CHAPTER VII

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Strange though it may sound, but it is a fact that one of the early movements which exhibited a tremendous nationalist fervour — so far as the revival of the ancient Indian culture is concerned — was a foreign movement, namely, the Theosophical movement; it was brought into this country by foreigners, and was chiefly led by an English woman — Mrs. Annie Besant. This foreign origin and leadership of the movement apart, the fact remains that, by nature, it was essentially Indian; for spiritualism, which constitutes the mainspring of the Indian culture, was its chief concern, especially during the early period of its history. This is borne out by the etymology of the term "Theosophy"; it is an exact translation of the well-known Sanskrit word, "Brahmavidya", for it is made of two Greek words — 'Theos' (God) and 'Sophia' (Wisdom). Thus, both the terms stand for the same thing — God-wisdom, or God-knowledge, or God-science. It was perhaps this intrinsic character of the Theosophical movement which made it sprout and grow on the Indian soil with such a remarkable success.

ORIGIN — ABROAD AND IN INDIA

The origin of the Theosophical movement and its early history — being an outcome of enquiry into occult phenomena — makes a very interesting reading. The two persons who were chiefly responsible for the origin of this movement were Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian lady, and Henry Steel Olcott, an Englishman by ancestry but an American by birth. These two great personalities met each other out of their keen interest in the occult phenomena, which had created quite a stir all over
the world in the later half of the 19th century.

H.P. Blavatsky, the moving spirit behind this movement, had a 'mysterious' personality. She was born with a 'fiery' and 'imperious' nature, and her ways, from her very childhood, showed symptoms of an abnormal, eccentric, and reckless spirit within her. She said that she felt the mysterious quality of 'mediumship' in her, that is, the spirit of the dead, who were supposed to be interested in the physical world, communicated with it through her. At first, she could not control these 'knockings' of the elemental denizens of the spiritual world, but gradually she mastered them.

Madama Blavatsky met Col. Olcott, who, after a chequered but successful and brilliant career, had become interested in spiritualism, at Chittenden (U.S.A.) where both of them had gone to observe the occult phenomena in 1874. Their common interest drew them together, and they decided, on 7th September, 1875, to form a Society for the purpose of revealing the realities of the spiritual world which had been the subject of all kinds of speculation in the past. Subsequently, it was also decided to name the Society as 'Theosophical Society'; Col. Olcott became its first President and Madama Blavatsky its first Secretary.

It is, however, interesting to note that Madama Blavatsky maintained throughout and persuaded her followers to believe that in founding the Theosophical Society she was obeying the orders of those 'Superhuman Adepts' or 'Great Ones' or 'Masters' who understand the spiritual side of this universe in its entirety and who wanted the men of this physical world also to understand it. In other worlds, the Society, according to her, was not an outcome of her own plans but the result of the wishes of these 'Great Ones', whose agent she was. She and her followers, whom she brought in communion with this hierarchy of 'Superhuman Adepts', held that
they were only working as messengers of these 'Adepts', who wanted them to interpret the world of 'Spirits' to the men living on this earth.

IN INDIA

After working ceaselessly in the cause of Theosophy for about three years in the U.S.A., Madame Blavatsky received, as she said, an order from the 'Master' to proceed to India with Col. Olcott and to start her work there. Accordingly, she, along with him, set sail for India and landed at Bombay on the 16th of February, 1879. In the beginning, they tried to work in collaboration with the Arya Samaj but, ere long, the two movements parted their ways.

Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott carried on with their spiritual work in India with great energy and enthusiasm, always busy travelling up and down the country, giving lectures and organising meetings wherever they went. Their labour did not, of course, go in vain, for, within two years, they could make their mark. The influence of the Society spread rapidly in the country and great interest was shown in its work by the Indian people, to whom any movement, associated with spiritual matters, was bound to have a special cultural appeal.

Encouraged by this successful beginning, the co-founders of the Society decided to make this country their permanent abode and centre of work. As such, in 1882, they finally settled at Adyar (Madras), which became their headquarter and has continued to be so down to this day.

THE 'THREE OBJECTS' AND CHARACTERISTICS

The 'three Objects' of the Theosophical movement, which it adopted as its basic tenets, are as follows:-

1. To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
2. To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and science.


From these objects of the movement, it is clear that its interests were wholly spiritual in the beginning, for, it sought to investigate and explore the unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man, to make a comparative study of various religions and to establish a Universal Brotherhood by appealing to the higher self of Man. This spirituality is even today an important characteristic of the movement.

Another outstanding characteristic of the movement is its intense humanism. Inspired by the lofty motives of establishing peace, harmony and happiness in the world, torn by distrust and dissensions, it has tried to demonstrate itself as a nucleus of International Brotherhood. Instead of being confined to any particular country, the Theosophical movement has become an international force having National Societies all over the world. It is free from any kind of discrimination on grounds of race, sex, colour, creed or nationality. Its membership is open to all those men and women who are interested in the pursuit of objects it stands for. Its activities and programme of work are also of a cosmopolitan nature. This will be evident from the fact that the International Convention of the Society, held in 1925, declared the promotion of the following objectives as its avowed programme of work:

(i) The World-Religion which would contain the basic truths of all religions.

(ii) The World-University which would disseminate knowledge without any discrimination.
(iii) The World-Government which would protect and promote the interests of all nations without any prejudice or favour.

INTEREST IN EDUCATION

Although in the beginning the movement was confined solely to spiritual matters but, as the years passed by, its leaders became more and more interested in social reform, with the result that it became a powerful force in the field of education, health, religion, social customs and the like. Of these, the Society gave its utmost attention to the subject of education. Starting with a modest beginning, the interest of the movement in the educational field grew deeper and deeper, and, as time passed on, it did laudable work in this sphere of its activities.

It is significant to note in this connection that this keen interest in education has been the only movement within the Society which has not at some time or the other been strongly opposed. In fact, the efforts of the Theosophical Society to educate the youth of the country in the spirit of the Motherland constitutes its most outstanding contribution to Indian education.

THE MISSIONARIES' HOSTILITY

Of the various difficulties which the leaders of the Theosophical Society had to face in their educational work in India during the first few years, opposition from the Christian missionaries, already working in the field, was a serious one. The Charter Act of 1813 had once again given the missionaries a long rope, with the result that they had resumed their educational work with their original zest and energy.

The clash between the Theosophists and the missionaries was, in fact, inevitable, for their educational aims were diametrically opposed to each other. The aim of the missionaries was proselytisation; hence
they tried to breed a kind of hatred among the native people towards the
religions of the land. The Theosophists, on the other hand, strived to
awaken the people to the cultural and religious traditions of their own
country. This was certainly not liked by the missionaries, as it stood
in the way of their proselytising motives. Hence, they raised a lot of
vicious propaganda against the Theosophists. It was, for example, alleged
by them that Mrs. Besant's Theosophy was calculated to encourage a blind
belief in her 'immaculate and transcendent wisdom.'

THE GOVERNMENT'S SUSPICIOUS ATTITUDE

The hostility of the missionaries apart, another difficulty
which the Theosophists had to face, at least in the beginning, was the
suspicous attitude of the Government towards it. The reason for this
was obvious. As the leaders of the Theosophical movement sought to arouse
among the Indian people the sentiments of patriotism and service to their
motherland, the British bureaucracy became naturally apprehensive lest
it might turn out to be a movement working slowly but surely for their
political annihilation. The educational efforts of the Theosophists were,
therefore, not welcome to them, and hence they did not like to give them
any help in their educational efforts.

Despite such a hostility from the missionaries and suspicious
attitude of the Government, the leaders of the Society went ahead with
their educational programme with a religious faith which knew no waver-
ing. The Society drew strength from the people of the country whose
confidence it had already won by upholding the great cultural and reli-
gious traditions of ancient India.

THE EDUCATIONAL WORK OF ITS FOUNDER

The spiritual traditions of India were held in very high esteem
by Col. Scott, the founder-President of the Society. He expressd
admiration for it in his pet lecture on 'India - Past, Present and Future', which he delivered in all the towns and cities he visited. He expressed his disgust at India turning materialistic under the Western influence, for his belief was that the world would ultimately swing to a new era of Indian civilisation and culture.

This sincere attachment of Col.Olcott to the spiritual traditions of India apart, he became interested in the problem of education and devoted much of his time and energy to it during the period of his work in this country. Although the greater part of his educational work was done in Ceylon, for the welfare of the Buddhists, yet he did some remarkable work in the field of Indian education as well.

While touring the country during the early years, he delivered lectures on 'The Duty of the Educated Youth of India'. This proved to be a great inspiration to the youth of the country, for it appealed to their dormant sense of patriotism and made them conscious of their national duties. The lecture also proved a great inspiration to the members of the Society who had begun to realise that they could serve the country best by providing a befitting education to its youth. The lecture was, in fact, the opening of the long and magnificent services of the Society to the cause of education.

Education was one of the favourite subjects on which Col.Olcott spoke in his Indian tours. He delighted in speaking to college students, always trying to draw their attention to the past glories and achievements of their country. By his speeches, he awakened into the hearts of the Indian youth a sense of national pride which, he thought, was the first pre-requisite for the salvation of the country. For this purpose, he formed 'Boys Clubs' and 'Societies', and raised subscriptions for them wherever he went.
THE 'HINDU BOYS ASSOCIATION'

In 1894, the Indian section of the Society decided to form an association known as the 'Hindu Boys Association', with the object of uniting all the Boys Clubs and Societies, hitherto organised by Col. Olcott on his lecture tours in India. The groundwork had already been done by him; this association was designed to give it an organised form. The aim of this association was to bring all Hindu boys together and to enable them to understand and practice their religion in a true national spirit. The formation of this Association was, in fact, an attempt to revive the interest of the Hindus in their own traditional religion in the modern times.

THE 'PARIAH' OR 'PANCHAMA' SCHOOLS

The chief educational work that Col. Olcott did in India was the foundation of 'Pariah Schools', which were later called as the 'Panchama' Schools. He was deeply moved by the sad plight of the untouchables in the Hindu society. He found them steeped into a heart-rending state of extreme ignorance and misery. As a humanist, he soon decided to take up their cause. He realised full well that the first and foremost thing to be done for the amelioration of their lot was to provide them with education which, by dispelling their ignorance, would make them conscious of their worth and dignity, and pave the way for their rehabilitation as honourable and enlightened members of the society. With this end in view, he wrote a pamphlet, 'The poor Pariah', in which he depicted the miserable plight of the untouchables and appealed for sympathy and help from all those who were interested in the cause of these down-trodden people. He distributed this pamphlet to the people throughout the world, to editors particularly, and found encouraging response from them.
In 1896, he set about starting another 'Pariah' school at Kodambakam (Madras), and persuaded the General Council of the Society to allow him to devote the H.P. Blavatsky Memorial fund to finance the same. He made personal sacrifice for the school by transferring the Olcott pension fund to it.

These 'Pariah' or 'Panchama' schools, started by Col. Olcott, for the untouchables, soon grew in numbers. The earnestness with which he advocated the cause of this miserable class captivated the interest and attention of the people far and wide. He could even make the Governor of Madras interested in this work, with the result that all, but one, of the 'Panchama' schools were taken over by the Government. On the whole, his efforts in this direction proved a great success in the South where, within a few years, a number of such 'Panchama' schools were started. In the beginning, they were supported by the Theosophists, but later, as already mentioned, all of them, excepting one, were taken over by the Government.

As regards the management of these schools, they were allowed to be managed by the untouchables themselves, so that they may not in any way misunderstand the motive behind these schools.

The educational work done by Col. Olcott for the untouchables won wide applause, and the institution, which was not handed over to the Government, was rightly retained by the Theosophists as a tribute to him, which he so well deserved.

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF MRS. ANNIE BESANT

The name of Mrs. Besant unmistakably stands out as one of those great personalities in the history of India whose efforts have gone a long way in shaping her destiny in the modern times. An English woman by birth, she was essentially a free thinker. She joined the Theosophical
Society in 1889 and settled in India in 1893, at the age of 46. She worked untiringly with Col. Olcott in the cause of Theosophy and soon won the applause of everyone in the Society by virtue of her missionary zeal and charming oratory. After the death of Col. Olcott in 1907, she was elected President of the Society, and, during the long period of her presidency, stretching up to 1933, she rendered excellent services to India in the sphere of education, besides her work in the field of religious and social reform.

HER GREAT LOVE FOR INDIA AND THE REVIVALIST APPROACH

Though an English woman by birth, Mrs. Besant's love for India was extraordinary. She regarded India as her motherland, and took pride in asserting that in her previous birth she had been a Hindu and that at heart she still was a Hindu. This is clear from the reply she gave to the invitation that was extended to her to visit India, "Ere long, I hope to stand face to face with you - I to whom India and the Indian people seem nearer than the nation to which by birth I belong. Born last time under Western skies for work that needs to be done, I do not forget my true Motherland (India); when Karma opens the door, I will walk through it."¹

Mrs. Besant was a great lover and admirer of India's past. The ancient civilisation and culture of India, especially that part of it which was represented by Hinduism, made a tremendous appeal to her. She spoke with so much feeling on the past glories of Hinduism that her audience were emotionally swept off their feet and some of them were even moved to tears. From the first year of her coming to India, she wore Hindu costume, adopted Hindu ways of life, studied Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Gita, and worked ceaselessly for the revival of Hinduism

¹ Extract from the Adyar Pamphlet No. 182; p. 10.
and the uplift of India for forty years, until she died at Adyar in 1933, at the age of 86.

With this ardent devotion to Hinduism, she soon made a profound influence on the Indian people and won their sympathy and support in her efforts to revive Hinduism. Even orthodox Hindus met her in large numbers, garlanded her and cried out, "Glory to the Eternal Religion". A great Sanskrit scholar at Benares hailed her on the spur of the moment as "Sarva Shukla Saraswati", the all-white Goddess of Wisdom.

The work of Mrs. Besant in India was of an astonishingly varied nature. She began with religion and very soon added education to it, and finally plunged into politics, journalism and social reform; and in all these fields she worked with tremendous energy and drive, captivating the attention of the people in all the fields of her activity.

The greatest service rendered by Mrs. Annie Besant in India was, however, in the field of education. She considered it to be the most effective agency for bringing about the desired regeneration of the country, "A generation of really educated people," she said, "--- will change the face of India."¹ With this conviction she threw herself whole-heartedly into the cause of education and, of all the leaders of the Society, she, no doubt, devoted the greatest attention to it. Mrs. Besant did for Hinduism in India what Col. Olcott had done for Buddhism in Ceylon, both through education mostly.

HER DISSATISFACTION WITH THE OFFICIAL SYSTEM

When Mrs. Besant came to India in 1893, she was deeply moved by the conditions then existing in the field of Indian education. She found the students being given only a purely secular and academic

education in the Government-controlled institutions. "Modern education in India", she regretted "has practically confined itself to the training of the mental and intellectual nature and has ignored the unfolding of the spiritual nature, the evolving and training of the emotional nature, and until lately, the development and training of the physical body to a high state of efficiency."¹

To put it briefly, she pointed out the following grave defects in the then-existing system of education:

(i) It was not national in form or spirit, for, instead of arousing patriotism amongst the youth of the country, it tended to make them slavish to the culture of the West.

(ii) It was unbalanced, for it sought to develop only the intellectual aspect of the students' personality, and ignored completely its other aspects, namely, physical, emotional, moral and spiritual.

(iii) It was secular through and through, and, as such, had nothing to do with the formation of character; the absence of moral and religious education from the prevailing system of general education was, according to her, a great shortcoming of that system.

THE AIMS AND IDEALS OF EDUCATION

Real education, according to Mrs. Besant, should be balanced and sufficiently comprehensive. Instead of developing only one aspect of the individual's personality, it should develop all of them in due proportion. The aims of education, advocated by her were, therefore, fourfold:

(i) To develop the physical aspect of personality, by providing ample facilities for games, sports, exercises and out-door activities.

¹ Ibid; p.40.
(ii) To develop the intellectual powers of the youth, by enabling them to grasp knowledge in an intelligent way.

(iii) To form high moral sentiments amongst the students, by training their emotions and sublimating their baser instincts into the channels of righteous action.

(iv) To foster spirituality amongst the educators by imparting them religious instruction in a truly liberal spirit.

Besides the above, Mrs. Besant advocated one more important aim of education which, she felt, should be given utmost thought under the then-existing conditions in India. And this was to kindle into the hearts of the youth of the country a sense of pride in their own ancient culture and civilisation, so that the denationalising current of Western culture may be checked. Education, she thought, was the best agency through which the traditional culture of the land could be rehabilitated, by arousing in the hearts of the youth a genuine love for their Motherland.

Mrs. Besant's love for the ancient Indian culture and civilisation manifested itself also in her ideals of education. She was not only an admirer of the great religious and spiritual traditions of ancient India, but had also great regard for her ancient educational traditions. Her attempt, therefore, was to apply in the field of modern Indian education the ancient ideals in as great a measure as possible. "India", she said, "must once more have an ideal whereby to shape an education suited to her needs and to her coming lofty position among the nations of the World. Can she find a loftier ideal than that which was her pole-star in the past, and which preserved her through an antiquity the history of which remains alone in the 'Memory of nature', in the archives of her Rishis, in her own literature, an antiquity which cannot
be checked by what is called history, for so far none exists earlier than her own, .......

Inspired thus by the ancient Indian ideals of education, she advocated the adoption of the following educational ideals in the modern times:–

(i) The Ashrama Ideal – The ancient system of education, centering round the Ashrama of a Rishi (a holy personage) and situated in the forest, made a great appeal to Mrs. Besant. This institution, which was so popular in ancient India was, she believed, the symbol of a true and fruitful education, and hence it should be revived; educational institutions must be founded in the midst of Nature, away from the distracting din and dust of towns and cities. To quote her own words, "It (Ashrama) must have a few representatives, at least, in India, if she is to rise to her former level in supreme intellectual and spiritual achievement, some places in which the three 'Margas' may be taught and 'Yoga' may be practised."  

(ii) The Ideal of Brahmacharya – This ancient ideal, Mrs. Besant said, should be the most vital and predominant feature of modern Indian education. It enjoins upon the students simple dress, plain food and hard bed, which, according to the rule of Manu, should be the vow of a Brahmachari. This ideal, she held, should be restored so that the students, during the period of their study, may be made to lead a simple and austere life, detached from the material allurements of society. Great stress was laid by her on the celibacy-aspect of this ideal. She firmly believed that it was entirely against the old ideals that boys in schools are found to be fathers of children, 'a child the father of a child'. The result of

such early marriages, she said, was "that a boy, at the end of his college-life, is often weak in body, his nervous system is weakened, his brain-power is exhausted and he is a wreck... physically when he ought to be in the full flush and vigour of manhood."\(^1\) She pointed out most vehemently the great harm that was being wrought by this custom of early marriages and exhorted all parents to abstain from it if they wanted "..... to take the first practical step towards the training of a stronger, a manlier and a more vigorous race."\(^2\)

(iii) The 'Gurukula' Ideal - The type of relationship which existed between the teacher and his pupils in ancient India was another old ideal that Mrs. Besant admired and desired to be restored in the modern times; she wished the same close and personal relationship between the teacher and the taught should exist today that existed in the ancient times. The teacher and his students, living together, should form a kind of family, that is, a 'Gurukula' of the good old days where the students regarded the teacher with the same respect as they would bestow upon their parents; and the teacher, in his turn, looked after their welfare and proper upbringing like his own sons, trying to give them the best possible education he could. Such a relationship, she believed, should be restored in the present-day educational system also, so that, the teacher and the taught may feel for each other, in some measure at least, what they used to feel in the ancient Gurukulas.

In a nut-shell, Mrs. Besant wished the education of the country to be based on its ancient traditions. Her belief was that the salvation of Indian education lay not in 'playing the sedulous ape' to the Western system but in replying on her own ideals of the past. She put it in her

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1 - Ibid; p.66.
2 - Ibid; p.67.
own telling way, "We need not look, let us not look to the West for power in our education, for lofty purpose in our education, for truth in our education. Let us cease to believe that education of the West is the ideal for the East. Far from it. For some parts of the body, we may well go to the West. But for the Soul, never." ¹ And at another place she says, "Only with an education full of Indian ideals, full of Indian spirit, full of Indian power, full of Indian unity, full of Indian simplicity, full of Indian purpose, full, that is, of Indian life, can India be herself." ²

Mrs. Besant, it must be pointed out in all fairness to her, was, however, not a mere dreamer of ancient ideals, living in her own ivory tower, with her eyes completely closed to the hard realities of modern life. She was, on the contrary, quite aware of the difficulties to be faced in trying to revive ancient educational traditions in the context of the changed political and social conditions of the day. As such, she herself confessed, "We cannot make the full change back to the old ideals at once, but I do trust that we may be able gradually to work towards the ancient ideal, and this may set an example which all lovers of India will venture to follow." ³

HER PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATION

Mrs. Besant based her 'Principles of Education' on her conception of the 'Natural Law of Education' which, she believed, was universally applicable, along with such adjustments as varying local conditions warranted. This Natural Law, she said, must be followed if education is to be imparted as a science, and not as 'a haphazard

¹ - Ideals in Education - (The Besant Spirit, Vol. 2); p.76.
² - Ibid; p.77.
³ - Ibid; p.67.
dragging of youth', if the students are to be helped in unfolding and developing the capacities they are born with.

The Natural Law, she said, is based on natural facts pertaining to human development which are fundamentally the same for all human beings. Looked at from this viewpoint of natural facts, the early development of the individual, according to her, falls into three natural periods of 7 years each, namely, (i) From birth to the age of 7, (ii) from 7 to 14, and (iii) from 14 to 21.

Education, according to her, must admit of the special natural facts pertaining to each one of these stages of development; and, therefore, she goes on to lay down the following principles which should govern the education of the individual in each of the above 3 stages:--

(i) From birth to the age of 7: Education at this stage should be primarily physical. Proper nutrition of the body and ample open air play should be provided to the child. Further, his senses should be trained into accurate observation and his emotions should be directed into healthy channels. Maximum freedom should be allowed to him, consistent with his personal safety, so that he may not form unpleasant complexes towards the work of the teacher.

(ii) From 7 to 14: This is the stage in which emotions predominate and, as such, educational efforts should be directed towards their control and training. Efforts should also be made to train the memory and the reasoning of the students as a preparation for more advanced intellectual work of the succeeding stage.
(iii) From 14 to 21 - At this stage, the student is supposed to have gained mental maturity to a sufficient degree. He should, therefore, be introduced to the study of subjects like logic, Philosophy, Science and the like, which would exercise his reasoning faculty and would give an incentive to his power of discrimination and judgement.

From the functional point of view, Mrs. Besant laid down two broad principles which should govern the entire educational process. They are as follows:

(i) The Principle of Individual Growth - The first function of education, according to her, is to develop the human being as an individual, taking into account his inherent potentialities. The development of the individual's personality should be on balance and harmonious lines, and for this, all the four aspects of his personality, namely, religious, mental, moral and physical, should be given due consideration.

(ii) The Principle of Social Happiness - Education, Mrs. Besant said, should not only develop the individual but also an individual viewed as a member of the society. Education is not the training of an isolated individual but of an individual living in society, it should consider the youth as the 'embryonic citizen', a factor in the collective good of the community. Social happiness, which is indicative of this collective good, must be an important function of education, and, for this, it should train the youth into the art of shouldering responsibilities and developing a condescending and cooperative attitude towards
Others right from his school-days.

These principles of education, laid down by Mrs. Besant, are unmistakably in consonance with the principles of modern education, in as much as they are based on a sound understanding of the nature of human-development, on the one hand, and the reconciliation of the individual good with the social welfare... on the other. This is the characteristic modern eclectic and psychological approach to the problem of educational aims.

THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN EDUCATION

Mrs. Besant, as an educationist, was full of religious fervour. One basic difference between the ancient educational system and the modern one, according to her, was the absence of religious and moral education from the latter. "Modern education in India", she pointed out, "practically confined itself to the training of the mental and intellectual nature, and has thus ignored the unfolding of the spiritual nature-----\(^1\) This, she felt, was a serious defect of the system and must be repaired by those who are at the helm of educational affairs. "Religious principles must come first and foremost in every perfect system of education", she said, "because you can not build up rational citizens, you can not build up noble men, men of ability and usefulness to the land that gave them birth, unless you lay the foundation of their education in Divine wisdom and train the boy in the knowledge of his duty to God and to man."\(^2\)

As regards the content of religious education, unlike the Christian missionaries who were motivated by proselytising considerations, she advocated the teaching of religion which was native to the students.

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2 Ibid; p.3.
and not alien to them. "The religion which is the atmosphere of
their homes, which came to them in their infancy from their mothers'
lips, that religion alone can strengthen the germs of good within them,
build up a noble character, and lead them onwards into a splendid man-
hood"¹, she said.

HER SCHEME OF NATIONAL EDUCATION FOR INDIA

Mrs. Besant was not only the first to conceive the idea of
a National System of Education for India, but she was also the first
to lay down a clear and coherent scheme for it. It would be in the
fitness of things to examine her scheme of national education at some
length. She divided the entire educational process into three stages,
which may be taken up one by one, as under:

1. The Primary Stage: Age-span - from birth to the end of the
7th year. This period is divided into 2 sub-parts, as follows:
   (a) From birth to the end of the fifth year.
   (b) From Sixth and Seventh years.

Scheme of Studies - Education of the child, during the first period,
that is, from birth to the end of the fifth year, should be centred
in home, and the care of his body should be the main concern of the
parents during this period of infancy. He should be encouraged to
observe and make his own little experiments as he grows in years.
Good habit, having physical significance, for clean, neat, and orderly
living should be developed, and the main media of teaching at this
stage should be play.

During the sixth and seventh years, the child should be in-
troduced to a bit of formal-schooling, and as such he should be sent

¹ Mrs. Besant's Address delivered on the occasion of the Central
Hindu College Anniversary, 1907-(published in the Besant Spirit,
Vol.7); p.63
to a primary school having classes A and B, each of 1 year's duration, and, both combined, termed as class I. The emphasis, during this period should also be on play-way. The atmosphere of the school should be made as attractive for him as possible, and the training of senses should be the primary concern of the teacher. Teaching of reading and writing should now be started. Creative subjects, like Drawing and simple crafts, should be taken up so that fingers may be trained in doing things with some amount of dexterity. The school should have a compound for games, exercises, dancing etc.; stories should be used for imparting religious and moral lessons. Each school should have some place, such as a shrine, where the students may assemble for their religious rites, according to their faiths.

2. The Secondary Stage — Age-span: 7 to 14 years. This period is again divided into two parts, namely, (i) Lower Secondary stage, and (ii) Higher Secondary stage. Emotional training is the main feature at the secondary stage.

The lower secondary stage covers the years from 7 to 10, consisting of classes II, III and IV. Besides religious education, this period should be devoted mainly for acquiring a good knowledge of the mother-tongue, by reading, writing and composition. Students should also be introduced to the study of the classical languages of India, such as, Sanskrit, Pali and Arabic, taught according to modern methods. In the teaching of History, Geography, Arithmetic and Nature-study, maximum use of material-aids, such as pictures, charts and models, should be made.

At the Higher Secondary stage, extending from the year 10 to 14, and covering classes V, VI, VII and VIII, religious education should be more comprehensive, so as to include the chief doctrines of
the pupils' religions and to make them aware of the fundamental unity of all religions. Teaching of mother-tongue should become more advanced, and higher Arithmetic, Elementary Algebra and Geometry should be taken up. Outlines of World-Geography should be introduced, and Indian History should be taught in a more intensive way.

3. The High School Stage - Age-span from 14 to 16 years, covering the classes IX and X. This stage should be devoted mainly to the intellectual development of the students. Religious education should be so planned that a fuller understanding of the chief doctrines of their religion may be imparted. Besides some common subjects, students, at this stage, should select a specialized course of study and, for this, there may be 4 types of High Schools, providing such different courses as may cater to their varying talents and abilities. These four different types of High Schools, suggested by her are as follows:

1. An ordinary High School, providing courses in Arts, Science, and Teachers' training.

Attached to all these four types of High Schools, there will be a preparatory-class for students proceeding to the University, with a view to giving them a grounding in such special knowledge as may be expected of them before they begin the three-years' Degree course.
AN APPRAISAL OF THE SCHEME

Evidently, this scheme of national education for India, given by Mrs. Besant, suffers from one obvious shortcoming, that is, it does not give a complete scheme of education. For, it does not go beyond the school stage, with the result that the college and university stages are completely left out of it. The following features of the scheme are, nonetheless, remarkable:

(1) It is a well graded scheme of education, and the course of studies suggested by her for each grade is adequately in keeping with the natural laws of development. That is why she has suggested that the physical, emotional, and mental education should predominate at the Infant, Primary, and High School stages respectively.

(2) Religious and moral education are an integral part of this scheme at every stage. This shows how particular Mrs. Besant was about the spiritual and ethical development of the students, along with their academic and physical education.

(3) It does not aim only at the development of the individual child, but also seeks to prepare him for social service, for which she suggests that boys at school should be encouraged to join the Indian Boys Scout, School Red Cross Society and School Cadet Corps, for these will provide them with necessary training in cooperative living and useful social work.

(4) The scheme is national in the sense that it gives due consideration for teaching the students their own religion, seeks to provide them with the teaching of the classical
Indian languages and, lastly, aims to arouse in them the sentiments of service to the society and the motherland. As compared to the then-existing system of education, this scheme may thus, of course, be said to be national, to a considerable extent.

(5) The scheme is realistic in nature, for it seeks to prepare the child for his future life by providing him with such specialized courses at the High School stage which will enable them to earn their livelihood when they enter society as its adult members.

(6) The scheme shows ample respect for the personality of the child. This is evident from the emphasis she lays on the play-way method of teaching and on the use of those material aids which would make the lesson an interesting experience for the child.

FOUNDING OF THE CENTRAL HINDU COLLEGE

The most solid work done by Mrs. Annie Besant in the field of Indian education was the founding of the Central Hindu College at Benares; and the services which she rendered to it from 1898 to 1913 bear a clear testimony to the great zest and fervour she bore in her heart for the cause of education. She was virtually the heart of this institution during the said period, and it is not a travesty of truth to say that, but for her efforts, the college would have, perhaps, never grown into such a mighty institution as it actually did.

The genesis of the college lay in the meeting which Mrs. Besant held at Benares on 10th April, 1898. The meeting was attended by Babu Upendra Nath Basu and a member of prominent Theosophists. It was
resolved that the Central Hindu College be started next July. An Executive Committee was formed on the spot to implement the scheme and Arther Richardson, Ph.D., was appointed the first Principal of the College.

Consequently, on July 7, 1898, a College, affiliated to the Allahabad University, and a Collegiate school were started with only 2 classes, in a small house in Benares. She appealed to the people for funds in such moving words as touched their hearts so much that monthly subscriptions, amounting to ₹350/-, were promptly promised for 6 years. Even Lord Curzon expressed great sympathy with this scheme, and his private secretary personally wrote to Mrs. Besant wishing her success in her efforts in this direction.

As regards the management of the College, Mrs. Besant decided to entrust it to Hindus themselves. The Board of Trustees, on which, therefore, served many leading orthodox Pandits of Benares, had the confidence of the people. Only four Europeans - Dr. Richardson, Col. Olcott, Mr. B. Keightly and Mrs. Besant herself - were there as members of the Board.

The Theosophical Convention, held at Benares in 1898, heartily endorsed the starting of the Central Hindu College, and raised the Section's contribution from ₹50/- to ₹100/- per month. Funds poured in, for Mrs. Besant had won the confidence of the people. Within two years, over ₹1,40,000/- in cash and ₹80,000/- in landed property had been donated for it.

THE BASIC AIM OF THE COLLEGE

The idea of founding the Central Hindu College, perhaps, occurred to Mrs. Besant from the example of the Muslim College at
Aligarh which aimed to impart education to Mussalmans on the lines of Muslim culture and religion. A great lover and admirer of Hindu religion and culture, she thought it meet and proper to found an institution which would revive, in a tangible way, the old glories of Hinduism. The Central Hindu College was designed to be for Hindus what the Muslim College was for Mussalmans. She sought to organise it as a virtual shrine of Hindu culture, a light-house from where would spread the glow of this ancient culture to places far and wide. On the occasion of the first anniversary of the College, she clearly said, "We are here then to teach religion, Hinduism to Hindus, that is our especiality." 1

It is, however, noteworthy that this basic aim of the College did not make its founder blind to the influences of the Western culture. Mrs. Besant's approach was fundamentally synthetic. She strived to unite the best in the Hindu culture with the best in the Western education and culture. "The work then which we do is not the work of rivalry but rather that of supplementing the work of other institutions," 2 she explicitly declared. Teaching of Hindu religion with revivalistic motive, along with a scheme for providing secular Western knowledge, was the aim which inspired her to found the Central Hindu College.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE COLLEGE

Although the Central Hindu College was not meant to be an institution having the attitude of rivalry towards other institutions, yet it had certain features of its own, which distinguished

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1 - Essentials of An Indian Education - (The Besant Sprit, Vol. 7); p. 3.
2 - Ibid; p. 2.
it from the others. These were as follows:

(a) A religious spirit permeated the whole atmosphere of the College. Mrs. Besant was very much disgusted with the purely secular character of the then-prevailing system of education, and she firmly believed that it could never deliver the goods. "Religion," said she, "is to us the only sure foundation for the building of character, the development of true manhood, and our hopes of noble citizenship for these youths depend on the laying of this religious foundation, the only foundation strong enough to bear the weight of a national civilisation, and of a character that can conquer in the world. The teaching of religion is the very essence of our work." 1 And the religion which she chose as best suited to this purpose was Hinduism — the swan-song of ancient India.

(b) It was designed to be a meeting-place for the East and the West. Speaking on the occasion of the first anniversary of the College in 1899, Mrs. Besant said quite explicitly, "We propose in this College to wed the best secular education of the Western type to the best religious teaching of the Eastern type. If this is to be done effectively, then it is necessary that in the College-staff East and West should meet and join hands together, as friends and co-labourers, as sympathisers and lovers one of the other. It is part of our dream that through this Hindu College two mighty nations — one hoary with antiquity and the other in the vigour of youth — may meet in more friendly cooperation than they have ever done before." 2 Such an approach was definitely a new one in the field of contemporary Indian education, characterised by a reckless hankering after the

1-Ibid; p. 63.
teaching of Western subjects and sciences, for, compared to these, the Eastern knowledge and literature were supposed to be of little worth.

(c) Patriotism and service to Motherland were the watch-words of the College. Fired with the desire to uplift India to her past glory, Mrs. Besant sought to harness the energy of the youth of the country to this end. She considered the young men and women of India to be the architect of her destiny and, as such, sought to kindle into their hearts such genuine sentiments of patriotism and love for their motherland as would ultimately bring about her national and cultural salvation. "We teach the boys", she said, "to love their country with a deep, passionate and absorbing love - one India, one people, one nation, that is the lesson we teach them."¹ Such mottos as 'Love your country', 'Love India', 'Worship the motherland', 'Remember your Land', hung up over the door-ways and walls of the College-building, bear a clear testimony to this patriotic feature of the institution.

(d) Great stress was laid on the formation of character. Mrs. Besant discerned with regret that under the contemporary system of education, characterised by ultra-secularism, character-building was almost completely lost sight of - a fact which accounted for the moral bankruptcy of the youth of the country. She condemned this type of education vehemently by saying, "Worthless all science and literature, worthless skill in arts and games, unless all is the ornament of a noble character, of the man whom India can regard as her own son and helper."² Religion, she believed, is the surest foundation of a lofty character and, as such, she attached very great

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¹ Ibid; p.52.
² The Besant Spirit, Vol.7; p.50.
importance to it, making it an integral part of the scheme of education followed in the Central Hindu College.

(e) It attached great importance to games and sports and other extra-curricular activities. Mrs. Besant was disgusted with the examination-ridden system of then-existing education, for it made students veritable book-worms and encouraged cramming to a breaking point. She did not want her students only to secure high marks in their examinations but also to be physically strong and to cultivate in them the qualities of self discipline, sportsmanship, chivalry and initiative. These qualities, she felt, could be fostered best through games and sports and other extra-curricular activities like Cadet Corps, Scouting and the like; and hence she gave them an important place in the programme of work followed in the College.

(f) Lastly, the principle of Brahmcharya, especially in the field of matrimony, was enjoined upon every student of the College very strictly. Mrs. Besant condemned early marriages outright, as they turned students into physical and nervous wrecks, and made them immune from the capacity to put in vigorous intellectual work. She, therefore, strongly felt that during the period of study, students should practise complete celibacy and they should, in no case, be burdened with the responsibilities of household. She made this a strict policy and said, "We do not take married boys in our school at all; we commenced our reform with the lowest classes first, and then went on to the older school-boys, and now we are passing on to the college."¹

¹ - Ibid; p.102.
These special features of the Hindu College were remarkable innovations in the field of contemporary Indian education. They made the institution an epitome of Indian spirit - inspiring patriotism and service to Motherland and, at the same time, imparting an all-round education calculated to build up the character and body of the students, besides giving them such intellectual training as becomes an enlightened person. The Central Hindu College, in fact, was the beginning of a new movement in the domain of Indian education - a movement which was truly Indian. Mrs. Besant firmly believed and hoped that it would ultimately bring about the desired cultural and national regeneration in the country.

Her hopes came true, for, within a few years, the fame of the college spread all over India, and it was widely felt that the college met a real need of the country. It received a 'grand chorus of approbation' from the Indian press, expressing its debt of endless gratitude to the Theosophical Society, especially to its worthy leader - Mrs. Annie Besant.

Under the fostering care of Mrs. Besant, the Central Hindu College grew rapidly, both in influence and numbers, till 1913; and then came the move for establishing the Benares Hindu University, with this College as its nucleus. Mrs. Besant acceded to the request, with the hope that it would bring into existence a University she had aspired for, and so the college was made over to the University Governing Board. In 'grateful recognition' of her 'invaluable cooperation' in establishing the University, the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred upon her on the 14th of December, 1921; and she was also elected as one of the life-members of the University-court and Council.
THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY FROM 1913 ONWARDS

After willingly surrendering the Central Hindu College, the fruit of all the years of her labour and self-sacrifice, Mrs. Besant and the other Theosophists who were on the governing Board had to face much antagonism from the University authorities due to the fears entertained by them about their association with the University. She felt very unhappy at this and ultimately withdrew from it. Other members of the Society followed suit and severed their connection from the University once and for all.

FOUNDING OF THE THEOSOPHICAL EDUCATIONAL TRUST

With the handing over of the Central Hindu College to the Hindu University, the climax of the educational activities of the Society had already been reached. The unpleasant circumstances under which Mrs. Besant and her colleagues had to sever their connection with the University must have, of course, been a great shock to them. Mrs. Besant was, however, a brave and indomitable soul. Under her leadership, the Society again took up the thread of its educational activities and, following the old ideals, tried to do its best in the cause of education.

Ere long, the Theosophists, therefore, decided to found another organisation, known as the 'Theosophical Educational Trust', to pursue the ideals of education which had proved so successful in the Central Hindu College. The Trust was founded in the year 1913, and its aim was declared to be "to establish schools and colleges, open to students of every faith, in which religious instruction shall be an integral part of education." Mr. Earnest Wood was made its Secretary and prominent Theosophists became its members.

1 - Ideals in Education -(The Besant Spirit, Vol.2); p.21.
The national ideals in education, propounded by the Trust, found encouraging response from the people. Four Boys Schools and three Girls' schools were at once started. The activities of the Trust increased so rapidly that by the end of 1914, 15 schools were under its management, attended by 2608 students and staffed by 122 teachers. The number grew every year and a variety of educational institutions, ranging from Panchama schools and Sanskrit schools to Elementary and High Schools and Colleges, were started by it. This remarkable rapid progress of the Trust evoked wide-spread admiration, and under its fostering care, the ideals of national education got the wind far and wide.

SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF NATIONAL EDUCATION

The Theosophical Society played an important role in the field of national education by aiding the formation and development of the 'Society for the Promotion of National Education'. The movement for the formation of this Society had been launched at Calcutta in December, 1916, and the members of the Theosophical Society resolved to give it an all-out support. Hence the Theosophical Educational Trust decided in its annual meeting on 27th December, 1916, to make a present of its colleges and schools to the Society, and gave its president the power to use the Trust as a nucleus for the proposed Board of National Education, which was inaugurated in May, 1917.

In July, when the Board decided to open the first college, the Theosophical Society came to its help by leasing to the Board its Damodar Gardens. This merging of the Trust with the Society for the promotion of National Education, did not, however, last long. In 1924, the latter became lukewarm to the educational needs of the country, and
it was, therefore, decided by the Theosophical Society that the Trust should again be given the charge of its management. Hence, once again, the Theosophical Educational Trust came to its own and started its work, this time chiefly consolidating the work that had already been done by it before it was merged with the Society for the Promotion of National Education. The schools managed by it were run on efficient lines, and the fact that their methods were followed by other educational institutions bore a testimony to their popularity and success.

For the next four years, the educational activities of the Society could not make much headway. This was mainly due to the financial stringency faced by the Society; the burden of the monthly expenditure was being borne by Mrs. Besant practically alone. Dr. Arundale, of course, tried to improve the condition by undertaking an educational tour in 1921, in which he collected Rs. 65,000 by magic lantern lectures and talks.

THE FORMATION OF THE BRAHMAVIDYASHRAMA

The formation of Brahmavidyashrama at Adyar on 3rd October, 1922, was a great cultural and educational venture of the Society. The aim with which it was started was "to provide a meeting-place for the East and West in its spirit, its scheme of studies and personnel." Its curriculum was, therefore, so designed as to cover Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Art and Science, both Eastern and Western. It was hoped that through such studies would be achieved a cultural synthesis which would pave the way for Universal Brotherhood. The Ashrama seemed to work well for some years and attracted a number of students, but finally there was a general slackening of interest and enthusiasm in its work, with the result that it could not flourish.
THE FOUNDATION OF THE BESANT MEMORIAL SCHOOL (1934)

After starting the Brahmavidyashrama in 1922, the Society did not launch upon any new educational work or scheme for about a decade. It was in 1934 that it started a new school at Adyar, known as the Besant Memorial School. It was calculated to fulfil her long-cherished desire to have a school founded to symbolize her love for youth. The school was put under the Besant Educational Trust which was created after her death, in 1933. Dr. Arundale, who succeeded Mrs. Besant, after her death, as the president of the Society, was the president of this Trust and also its Honorary Educational Adviser. He enlisted support for it everywhere he went, and organised it on the lines laid down by Mrs. Besant in her pamphlet, 'The Principles of Education'.

The death of Mrs. Besant in 1933 did not only close an important epoch in the history of the Theosophical Society but also brought to an end the long and magnificent services it had rendered in the cause of Indian education. Dr. Arundale, Jinarjadasa and others, who followed her, were interested in education but every little constructive work, of the type done before, could be accomplished by the Society under their leadership. In a spirit of honest self-confession, Dr. Arundale himself wrote, "--- and while I feel how wonderful it was to have worked with her in so great an educational mission, no less do I feel ashamed that I have been able to do so little in the field of education since her passing away."¹

¹ Dr. Arundale's Introduction to the Besant Spirit, Vol.7; p.vii.
CRITICISM AND SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTIONS

The account that has been given above of the educational activities of the Theosophical Society in India over such a long span of time should leave us convinced as to the magnificent service rendered by it in this important sphere of national activity. From the very early years of its inception in this country, the leaders of the Society had made education one of the chief parts of their constructive programme, and the zest and fervour with which they did their work in this field was really laudable. They worked with a missionary spirit, and did considerable work in the educational field.

Despite all this, the educational work of the Society is open to two chief criticisms. Firstly, the approach of the Theosophists to Indian education was denominational/nature. Mrs. Annie Besant, under whose leadership the Society accomplished the bulk of its educational work, was obsessed with Hindu religion and culture, and the chief aim of her educational activities was to revive them in the modern times. Her Central Hindu College was designed to be for Hindus what the Muslim College (Aligarh) had been to Mussalmans. In their educational efforts, the Theosophists, therefore, received the support of the Hindu community only; the rest of the communities remained indifferent towards their work.

Secondly, the concept of national education propounded by the Society was essentially narrow. This was the natural outcome of their special attachment to the Hindu community and Hinduism. Mrs. Besant and her followers were somehow under the notion that Hinduism alone was the embodiment of Indian nationalism. She did not stop to realise that a truly broad-based concept of nationalism should include within its fold other religions and communities as well.
Her vision in this respect was distressingly narrow, and it is no wonder then that the concept of national education which emerged under her leadership was not broad enough to embrace all religions, sects and communities. Looked at from the viewpoint of the modern standards of nationalism, such a concept of national education was obviously a narrow one.

These shortcomings apart, the following contributions of the Theosophical Society to Indian education can never be overlooked:

(1) True to its humanitarian spirit, the Society rendered laudable educational services to the untouchables. Col. Olcott - the founder-president of the Society - concentrated his educational efforts on the uplift of this unfortunate section of the Indian society. He was deeply moved by their miserable plight, and, to uplift them, he appealed widely to collect funds for them; and opened 'Fariah' or 'Panchama' schools for them in considerable numbers. His efforts won the sympathy of all good-hearted people, and even the Government gave him a helping hand in this sphere of his humanitarian work.

(2) It gave to the country, for the first time, a clear and explicit concept of National Education. The educational work of the society was a protest against the then-prevalent system of education, which, according to its leaders, was denationalising to the core. Mrs. Besant most emphatically condemned the tendency to introduce the Western principles and ideals of education in Indian schools and colleges. She, on the contrary, stood for the revival of the old educational institutions and ideals of ancient India, so that the educational system of modern India may permeate with a truly
Indian spirit. She was not averse to the teaching of Western sciences and literature, but what she advocated was that the spirit of our education should remain essentially Indian. "Indian custom and sentiment must regulate the blending of the two civilizations; the dominating custom must be Indian; the foundation must be Indian; in no other way can all that is best in the West be made acceptable in the East," she emphatically declared.

(3) The educational policy and programme of the Theosophists provided a happy corrective to the unbalanced and one-sided education which was being imparted by the then-existing educational institutions controlled by the Government. Education, they believed, must be comprehensive and broad-based; it should develop the total personality of the student. Mrs. Besant, who was the best representative of the Theosophists in the domain of education, was pained to find that the contemporary Indian education was purely intellectual and that it completely ignored the physical, moral, and spiritual aspects of human personality. The institutions founded by her were, therefore, so designed as to exemplify the aim of building up a wholesome and well-rounded personality. In her Hindu College, she, therefore, laid great stress on the activities calculated to build up a robust and stout physique; hence games, exercises and sports were encouraged by her. Character-formation, spiritual development and emotional training were also accorded sufficient importance, as she considered these to be vital parts of a total personality.

(4) Wedding religion to education was a remarkable contribution made by the Theosophical Society in the field of Indian education.

1 - Essentials of an Indian Education -(The Besant Spirit, Vol.7); p.36.
The Central Hindu College was unmistakably a great experiment in this direction. Religious teaching constituted an integral part of its educational programme, and a religious spirit was made to permeate its entire atmosphere. Mrs. Besant, the great leader of the Society, who founded the college, firmly believed, "Religious principle must come first and foremost in every perfect system of education" because, "you can not build up rational subjects, you can not build up noble men, men of ability and usefulness to the land that gave them birth, unless you lay the foundation of their education on Divine wisdom, and train the boy in the knowledge of his duty to God and man." This emphasis on religious teaching was definitely in consonance with the traditional national culture of the country, and thus provided a happy departure from the secular educational policy of the Government.

(5) The importance of mother-tongue, which stood badly neglected, was brought into limelight through the educational efforts of the Theosophists. One of the greatest denationalising factors in the then-prevalent system of education, according to them, was that it laid too much stress on the teaching of the English language, in learning which the students had to waste much of their energy and time during their school-years. "Nothing so denationalises a people as the imposition upon them of a foreign tongue, dominating their life and thought", said Mrs. Besant. As the medium of instruction and examination, the English language was a great handicap for the

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1 - Essentials of An Indian Education - (The Besant Spirit, Vol.7); pp.3-4.
2 - Ibid; p.3.
youth of the country going in for college and university education. The scheme of national education, which she put forward was, therefore, to be imparted in the vernaculars. While advocating the use of vernaculars in secondary schools, she said, "There are many reasons why the vernacular should be used in the secondary schools... it smooths the way to knowledge which the child must tread, leaves his intelligence free and enables his observations and his reasoning faculties to work on the subject presented to him without the fetters of a foreign tongue. Inventiveness will be stimulated, originality encouraged, where the child is no longer hampered by the difficulties of mere language which his elders now impose on him."¹ This ardent advocacy for vernaculars made a tremendous appeal to the sentiments of Indian nationalism and proved a great redeeming factor in the field of education.

(6) The efforts made by the Theosophists for spreading the teaching of Sanskrit needs also be mentioned as one of their educational contributions to the country. It was obvious to them that the students could be made familiar with the ancient religion and culture of their land only by teaching them Sanskrit; hence they opened a number of Sanskrit schools in the South. Mrs. Besant gave great attention to her Pathshala of the Central Hindu College, for she realised full well the significance of teaching the Sanskrit language and literature to the youth of the country. From this, she hoped, "to send out learned Pandits, to serve, with their knowledge, the ancient faith and Motherland."² Though this emphasis on the teaching of Sanskrit had a revivalistic aim, yet it was permeated

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¹ - Annie Besant: Speeches and Writings; p.253.
² - The Besant Spirit: (Vol.7); p.45.
with a national spirit, for, along with it, went the conviction that it will make the youth of the country conscious and proud of the ancient culture and civilization of their land.

(7) The movement made signal contribution in the field of girls' education as well. Its leaders soon discerned the general apathy, rather prejudice, that existed towards the education of girls in the contemporary Indian society, and they believed that such an attitude was essentially harmful for the national interests of the country. Mrs. Besant vehemently declared, "Never will India take her right place among the nations of the world, unless the mothers on whose knees the little ones grow up, the mothers of her sons, are given an education which helps to produce noble and splendid women."¹ Realising thus the importance of girls education, the leaders of the movement opened schools for them and persuaded the parents to send their daughters there. It is worthy of note here that the education which the Theosophists aimed to impart through these girls schools, started by them, was to permeate with a characteristically Indian spirit and outlook. They advocated, "the education of girls on the lines of pure Hinduism, so that they may be trained up to be worthy follower of those great Hindu women whose names shine as stars in the firmament of Indian literature."²

It was due to this special feature of their efforts in the field of girls education that they could win the support of the parents, who started sending their daughters to their schools. Their efforts in this field had also a more general effect of stirring the people themselves into activity in the field of girls' education.

¹ - Ibid; p.46.
² - Ibid; p.46.
The practical contribution of the movement in the field of Indian education is revealed by the large number of educational institutions founded by its leaders. A list of such institutions is given below *:

Year 1882 - 5 schools - 3 for boys and 2 for girls.

" 1883 - 1 Anglo-Sanskrit School; 1 Anglo-vernacular school; 1 Hindu school; 6 Night-schools for labourers; 7 Sanskrit schools; 6 other schools; and 2 girls schools.

" 1884 - 10 Sanskrit schools; 2 Vaidic schools; 1 Night school; 1 Anglo-Sanskrit Bengali school; and 3 other schools.

" 1885 - Sanskrit College at Tallur and Vizianagram;
   * Sanskrit School; 1 Sanskrit College; 1 Hindu school; 3 Sunday schools for Hindu boys.

" 1886 - 2 Sanskrit schools; and 3 Sunday schools.

" 1887 - 6 Schools : Boys, Girls and Infants.

" 1888 - 1 Sanskrit school; Hindu Girls schools.

" 1893 - Hindu Boys' Association.

" 1894 - Pariah Schools started by Col. Olcott; Youngmen's Arya Union, Calcutta; H.P.B. Sanskrit School, Jullunder.

" 1895 - Anglo-Sanskrit School, Bankipur.

" 1896 - Pariah School, Madras

" 1898 - Central Hindu College, Benares; H.P.B. School, Madras.

* This list has been prepared out of that given by Joshephine Ransom - A Short History of the Theosophical Society; pp. 558-59.
Year 1901 - Tirvallur School, Madras; Women's Educational League, Adyar.

" 1903 - Sanatana-Dharma Examination, founded by D.M. Gokuldas and K.M. Shroff.

"" 1905 - Schools at Delhi and Lahore affiliated; Olcott Panchama Free Schools incorporated.

" 1907 - Olcott Teachers' Association.

" 1911 - Distressed Indian Students' Aid Committee.

" 1913 - Theosophical Educational Trust Incorporated.

" 1915 - Theosophical Educational Trust has 18 educational institutions under its control.

" 1916 - Women's College, Bhopal.

" 1917 - Society for the Promotion of National Education; Fraternity in Education, India.

" 1918 - Hindu University; College of Science in Madras; College of Agriculture in Adyar; S.P.N.E. & T.E.T. Amalgamate.

" 1919 - Training College for Teachers, Adyar.

" 1922 - Brahmavidyashrama, Adyar.

" 1925 - Besant School for Girls.

" 1934 - Besant Memorial School, Adyar.

" 1936 - International Academy of the Arts, Adyar.

Such a large number of educational institutions and associations, founded and fostered by the Theosophical Society in India, is unmistakably indicative of the fact that the Theosophists, while working in the field of Indian education, were not merely a band of idle dreamers in the realm of educational philosophy, that they did not only lay down the principles and ideals to be followed
in the domain of education, but that they were the real and earnest workers in the field—digging the soil of education and sowing such seeds there as could sprout and grow and blossom forth into a National System of Education. The zest and fervour which they brought to bear upon their task was commendable, and the amount of work which they did in this field is praise-worthy.

The leaders of the Theosophical Society, particularly Mrs. Annie Besant, were the harbingers of a new movement in the field of Indian education; it was a movement which, being in consonance with the religious and cultural traditions of India, sought to promote a National System of Education. Attempts had, no doubt, been made before also to bring Indian education back to the fold of her ancient culture, but none of these attempts had that breadth of vision or clarity of conception which was characteristic of the efforts of the Theosophists.

The real charm in the personality of Mrs. Besant—the chief leader of the movement—as an educationist, lies in the fact that though she loved and admired the ancient culture of India, she was no fanatic in this respect. No doubt, she knew full well that a truly National System of Education, for which she so valiantly strived, could be set up only on Indian foundations, but, at the same time, she was not unaware of the new forces of modernity which, under the impact of the Western civilisation, had already made their mark on the Indian horizon; as a judicious thinker, she realised that India should not, in her own interest, try to turn away from them. This is why her conception of National Education was not hostile to the study of Western literature and sciences; instead, she advocated a system of education which, though Indian in spirit,
would give them their due place in the total scheme of education. This was an attempt to bring the East and the West together on the platform of education - an attempt which is a clear testimony to Mrs. Besant's breadth of vision and sagacity of judgement. Verily she was a nationalist, an internationalist, a realist and an idealist - all rolled into one beautiful whole.