

## IDEALISM AND EDUCATION

Idealism is the oldest theory of philosophy. It has exercised a great and potent influence on man, his mind and activities. Indians are simply enchanted by its teachings and it appeal to them most. Its origin goes back to ancient India in the East and to Plato in the West. Generally, idealists believe that ideas are the true reality. According to them, the human spirit is the most important element in life. Matter is not real. It attaches great significance to the study of man and his mind. It maintains that the material and physical universe is subordinate to a higher type of reality, a spiritual universe.

### Chief Exponents of Idealism

- (i) The Vedic Rishis of India
- (ii) Plato (427-347 B.C)
- (iii) Kant (1724-1804 A.D)
- (iv) Hegal (1770-1831 A.D)
- (v) Froebel (1772-1852 A.D)
- (vi) Swami Dyananda (1825-1883 A.D)
- (vii) R.N. Tagore (1861-1941 A.D)
- (viii) Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950 A.D)
- (ix) Barkley, Pestalozzi, T.P. Nunn, James Ross etc.

## **Meaning of idealism**

The word 'idealism' has been derived from 'Ideal' and 'Idea'. According to Titus, the word 'Idealism' has been derived from the word 'idea' than 'ideal'. Plato conceived of ideas as the basis of his philosophy. Idealism is a philosophical position which adheres to the view that nothing exists except an idea in the mind of a man. Ideas or higher values are essences. They are ultimate cosmic significance. In brief, idealism asserts that reality consists of ideas, thoughts, minds or selves rather than of material objects and forces. The important is idea or thought. It has no dimension such as length or breadth and such is different from material forces.

### **Philosophical Presuppositions**

1. Metaphysics: The ultimate existing element is spiritual in nature. The entire universe is an extension of the mind or soul. Ideas are the true reality.
2. Epistemology: Thought or idea has greater validity than the physical world. All knowledge is independent of sense experience. The act of knowing takes place within the mind.
3. Axiology: Values are more than mere human preferences; they really exist and are inherent intrinsically in the structure of the universe. Values are eternal. Three spiritual values are the Truth, The Beauty and the Goodness. Truth is an intellectual value, the beauty an aesthetic value and the good a moral value.

### **Idealism Defined**

Many psychologists and philosophers have given various definitions of Idealism. Some important definitions out of them are as follows-

1. Oxford Dictionary: "Idealism means representation of things in an ideal form, imaginative treatment, system of thought in which the object of external perception is held to consist of ideas."
2. J.S. Ross: "Idealistic philosophy takes many varied forms, but the point underlying all is that mind is the essential stuff, that the true reality is of mental character."

3. Harold B. Titus: "Idealism asserts that reality consists of ideas, thoughts, minds, or selves rather than material objects and force."

4. Prof. Brubacher: "Idealists point out that it is mind that is central in understanding the world."

5. Rusk: "Idealism contends that the material and physical universe known to science is an incomplete expression of reality that it exists but to subserve and requires to complement it a higher type of reality, a spiritual universe."

6. R.N. Tagore: "Idealism is that school of philosophy which lays great emphasis on ideas as well as on moral and spiritual values."

From the above definitions, we can conclude that idealism is that type of philosophy which has little to do with the realities of the world and which mainly recognises the importance of imaginary ideas and moral or spiritual values. Idealism seeks to offer an explanation of the man and the universe in terms of mind or spirit. Idealism is infact spiritualism.

### **Main Features/Characteristics of Idealism**

1. True reality consists in ideas; spirit and mind constitute reality.
2. Material world is the expression of spiritual world. This world is not real.
3. There is a universal mind called God and he is the source of all knowledge.
4. Man is the best creation of God. That is spiritual power in him.
5. Value are absolute and unchanging.
6. Man is not the creator of values.
7. The source of attaining true knowledge is our wisdom or intellectual enlightenment.
8. The philosophy believes in unity in diversity.
9. There is a kind of inner harmony between man and universe.
10. It gives much importance to its 'self' of the individual. Hence, they insists upon the fullest development of the personality of individual.

## Chief Assertions of Idealism

1. Mind a true reality: The mind or spirit is the true reality. Idealism believes that the spiritual nature of man is the essence of his being. The mental or spiritual is more real and important than the material. Idealism holds that the final truth is in the nature of mind. The study of man and the realisation of 'spirit' is the 'be all and end all' of human life. This realisation comes through intuition and an understanding of our own 'self'.

2. Man being spiritual is a Superior Creation: According to Idealism, the supreme aim of life is "exaltation of human personality." Ross says, "Human personality is of supreme value and constitutes the noblest work of God." Man is an incarnation of God, the root and crown of all creation. His spiritual side distinguishes him from other animals. Reality is found in the mind of man and not in the external world.

3. Ideas are more Important than objects: To the idealists, ideas are the ultimate Reality whereas objects die out sooner or later. Hence, they give more importance to ideas over the objects and material things.

4. Universal Mind: According to idealism, there is a spiritual universe permeated by the Universal Mind. This little mind is a part of the Universal Mind. The goal of human life is to realize the Universal Mind. The whole universe is one organism with its varied parts. Since mind comes from Mind, and soul from a Soul and since they are not matter, they are imperishable. Final reality is Mind. This is also known as principle of Unity in Diversity.

5. Knowledge is perceived and crystallised in mind: Knowledge acquired through the activity, creativity, and exercise of the mind is more important than the knowledge acquired through senses.

6. Realisation of Higher Values: According to Idealism, ideals of higher values are made by man. They have their prior existence. The chief aim of human life is to realize these values which are

Truth, Goodness and Beauty. Idealism visualises glimpses of God in whatever is true, good and beautiful. The beauty and grace of human life lie in the achievement of these fundamental, absolute and eternal values.

7. Importance of Personality Development: Idealists give much importance to the 'self' of the individual. Hence they insist upon the fullest development of personality of an individual. According to them, the development of personality means achievement of perfection.

8. Emphasis upon normative and social sciences: In the field of education, idealists place greater stress upon normative and social sciences than upon the natural and physical. The normative sciences are-Ethics, Logic and Aesthetics. Of the social sciences, the main ones are sociology and psychology. Idealists explain the universe on the basis of these sciences.

9. Normative description of the Universe: For the Idealist, facts alone are not sufficient explanation. The universe as a whole: is explained explicable in terms of ideals of truth, good and beauty.

10. Universal is Knowable: Idealists believe that universe can be comprehended through mind because both the mind and the universe are constituted of the same elements-intellect and spiritual essence.

Idealism also believes that there is a certain wholeness about spiritual life as for instance maintained by Vedanta, the knowledge of spiritual reality. Brahma Gyan is the highest knowledge.

### **Schools of Idealism**

Following are the various types of Idealism:

## Subjective Idealism

It is also called 'Mentalism' or 'phenomenalism'. The subjective idealists hold that mind or spirit and their perceptions of ideas are all that exist. All that exist are minds and their ideas. Minds are perceivers. All that is real is a conscious mind or some perceptions or ideas held by such a mind.

## Objective Idealism

The objective idealists are of the view that the external world is in real sense man-made. They do not deny the existence of an external or objective reality. In nature, they find the same principles of order, reason and purpose that men find within himself. They say that ultimate nature of the universe is mental. The universe is one-all embracing order and they attribute this unity to the ideas and purpose of an Absolute mind or God.

## Personal Idealism

For the personalists, the basic reality is neither abstract thought nor a particular thought process, but a person, a self or a thinker. Reality is of the nature of conscious-personality. Nature is an objective-order. Nature was created by God, who is the supreme self in a society of persons. It is pluralistic.

## **Idealism and Education (Educational Implications of Idealism)**

An idealistic concept of education is something which leads to the highest moral conduct and deepest spiritual insight. It is through education that man is led to realise the higher values of life, namely Truth, Beauty and Goodness. As Ross said, "The function of education is to help us in our exploration of the ultimate universal values so that the truth of universe may become our truth and give power to our life."

### Principles/Assumption of Idealistic Education

The purpose of education according to Idealism is the development of the mind and self of the pupil. They like to educate the child for mainly two reasons:

1. **Spiritual Necessity:** Education, according to Idealism is a spiritual necessity and not a natural necessity. Education must convert original nature of man into spiritual nature. In the words of Russett, "Education must enable mankind through its culture to enter more and more fully into the spiritual realm" In other words, Idealists believe that man's nature is spiritual and divine. He can realize this only through education. **Social Necessity:** The social aspect of education is not altogether neglected by the Idealists. They regard education as a social necessity as well. Man is an object projection of society in an individual form. Such a projection should reflect the good of the society'. Hence the need for education and schools.

Idealism in Education is based on Two Principles

1. **Intellectual Training:** The world is an absolute order of physical objects and is based on natural laws that are external laws that are eternal and unchanging. Idealism emphasizes the study of these laws. Reason is above everything else in the universe, hence in education, physical laws based on reason must be taught, because nature is simply the outer expression of an inner logical order.

2. **The unique Nature of Man:** Man is different from all other creatures, because he alone can understand logic and order and order in existence. Through the power of his mind, he is rational being unlike animals. Man overcomes his animal nature through self-discipline and reason. He can change due to upbringing and the discipline provided by the family and the school. This process is called education and acquires an effect of the mind and will.

### **Idealism and Aims in Education**

The purpose of education according to Idealism is the development of mind and self of the child. Idealists say that education is a process of unfolding and developing that which is a potential in

the human person. It is unfolding of what is already enfolding. They also believe that the greatest work of God is the human personality. Their aims of education are based on these assumptions:

1. All round development of personality: According to Idealism, the aim of education is to develop all aspects of the personality of an individual or a child so that he is able to receive recognition from all directions in life.

2. Self-realisation: The highest potentialities of the self must be realized in a social and cultural environment provided by the school and the home. This should be the goal of all educative effort. Education should lead to perfection in the individual. There should be an unfolding of the divine in man. (Shankracharya said, "Education is the realisation of the self." By education child will be able to recognise his soul) .This is the Individual aim of education emphasised by the Idealists.

3. Spiritual Development: It is another important aim of education of Idealism. They prefer spiritual value to material attainment. Rusk has rightly said, "Education must enable mankind through its culture to enter more and more fully into the spiritual realm and also enlarge the boundaries of spiritual realm."

4. Synthesis between Man and Nature: Another aspect of the Idealistic conception of education is the synthesis between nature and human beings. Adams has suggested that education must aim at achieving and understanding of nature in human beings and educating them to achieve harmony with it. This can be done by acquainting the child with the permanent laws which guide and control natural phenomena.

5. Development of Rationality: This universe is a thought process in which there is a perfect order. Certain inevitable laws govern the universe. Education should aim at helping the pupil to direct his effects towards understanding these laws. Intellectual development requires a training in logical understanding and perception.

6. Development of Eternal Values: Idealism has emphasised some eternal values such as Truth, Beauty and Goodness. According to this school of philosophy, the aim of education is to impart knowledge of these eternal values to all individual and inspire them to lead their lives according to their eternal values.



7. Intellectual Development: Idealism believes in 'Unity in Diversity' in the world through common intellect of humanity. This unity is possible only if the intellect, thinking power and reasoning power of every individual is developed through education. Hence development of intellect or intellectual development is one of the aims of education.

8. Moral/Character Development: The idealists give great importance to the moral side of the individual or his character. Hence, Idealism advocates strongly the importance of the development of character. According to Herbert, "One and the whole aim of education may be summed up in the concept of morality or character building."

9. Culture Development: Idealism lays great stress on the preservation and development of culture in the form of human feelings and ideas. It also recognises the important place of education in the work of preserving and developing human culture through transmission from one generation to the next generation. So, the aim of education should be sound preservation and proper development of human culture throughout the world.

10. Sublimation of Instincts: According to the Idealists, the aim of education is to redirect and sublimate the instincts of all individuals, so that they are in line with the culture of human society at large. It means that education should aim at leading human beings to purity of life through redirection and sublimation of human instincts.

11. Physical well-being of the Individual: Physical well being of the individual is an important aim of Idealistic education. As spiritual exaltation is not possible without being physically fit, so physical aspects of education cannot be ignored. 'A sound body has a sound mind' is their motto. Ross says, "The health and fitness of the body must receive the attention, for without such health and fitness, the pursuit of spiritual values is seriously handicapped."

12. Development of Inventive and creative powers: Unlike the animals, man is not the passive victim of the force of nature. He can change them to suit his own needs. Man should not accept his physical environment as unchangeable. He should rather change and modify that environment according to his needs. Education must "foster those inventive powers of man that ensure his mastery over the material given to him."

13. Education for all: Idealists hold that every human being must receive a chance to be educated and their goal is Universal education. However, as outlined by Plato's 'Republic' education should be imported according to the needs of the individuals being educated.

(a) Slow learners have to be educated and trained for the job market or for manual work.

(b) The average student may be educated for a specialist's job.

(c) The very bright student may be given an extensive education. Higher education may be provided to them only.

14. Religious Education: Many of the Idealistic philosophers give place to religious education as one of the educational aims. Since religious is based on the revelation of God to man, the student will find it helpful to discover reality for himself through religion.

15. Preparation for a Holy Life: A holy life full of "piety and good ideals will lead naturally towards spiritual development and self- realisation. Hence another important aim of education is to prepare the child for a holy life."

16. Modern Aims of Idealism: Modern Idealism, as interpreted, emphasises following two types of aims:

(a) The proximate aim should be the development of intelligence, skills, art, social justice and character.

(b) The ultimate aims should be "the development of humanity in the image of divinity."

The above discussion leads us to the conclusion that Idealism plays a great role in influencing the aims of education. These aims, as recognised by Idealism, are connected with the individuals, as well as with the society, because they lead all individuals to development of personality, development of character, preservation of culture and sublimation of human instincts for the betterment of society and humanity. It wants education to aim at the development of human personality culminating in self- realisation. In short, the aim of education as per idealists seems to be a comprehensive one, "training the whole man completely and fully for manhood."

### **Idealism and Curriculum**

Curriculum is closely connected with the aims of education. Hence when we say that Idealism has great influence upon the aims of education we also mean that it has great influence upon the field of curriculum. The aims of Idealism are very high and good, hence it lay great stress on good curriculum also.

Idealists want an all round developed individual. Hence the curriculum of idealism includes everything. Which help the all round development of the individual. Therefore, idealists believe in fullness of muscles, wisdom and they suggest the material that promotes this.

### Principles of Curriculum Construction

1. Domain: Idealists approach the framing of the curriculum from the domain of ideas and ideals.
2. Spiritual in Nature: Idealism emphasizes the spiritual side of man. So, the idealists curriculum is based upon the ideas or assumptions of the spiritual nature of man. They are of the view that the curriculum is a body of intellectual disciplines that are basically ideational or conceptual.
3. Hierarchy of disciplines: Idealists arrange their curriculum in the form of a hierarchy in which the general discipline occupies the top most position and gradually it comes down to particular subject in their relationship to general discipline.
4. Experience of the human race: Idealistic stressed that the curriculum should represent the experience of the human race as a whole, relating to the physical and the social environment; the sciences and the humanities will thus be included.
5. Pursue the Good and True: Plato spoke of spiritual values which enable the pupil to pursue the good, the true and the beautiful. Thus intellectual, aesthetic and moral values should be inculcated through a study of language, literature, science, mathematics, art, music, poetry, religion, ethics, logic and metaphysics.
6. Physical Education: Physical Education which Plato called 'Gymnastic' should be included in the curriculum. Athletics, gymnastics, health and hygiene should be taught along with intellectual, artistic and spiritual pursuits in the school.
7. Views of various Idealists:

**(a) Plato:** Plato, a great exponent of Idealism, conceives of the curriculum from the point of ideas. He believes that the highest idea of life is the attainment of the highest good or God. Hence, curriculum ought to impart inherent values, in order to enable the educand to attain his highest good.

The spiritual values, according to Plato are- truth, beauty and goodness. These three values which determine three types of activities- intellectual, aesthetic and moral. Each type of activity is represented by different subjects and should form a part of the curriculum.

(i) Intellectual Activity: These are represented by subjects such as language, literature, science, mathematics, history, geography.

(ii) Aesthetic Activities: These are represented by through the study of art and poetry.

(iii) Moral Activities: Moral activities are represented by the study of religion, ethics and metaphysics..

**(b) James Ross:** This Idealistic and educationist has classified human activities in two groups- physical and spiritual activities.

These activities should be included in the curriculum.

Physical activities: These activities include subject such as health and hygiene which foster bodily skills viz. gymnastics and athletics that lead to good health and fitness and thus make the pursuit of spiritual values possible. Spiritual pursuits: It implies the intellectual, aesthetic, moral and religious studies. Hence such subjects as history, geography, language, fine arts, morality, ethics, religion, science, mathematics and others should be included in the curriculum.

**(c) T.P. Nunn:** Another Idealistic educationist T.P. Nunn argued that education in the school should consider two kinds of activities-

(i) First Group of Activities: In this group falls such activities which create conditions by which the individual and social life is ensured and maintained. This can be done through physical health, customs, social organisations, ethical conduct, etiquette, religion etc..Education must provide opportunities, therefore, for physical training, ethics, religion etc.

(ii) Second group of Activities: In this group falls those activities which are more important outside the sphere of school. These activities maintain the cultural life of the community because they are creative. These activities include teaching of literature, art music, various kinds of handicrafts and manual skills, science, mathematics, history etc. Hence, according to Nunn, curriculum must be so designed that it can help to acquaint the individual with his social and cultural heritage and also to enable him to make some positive contribution to this heritage.

**(d) Sri Aurobindo:** Sri Aurobindo also in his Integral philosophy of education gives importance to moral, religious and physical education. By moral education, he means the training of moral faculty, the ability to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. He advocates that religious education should also be imparted not only through religious books or religious sermons but by the practice of religious life and spiritual self training. Theoretical teaching of religion must be complemented with actual practice. Along with moral and religious education, he has given importance to physical education. "If our seeking is for the total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside; for the body is the material basis, the body is the instrument which we have to use."

Explaining the Idealistic bases of curriculum as the imparting of spiritual and cultural heritage to the child, along with his self and personality development, Herman H. Home writes, "It is better to centre education in ideals for children and the race rather than in children themselves." Early idealists laid emphasis on 'dialects' also so that the child can know the truth. This is in true of Tibetan system of education. In all the Idealists insist on emphasis being placed on the study of humanities such as literature, art, religion, morality etc, along with the teaching of science. All elements necessary for attaining God are included in the Idealistic curriculum.

### **Idealism and Method of Teaching**

Idealism has not contributed much to the field of teaching methods. It is rather the weakest point in idealist philosophy.

1. No special method of teaching: The idealists have not suggested any special method of teaching. They say that the teacher can choose any useful method of teaching according to his subject and needs. Butler has stated in this context, "Idealists consider themselves as creators and determiners of methods, not devotees of some one method." Only Pestalozzi and Froebel have contributed to

methodology. Pestalozzi advocated 'self-activity' on the part of the children. She said that all instructions should be based on psychological findings, experience and observations and not on abstract statements and words. Infact, Pestalozzi psychologised education. Froebel gave "kindergarten' method which is playway method of teaching.

2. Teaching methods mentioned by Idealists: Some Idealists have mentioned a few teaching methods as follows;

- (a) Question-Answer Method-Plato
- (b) Discussion method-Aristotle,
- (c) Induction and Deduction-Aristotle
- (d) Simple to complex-Desecrates
- (e) Lecture method
- (f) Imitation method
- (g) Playway method
- (h) Story telling method

3. The Idealist Methodology in education lays special stress on the three following processes.

a) Instruction: It implies educational instruction which is believed by Herbert to be essential to education. Child's mind should not be stuffed with various scraps of information. It implies a modification and are finement of the child's mind. Training of all kinds must be provided in the school.

(b) Activity: The educational methods recommended by the Idealists are based on activity. The child must learn through activity. Although the child can learn much by asking questions of the lectures in the school creative activity is much more important. The creative activity should be natural, continuous and progressive. This helps in moving towards self-realisation because it encourages the child to manifest his innate tendencies.

(c) Experience: Idealist methodology also places considerable stress on experience. Every educand must base his education on his own experience. It means that idealists want that instruction should be active, students and teacher both should be active and they should indulge in the mutual exchange of experience so that they can progress. The teaching method should be such that the child should recognise it as a mode of self-instruction.

### **Idealism and Discipline**

Idealists believe that the pupil cannot realize his spiritual and moral possibilities without submitting to discipline and self-restraint. So, discipline is very essential.

1. No Rigorous Discipline: Rigorous discipline is never accepted by the idealists. They are also not in favour of free discipline. Children must endure a restraint on freedom.
2. Self-discipline: According to Idealism, discipline must always take the shape of self-discipline, because only then can it guide the educand along the path of self-realisation. Self-insight and self-analysis are the main disciplinary factors. Froebel believes that the child should not be submitted to any external pressure. It is only through discipline that the child can realize the ideals of education and once it has understood this, it can discipline itself.
3. Teacher's guidance: The teacher's guidance is always necessary at every stage. Idealists are not in favour of imposed discipline. The discipline is not to be imposed on pupils. The teacher has only to help them to develop self-discipline and through that self-knowledge."
4. No physical punishment: Idealists have criticised the establishment of discipline through threat, repression and punishment. It is better realised through developing such qualities as self-resignation, love and sympathy at all stages of education." In the end, we can say that Idealism emphasises sympathetic control over the undesirable activities of the child whereas on the other hand, it grants regulated liberty for his spiritual development. The main task of education is to emphasise the cultivation of higher values through moral and religious instructions. These virtues will ultimately make the child properly disciplined. In fact, their theory of discipline is based on their concept of freedom. Freedom does not mean waywardness, it implies responsibility. It should be regulated, guided and restrained freedom. Gandhi ji also believes, that real freedom comes through self-discipline.

## **Idealism and Role of Teacher**

The teacher stands next to God in idealistic education. He occupies a prominent place in scheme of idealistic education. He is a friend, philosopher and guide in real sense. Idealism believes in the maxim that pupils catch fire from a teacher who is himself a flame. Idealists have high expectations of the teachers. They believe that the teacher is an important ingredient in the education of the child. To the idealist, "the school is a garden, the educand is a tender plant and the educator the careful gardener". He carries the child from darkness to light. His role is very important and glorious.

(i) Highest place to the teacher: Idealistic pattern of education grant the highest place to the teacher. Education according to the idealist pattern is ideal-centered, not wholly child-centered or subject-centered. Hence the teacher assumes a very important role in the education process. He becomes the key to educative process more than any other element comprising it.

(ii) Creator of learning environment: The teacher sets, to a large extent, the atmosphere of the learning environment. According to Ross, "The teacher creates a good atmosphere for the child, so that he is able to get inspiration for learning by himself in that good atmosphere." The educator creates a specific environment for the educand's development and provides guidance so that the latter may progress towards perfection and a rounded personality.

(ii) Best guide and friend: According to Ross, the teacher is the best guide as well as best friend of the child. He is the gardener and the children are flowers. The gardener, in the form of a teacher, is to do the work of producing the best flower and separate them from briars, "The Naturalist may be content with briars but the idealist wants fine roses."

ज्ञानं चक्षुर्मनुष्याणां

