



EDUCATIVE RAPPORT

Fr. (Dr.) Matthew Pulingathil sdb



DON BOSCO EDITIONS
CALCUTTA

THE EDUCATIVE RAPPORT

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Fr. Mathew Pulingathil, S.D.B.

**DON BOSCO EDITIONS
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FOREWORD

VISHWA-BHARATI

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This monograph by Fr. Mathew Palingathil is slender in volume but substantial in quality. Numerous books have been written on Christian missionary educational activities in India and their effects on young Indian minds. The contributions of their educational institutions have been widely acknowledged and, at the same time, some aspects of the content and purposes of such educational enterprises have been criticized. There has been a rather popular belief that the Christian missionary education, its system and structure, are not quite in conformity with Indian tradition and heritage. Consequently, the admiration for the quality and achievements of the missionary educational institutions has been often mixed with misgivings. The present study will not only help in removing such doubts, but also throw new light on the nature of the education, especially, teacher-student relationship, in the institutions run by Don Bosco. The very title of the monograph, *The Educative Rapport*, is highly suggestive. It underlines the most essential component of any system of education.

The author's motivation has enabled him to undertake such an important project and achieve so much within so little space in terms of pages. It is 'love for the Indian cultural heritage and

love for Don Bosco'. To this has been added his scholarship and clarity of understanding. It is by no means easy to appreciate the essence of the *Guru-Sishya* (teacher-pupil) relationship that existed in ancient India. It still continues to be the goal, though an elusive one, in modern India. Fr. Pulingathil has searched for, and found out, a positive relationship between the *Guru-Sishya* relationship and Don Bosco's concept of *amorevolezza*—(loving kindness).

The author admits and regrets his inability to study the primary sources regarding the Brahmanic educational system. He also refers to the difficulty of translating primary sources from Italian to English relating to Don Bosco's system. But he has largely overcome the impediments and produced an excellent monograph. This has been possible because of his scholarship, sincerity and personal experience in the field of education.

India has just accepted a New Educational Policy. There are expectations of major changes in education in the coming years. Computers and other technological aids are to be increasingly used for progress and advancement in the field of education. But nothing can minimize the human factor. No system can function unless the teacher establishes a warm personal relationship with the student. On the other hand, the student has to respect his teacher. This is particularly true at the school level. The success of the educational system in ancient India and the missionary institutions of today may be ascribed to the teacher-student relationship. Fr. Mathew Pulingathil's monograph underlines this crucial point very effectively.

Nemai Sadhan Bose

8. 12. 87

PREFACE

The new awareness of the Church as She emerged from Vatican II, as a reality immersed in the world, contains in itself the possibilities for the development of a new ecclesiology with its far reaching effects on the very mission of the Church Herself. The evangelizing mission of the Church is seen ever more clearly as a process of encounter and dialogue with the cultures of the world. We are entering into a period of evangelization through inculturation. Pope Paul VI put it most succinctly when he said :

“What matters is to evangelize man’s culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense... The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly, of cultures.” (FN 20, 29)

Today, more than ever before, the religious families have begun to realize their roles as ecclesial realities. Speaking particularly of the apostolate of education, the second Vatican Council says :

“All men of whatever race, condition or age, in virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to education. This education should be suitable to the particular destiny, sex and national culture, traditions... True education is directed towards the formation of human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult, have a share.” (GE 1, 639)

ABBREVIATIONS

- BM** LEMOYNE G. B., *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, Vols. 2—7, Diego Borgatello, Editor-in-chief, New York, Salesian Publishers, 1966—1972.

In the citation, the first number indicates the volume, the second, the page.

- Constitutions** *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St. Francis of Sales*, Appendix : A selection of writings of Don Bosco, Roma, SGS, 1972.

- E** *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco*, Vols. 1—4, per cura di E. Ceria, Torino, SEI, 1955—1959.

In the citation, the first number indicates the volume, the second, the page.

- EN** PAUL VI, *Evangelization in the modern world*, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, London, Catholic Truth Society, translation published by the Vatican Polyglot press, (s.d.).

In the citation, the first number indicates the article, the second, the page.

- GC XXI** *XXI General Chapter of the Salesian Society Chapter Documents*, Roma, Editrice SDB, 1978.

In the citation, the first Arabic number indicates the article, the second, the page.

- GE** THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, U.S.A., Walter M. Abbott, General Editor, The American Press, 1966.

In the citation, the first number indicates the article, the second the page.

Manu *The Sacred Books of the East*, translated by various oriental scholars and edited by F. Max Müller, Vol. 25, *The Laws of Manu*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1975.

In the citation, the first number indicates the chapter, the second the verse.

MB LEMOYNE G. B., AMADEI A., CERIA E., *Memorie Biografiche di Don (del Beato, di San) Giovanni Bosco*, Vols. 1—18, San Benigno Canavese/Torino, Scuola tipografia e libreria Salesiana/SEI, 1898—1937.

In the citation, the first number indicates the volume, the second, the page.

MO BOSCO G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, Roma, a cura editrice SDB, SGS, 1946.

In the citation, the number indicates the page.

SBE *The Sacred Books of the East*, translated by various oriental scholars and edited by F. Max Müller, Vols. 1, 2, 15, 29 and 30, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1973—1975.

In the citation, the first number indicates the volume.

INTRODUCTION

Don Bosco's educative method ought to be incarnated in every culture in order that it may be fully effective. Love for the Indian cultural heritage and love for Don Bosco and his educational method was the motivating force that spurred this little research. This has been amply enunciated in the preface to this work. The difficult task of incarnating Don Bosco's method in Indian soil cannot be achieved unless a sound knowledge of Don Bosco's method is juxtaposed with a sound knowledge of the Indian cultural heritage.

While a mere conceptual knowledge of the educational system of ancient India may be comprehensible to all, a historically based and documented version of this great cultural heritage has not been unearthed by the majority of Indians. The effort of this paper is to study the '*guru-sishya*' (teacher-pupil) relationship in the brahmanic educational system of ancient India in order to see whether a possible relationship can be made to the concept of Don Bosco's '*amorevolezza*' (loving kindness).

The material presented in the brahmanic education will be mainly based on 'The Sacred Books of the East', volume twenty-five, '*The Laws of Manu*' as this volume deals with studentship that existed in ancient India. In the section dealing with Don Bosco, we will be making use of the written documents of the Saint dealing with this theme of loving kindness, his own letters, testimonies and other scholars. Whenever the English translation is available, it will be made use of, at other times the translation in great part will be made by the researcher.

The lack of availability at hand of the primary sources regarding the brahmanic educational system is one of the greatest difficulties that a research of this nature has to affront. Equally

major is the difficulty in translating much of the primary sources from Italian to English regarding Don Bosco's system. Besides, it is no easy task to attempt a comparison of educational concepts that prevailed in two different worlds, that too, at two far distant periods of history. Consequently, this research remains on a generic plane rather than an in-depth study.

We shall use the historico-expository-comparative method. We shall be exposing the historical facts, the realities that existed centuries ago in India and the concept of loving kindness in education brought to the forefront by Don Bosco during the last century. No historico-critical exegesis of the texts, however, will be made in this paper.

This research is articulated in three chapters. The first chapter deals with the brahmanic system. It begins with a historical setting of ancient India, which saw the birth of the brahmanic education with its early beginnings, development and aims. Then, it presents the system of education that was in vogue, with the *guru* and the *sisya* with their respective rights and duties and the relationship that existed between them. The oft-used terms '*guru*' (teacher) and '*sisya*' (pupil) will not be italicized in the text as they are almost considered as universally accepted terms.

The second chapter deals with Don Bosco's educational system. It begins with a short historical setting of Don Bosco's native Piedmont followed by a biographical sketch of the Saint. Then a brief idea of the preventive system follows, which will take us to a detailed exposition of the concept of Don Bosco's loving kindness.

The third chapter is an attempt to compare the *guru-sisya* relationship in the brahmanic educational system of ancient India and Don Bosco's loving kindness. It begins with a general perspective and then the rest is divided into three parts, namely, some converging points, some diverging points, and some aspects that could be made to converge with the use of a little imagination and inventiveness. Neither the exposition of the first two chapters, nor the attempt at a comparison in the third chapter claims to be exhaustive. As it is a tentative effort of a new kind, it gives ample room for further in-depth research.

Keeping in mind all these orientations that are operative in the Church today, the Salesian Congregation has reflected on her own life and mission in the Church. The authentic and fruitful existence of the Congregation in the world, depends very much on how the spirit and the charism of Saint John Bosco has been incarnated into the culture of the people among whom she lives and serves. This need was felt in a special way with regard to the adaptation of the educative system that we follow :

“It realizes first of all the extreme cultural heterogeneity in which the Congregation is performing its mission: countries with longstanding Christian tradition and territories on the threshold of dechristianization; regions in which the first proclaiming of the Good News has need of consistent efforts at deepening the Christian experience and the faith; immense subcontinents where educational and pastoral action confronts deeply rooted non-christian religions, let alone the extremely differentiated levels of economic development, of social stratifications, of political regimes, of traditions.” (GC XXI, 82, 64)

Even though the General Chapter did not spell out the manner in which the Congregation should meet this need of indigenizing the apostolic method of Saint John Bosco, the very fact that she felt this need is a very positive indication. The Church and the Congregation will be enriched with an Indian dimension of the spirit and the charism of Saint John Bosco; but this calls for serious study and reflection on the part of the Indian Salesians. This little research is but tiny contribution towards the realization of this gigantic goal.

CHAPTER I

The 'Guru-sishya' (Teacher-pupil) Relationship in the Brahmanic Educational System of Ancient India

A. 1. THE GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATION AND THE PEOPLE

If we look at the map of the world, India is the name of a triangular land, with the Himalayan ranges on the north and a peninsula tapering off into the Indian Ocean. Within the boundaries of this great land, there dwells a population of approximately seven hundred millions, derived from different races and speaking diverse languages. Historians have varied opinions regarding the different races that inhabited this sub-continent. According to the classification of B. S. Guha, there were six races that came into India during the course of time. They were the Black people, who were emigrants from Africa; the Austrica language family; the Dravidians, who belonged to the west Mediterranean type; the Mongoloid type; and the Aryans, who penetrated into India more than 1000 years before Christ.¹

Archeological discoveries of Sir John Marshall, Daya Ram Sahni and R. D. Banerji some sixty years ago, have thrown light on the existence of a civilization at Harappa and Mohenjodaro, which is known as the Indus Valley Civilization. This civilization belonged to a period approximately between 2500 B.C. and 1500 B.C. The end of the Indus Valley culture seems to fall around 1500 B.C.,

1 Cfr. GNOLI R., *La civiltà Indiana*, Torino, unione tipografica editrice, 1973, pp. 13—14.

when it is likely that the Aryan race came and conquered it.² It is opined by the scholars that the Aryan race belonged to an Indo-European family. The Aryans have left us the famous texts of a religious and liturgical character known as the *Vedas*,³ which form the oldest strata of Indian literature. It was the Aryans and especially the priestly class among them, who moulded the religion, philosophy, science and art, as well as the social organization which is spread all over India.⁴

2. THE VEDIC RELIGION

A singular feature of ancient Indian or Hindu civilization is that, it has been moulded and shaped in the course of its history, more by religious than by political or economic influences. Religion, as the ancient Hindus understood it, practically dominated every sphere of their national life. The fundamental principles of social, political and economic life were welded into a comprehensive theory, which is called religion in Hindu thought. The total configuration of ideals, practices and conduct is called *Dharma* (Religion, Virtue, Duty) in this ancient tradition. Thus it is religion that gave its laws to the social life and organization of ancient Hindus and regulated even their economic activities and pursuits.⁵

Three strata of development are found in the thought of the hymns of the vedas, namely, naturalistic polytheism, monotheism,

2 Cfr. GNOLI R., *La civiltà Indiana*, pp. 16—17.

3 'Veda' is a Sanskrit word signifying knowledge, (from root 'Vid' meaning 'to know') designates 'sacred lore'. Besides this general sense, the word has also the restricted meaning of 'Sacred Book' of the Hindus. Most of the time we shall be following the latter meaning during the course of this work. The name 'Veda' suggests that the road which the vedic sages travelled was the road of those who seek to understand. It is used both in the singular and in the plural. This word will not be italicized in the text.

4 Cfr. KEAY F. E., *History of education in India*, Calcutta, Oxford University Press, 1978 p. 1.

5 Cfr. MOOKERJI R. K., *Ancient Indian education*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1974, p. xix.

and monism. Naturalism and a type of anthropomorphism, as indicated in these hymns, seem to constitute the first stage or stages of vedic thought. A striking aspect of the hymns is their polytheistic character.

Different views of the spirit of these hymns are held by various competent scholars. They have been referred to as primeval child-like naive prayers, as the allegorical representation of the attributes of the Supreme Deity, as sacrificial compositions of a primitive race which attached great importance to ceremonial rites, as altogether allegorical, or as somewhat naturalistic. These varying opinions need not be looked upon as antagonistic, for they only point to the heterogenous nature of the vedic collection.⁶

3. (a) THE VEDIC LITERATURE

There are four vedas: the *Rig veda*, composed of hymns; the *Yajur veda*, which deals with various sacrificial formulae; the *Sama veda*, which refers to melodies; and the *Atharva veda*, which has a large number of magic formulae.⁷ Each veda contains four sections: *Samhita* (a collection of hymns, prayers, benedictions, sacrificial formulae, and litanies); *Brahmanas* (prose treatises discussing the significance of sacrificial rites and ceremonies); *Aranyakas* (forest texts), which are partly included in the *Brahmanas* and partly reckoned as independent; *Upanishads*, which are the concluding portions of the vedas and the basis for the vedanta philosophy—a system in which human speculation seems to have reached its very acme.⁸

The dates of the composition and of the collection of the hymns of the *Rig Veda* are unknown. It is believed, however, that a long period of time must have elapsed between the composition and compilation of the hymns. There is evidence to indicate with some certainty, that the hymns were current fifteen

6 Cfr. RADHAKRISHNAN S. (Ed.), *A Source book in Indian philosophy*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 5.

7 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

8 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

centuries before Christ, somewhat in the arrangement in which we have them at the present time. The *Rig veda samhita* is a collection, which represents the thought of several generations of thinkers, and this fact accounts both for the heterogeneity of the hymns and also for the different strata of thought, which indicate marked development from polytheistic religion to monistic philosophy.⁹

The vedic literature does not exhaust itself with the *Samhitas*, the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads*. These constitute only the principal body of the vedas.¹⁰ Hinduism possesses definite sets of documents which are regarded as conveying unique divine truths, which need to be known for salvation. It makes the claim of having these saving truths as not merely man-made, nor even man-discovered, but divinely inspired. There are two sets of such documents recognized as belonging to its sacred scripture. They are *Sruti* and *Smriti*. *Sruti* means 'that which has been heard and communicated from the beginning', sacred knowledge orally transmitted by the brahmans from generation to generation. That is to say, the veda eternally heard by certain holy sages as different from what is only remembered and handed down in writing by human authors. The whole body of sacred tradition or what is remembered by human teachers, in contradistinction to what is directly heard by or revealed to the sages, is called *Smriti*.¹¹

According to eminent scholars, classical Hinduism proper developed from the forms of Vedism and Brahmanism and lasted until the eighth century after Christ. The religion of this phase is reflected in the two great epics: *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and more especially in the *Bhagavad Gita* which is a part of the *Mahabharata*, and in the literature which contains discourses on law and human conduct called *Dharma Sutra* and *Dharma Sastra*.¹²

9 Cfr. RADHAKRISHNAN S., (Ed.), *A Source book...*, pp. 3—4.

10 Cfr. GNOLI R., *La Civiltà Indiana*, p. 36.

11 Cfr. DHAVAMONY M., *Classical Hinduism*, Roma, Università Gregoriana editrice, 1982, p. 5.

12 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Although we have given a rapid glance at the vedic literature, we shall not be making use of all of them in our work. Our work will be mainly based on the universally accepted volumes of *'The Sacred Books of the East'*.¹³ The twenty-fifth volume, which is entitled *'The Laws of Manu'*, deals with the brahmanic student-ship—the focal point of our attention. We shall also be utilizing some of the works of the well-known Indian authors, noted for their competence in the field of Indian education.¹⁴

(b) THE LANGUAGE

The vedas, we should note, were not written, but handed down from teacher to pupil. They were committed to memory, not only because the epoch in which most of those hymns were composed writing was not yet known, but also writing was always considered very inferior to oral communication. The veda was to be recited not only with proper modulation of the voice to convey the accent, but the accents were indicated also by the movements of the fingers. All these intricate matters could be learnt only by oral instruction.¹⁵ Besides, when dealing with sacred texts, writing was almost a profanation. When finally set to writing, they were written in a language quite different from the classical Sanskrit.¹⁶

4. (a) THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

The fundamental social and political organization of the Aryans was the patriarchal family. The villages had great importance and each village had a headman, who was generally one of

13 The Sacred Books of the East, is a series of fifty volumes translated by various oriental scholars and edited by F. Max Müller. Twenty-one volumes of this gigantic work are on Hinduism. Our research is mainly based on the twenty-fifth volume entitled *'The Laws of Manu'*. There will also be occasional references to volumes 1, 2, 15, 29 and 30 in our work.

14 Cfr. KANE P. V., *History of Dharmasastra (Ancient and Mediaeval religious and civil law)*, vol. II, Part, I, Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941, p. 321, note 765.

15 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 347.

16 Cfr. GNOLI R., *La civiltà Indiana*, p. 20.

the cultivators or merchants. A large social community was made up of several villages called *Jana*, at the head of which there was a king or *Rajah*, who had the duty to protect the tribe or group and their territory. Kingship was often but not necessarily hereditary, although there are evidences of kings who were elected. The most important persons who lived in the king's court were the priests and the head of the warriors.

Sacrifice was considered of great importance in vedic society. It was accompanied by precise recitals of the hymns and the formulae in order to propitiate the divinity and to unfold the divine will. The chanting of the hymns or formulae would be rendered null and void by the least error, even by a mistaken accent.¹⁷

(b) THE CASTE SYSTEM

The ancient Hindu writers classified mankind into four classes with reference to their occupations. They were, the learned and priestly order (*brahmans*), the fighting and governing class (*kshatriyas*), the trading and agricultural people (*vaisyas*), and the servant class (*sudras*). The Hindu society as subjected to the caste system consisted of many subdivisions or castes. They were exclusively endogamous and tended strongly to be socially exclusive and perpetuated themselves hereditarily.¹⁸ Some authors hold the view that there was no sense of superiority or inferiority attached to any of these castes as have been often wrongly assumed, for each of the castes was considered as equally important. The difference was functional rather than racial.¹⁹ But gradually, they were hierarchically structured on the basis of a cultural standard.

Although, the first of the four castes was commonly called sacerdotal, it did not mean that all its members were priests. A *brahman* may be, but not necessarily, a priest. The expression '*brahman*' means 'relating to or given by a *brahman*, one who has divine knowledge, one who knows and repeats the veda'. More-

17 Cfr. GNOLI R., *La civiltà Indiana*, p. 22, 28.

18 Cfr. DHAVAMONY M., *Classical Hinduism*, p. 137.

19 Cfr. APTE D. G., *Our educational heritage*, Baroda, Shri J. C. Shah, 1961, p. 17.

over, the term '*brahmana*' can be taken to mean 'descendant of a *brahman*' and this would suggest that the brahmanic priesthood was normally hereditary. If we inquire into the origin of the caste system, we will find the only passage in the *Rig veda*, the famous *Purusha-sukta* hymn, where the four classes are mentioned and a mythical-mystical explanation of the division is given by the composer.²⁰

The subject matter of the *Purusha-sukta* hymn is a cosmology or theory of creation. The sage portrays creation as the result of the sacrifice and immolation of *Purusha*, the embodied spirit, or Man personified and regarded as the soul and original source of the universe, the personal and life-giving principle in all animated beings.

"When they divided the *Purusha*, into how many parts did they arrange him? What was his mouth? What were his two arms? What are his thighs and feet called? The *brahman* was his mouth, his two arms were made the *rajanya* (warrior), his two thighs the *vaisya* (trader and agriculturist), from his feet the *sudra* (servile class) was born. The moon was born from his spirit (*manas*), from his eyes was born the sun, from his mouth *Indra* and *Agni*, from his breath *vayu* ... Thus did they fashion the worlds."²¹

(c) THE STAGES OF LIFE

Ancient Hindus divided life into four stages or *asramas*, binding all castes in its common rules to lead life along a regulated course of development by natural stages. It is mentioned in the sacred texts very vividly.

"The student, the householder, the hermit, and the ascetic : these (constitute) four separate orders, ..."²²

20 Cfr. DHAVAMONY M., *Classical Hinduism*, pp. 137—138.

21 *Rig Veda*, Chapter X, verse 90 as cited in Radhakrishnan S., *A Source book...*, pp. 19—20.

22 *Manu* 6, 87.

The pride of birth with its inequalities was checked by the law relating to the four *asramas* or stages of life, which emphasized the spiritual objective of the institution and made all the castes equal in a common obedience to it. Most of the Indian scholars speak of it.

“Another is the division of life into *asramas* which are four in number, namely, *Brahmacharya*, *Garhasthya*, *Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*, which constitute the four principal stages of life. The first concerns itself with the life of the student, the second with that of the householder, the third with that of the hermit and the last with that of the ascetic absorbed in contemplation.”²³

The first stage of life covers the period of studenthood, that is, generally from the eighth year to the twentieth, and the second from twenty to fifty. The third begins when one sees wrinkles on one's body, when the hair has turned grey and when one has become a grandfather. While going to the forest in this stage he was allowed to take his wife with him or leave her with the family. The last stage covers the fourth quarter of life and comes only after the first three stages. The ancient Hindus believed that man has a triple debt that he has to pay in this life. First of all he has a debt to the gods, which is liquidated by sacrifice; the second debt is to the fathers, which is liquidated by creation of progeny; and the third debt is to the *Rishis*, liquidated by the daily study of the vedas. This last stage of life is meant as a preparation for its end through the severing of all possible worldly ties.²⁴ Perhaps it is fitting to conclude this topic with the lament of an Indian scholar :

“...the principle of caste-system which is an outstanding peculiarity of India is much misunderstood...Unfortunately more emphasis has come to be laid on caste than on the *asrama*. Caste divides and that on the basis of birth. But the

23 APTE D. G., *Our Educational heritage*, p. 18.

24 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

asrama system unites, binding all castes in its common rules to lead life along a regulated course of development by natural stages.²⁵

5. THE INFLUENTIAL POSITION OF THE 'BRAHMAN' CLASS

The period of early Hinduism, or better still, of Brahmanism, is a very important one in the history of Indian society and Hindu religion. It was during this period the system of four castes or social divisions assumed a definite shape, furnishing the basic structure within which the highly complex network of castes and subcastes of today has been developed. In this structure, the *brahman* class had occupied an influential position and steadily grew into a dominant power, which has lasted ever since both in the social and religious field.²⁶ It is no exaggeration to say that the life of no other people has been so saturated with sacerdotal influence as that of the Hindus, for the *brahmins* had claimed to possess sacred power, sacred knowledge, sanctity, and superior culture, and has found willing recognition of such claims by the other classes of the Hindu society. The sacred book of laws speaks extensively about the duties and privileges of the *brahmins*.

"*Brahmins* who are intent on the means (of gaining union with) *Brahman* and firm in (discharging) their duties, shall live by duly performing the following six acts (which are enumerated) in their (proper) order. Teaching, studying, sacrificing for himself, sacrificing for others, making gifts and receiving them are the six acts (prescribed) for a *brahman*."²⁷

Although we have mentioned the six acts that every *brahman* has to perform, the job that was most jealously guarded was that of teaching as it was clearly spoken by the law-giver.

25 MOOKERJI R. K., *Hindu civilization*, London, Bardwell L. Smith, 1976, p. 60.

26 Cfr. DHAVAMONY M., *Classical Hinduism*, p. 136.

27 Manu 10, 74—76.

"Among the several occupations the most commendable are, teaching the veda for a *brahman*,..."²⁸

There were laws that protected the status of the *brahman* even in difficult circumstances, which is a clear sign that he enjoyed an exalted position of honour in Hindu society :

"A *brahman* who has fallen into distress may accept gifts from anybody; for according to the law, it is not possible (to assert) that anything pure can be sullied. By teaching, by sacrificing for, and by accepting gifts from despicable (men), *brahmans* (in distress) commit no sin; for they are (as pure) as fire and water. He who, when in danger of losing his life, accepts food from any person whatsoever, is no more tainted by sin than the sky by mud."²⁹

B. 1. THE BRAHMANIC EDUCATION—EARLY BEGINNINGS

In ancient India, it had become the custom for chieftains or nobles to appoint *purohitas* or domestic priests to bring them prosperity by sacrifice. It was probably in such priestly families of high standing that the collection of hymns were formed and preserved, and the competition among these families to possess the best hymns led to the development of a dignified and expressive literary dialect. As the influence of the priests increased, the ritual of the sacrifice became more complex. The technical lore of language and hymns were handed down from father to son and this was no doubt the beginning of brahmanic education.³⁰

In a hymn of the *Rig veda*, there is a reference to what is probably the earliest form of the brahmanic school in India. It is a poem which compares the gathering of frogs in the rainy season with the meeting together of *brahmans*.

"Each of these twain receives the other kindly
while they are revelling in the flow of waters.

28 Manu 10, 80.

29 Manu 10, 102—104.

30 Cfr. KEAY F. E., *History of education...*, pp. 2—3.

When the frogs moistened by the rain spring forward,
 and Green and Spotty both combine their voices.
 When one of these repeats the other's language,
 as he who learns the lesson of the teacher,
 your every limb seems to be growing larger,
 as ye converse with eloquence on the water."³¹

Each experienced priest probably taught his sons or nephews the ritual lore and hymns which were traditional in the family, by letting them repeat them over and over again after him until all had committed to memory, and probably each family guarded the secrecy of its own sacred tradition.³²

The gathering together of all the hymns into one collection took place probably before 1000 B.C. When this was done, it is likely that the schools, where the priestly lore was learnt, were no longer always family schools, though in many cases no doubt the boy was pupil to his own father. This indeed was often so in much later times.³³

During the course of this period, much reference will be to probabilities rather than to certainties. It would be good for us to keep in mind that one of the characteristics of ancient Hindu thought is its indifference to history, as Gnoli himself remarks :

"The Indians of ancient India did not have a historic sense ...chronology was ignored altogether or treated very freely."³⁴

In discussing the content of a book, for instance, ancient and even mediaeval Indian writers care very little for the date or the life of the author.

"They care more for the truth of experience or the soundness of doctrine than for the circumstances that gave it

31 *Rig Veda*, chapter VII, verse 103 as found in *The hymns of the Rig Veda*, translated by Griffith R. T. H., Banares, E. J. Lazarus and Co., 1920, p. 35.

32 Cfr. KEAY F. E., *History of education...*, p. 3.

33 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

34 GNOLI R., *La Civiltà Indiana*, p. 7.

birth...But there is no doubt that the Hindu writers went to one extreme in ignoring history altogether, while modern western writers go to the other extreme in making too much of the historical treatment of thought and art and digging at the root of a tree instead of enjoying its flower and fruit."³⁵

What we term history may, no doubt, be far from the many-sided reality which it seeks to record. It may too often be only a very faulty and subjective view of events. All the same, the historical treatment of a subject, however imperfect and one-sided it may be, has its own value.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT

The influence of priesthood had been growing and the ritual of the sacrifice enormously developed. In the early vedic schools, it seems that instruction was confined to young *brahmans*, and was regarded mainly as a preparation for their future vocation as priests. But at some time before 500 B.C., the education of young *ksatriyas* and *vaisyas* had also come under *brahman* control, and in their case it was an opportunity of inculcating in their minds the necessary directions for all their future life.³⁶

It became also the exclusive privilege of the *brahmans* to teach, and this marks the growing and ever increasing influence of the *brahman* caste.

"Let the three twice-born castes, discharging their (prescribed) duties, study (the veda); but among them the *brahman* (alone) shall teach it, not the other two; that is an established rule."³⁷

The ceremony of initiation (*upanayana*) and investiture with the sacred thread came to be regarded for all Aryan youth as the preliminary to school life or studentship.

35 SARMA D. S., *Hinduism through the ages*, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1973, p. 1.

36 Cfr. KEAY F. E., *History of education...*, p. 12.

37 Manu 10, 1.

"In the eighth year after conception, one should perform the initiation (*upanayana*) of a *brahman*; in the eleventh (year) after conception (that) of a *kshatriya*, but in the twelfth that of a *vaisya*."³⁸

The three castes that had this privilege of initiation were considered twice-born, because this ceremony of *upanayana* was looked upon as a second birth.

"Thus has been described the rule for the initiation of the twice-born, which indicates a (new) birth, and sanctified; learn (now) to what duties they must afterwards apply themselves."³⁹

3. THE AIMS OF EDUCATION

In ancient India, life had not been divided into compartments, such as social life, political life, economic life, religious life, academic life and so on, because all these are inextricably mixed up. We can talk of the aim of life and then whatever is the aim of life will also be the aim of every aspect which forms a part of life. Life was treated as an integrated whole and every aspect therefore had to be interlinked. In the opinion of Indian thinkers, there can be one aim of life, the same being common to every activity connected with life. This aim of life can be termed as observance of *Dharma*.⁴⁰

We deliberately prefer the use of the Sanskrit word '*dharma*' to the usual but wrong practice of translating it as 'religion'. Religion and *dharma* are two entirely different ideas, the former being narrow in its connotation when compared with the latter. Hindu *dharma* is an ideology spread over hundreds of Hindu works covering millions of verses, which enable every person to live a spiritually prosperous life. Etymologically the word '*dharma*' means 'that which sustains'. This sustenance has two aspects according to a Hindu: sustenance in this life and in the life hereafter. Therefore, *dharma*

38 Manu 2, 36.

39 Manu 2, 68.

40 Cfr. APTE D. G., *Our Educational Heritage*, p. 42.

permeates the whole life here and hereafter and gives a prominent position to one's behaviour.⁴¹

The philosophy propounded by the *rishis* or seers controlled educational concepts and aims. Hindus believed that man is one of the manifold manifestations of the Supreme Being. Hence, he is a part of the universal whole. Man is born from God and the end of his life should be the realization of oneness with God. He believes that he was identical with Godhead, but has somehow or other been separated from him and his attempt always is, therefore, to regain his former position. The whole Hindu literature has this principal aim, which they call the aim of one's life, that is, self-realization.⁴²

Dr. Radhakrishnan, one of the most noteworthy Indian philosophers of this century, quoting the sacred scriptures, has spoken clearly regarding the aims of life :

"In the *Mahabharata* we find the elaboration of the orthodox social code, with the four aims of life (*purusarthas*), namely, righteousness (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), worldly enjoyment (*kama*), and spiritual freedom (*moksha*); the four stages of life, the student (*brahmacharya*), the householder (*garhasthya*), the forest-dweller (*vanaprastha*), and the wandering ascetic (*sannyasa*); and the four castes, the priest-teacher (*brahman*), the warrior (*kshatriya*), the trader (*vaisya*), and the worker (*sudra*)."⁴³

We have already seen the rich and very comprehensive significance of the term '*dharma*'. In the above context, *dharma* means the discharge of one's duty as rationally conceived as an aspect of social ethics. *Artha* means the ordering of one's worldly concerns so as to conduce to happiness. *Kama* means the enjoyment of pleasures without coming into conflict with *dharma*. Finally, *moksha* means the disentangling of oneself from ephemeral pleasures and joys, because the pleasures have ceased to please and joys have

41 Cfr. APTE D. G., *Our Educational Heritage*, p. 47.

42 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

43 RADHAKRISHNAN S., *A Source book...*, pp. 99—100.

become void of content, as higher and more permanent forms unfold themselves to mental vision.⁴⁴

Artha and *kama* are to be controlled by means of *dharma*, which gives equipoise to everything. The final stage is emancipation from all worldly bondage, self-realization, the realization of one's identity with the one Eternal, Supreme Principle of life, the Uncaused Cause of the world.⁴⁵

The vedic seer was not averse to the performance of worldly duties, because the worldly life as ordained by the Supreme was purposeful. Knowledge for salvation was *para vidya* and knowledge for worldly affairs was *apara vidya*.⁴⁶

The *Mahabharata* speaks of the eminent role of knowledge in the life of every individual :

"...one becomes cleansed of all sins by means of knowledge alone, living the while in (the) Supreme Brahma (Deity)...Emancipation does not exist in poverty; nor is bondage to be found in affluence. One attains to emancipation through knowledge alone, whether one is indigent or affluent."⁴⁷

Education was regarded as a source of illumination and power, which transforms and ennobles our nature by the progressive and harmonious development of our physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual powers and faculties. It thus enables us to live as decent and useful citizens of society and indirectly helps us to make progress in the spiritual sphere, both in this life and in the life to come.⁴⁸

44 Cfr. APTE D. G., *Our Educational Heritage*, p. 46.

45 Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 48—49.

46 Cfr. BANERJEE J. P., *Education in India: (Past, Present, Future)*, Calcutta, Sri Jagadhatri press, 1981, p. 6.

47 RADHAKRISHNAN S., *A Source book...*, pp. 168—169.

48 Cfr. ALTEKAR A. S., *Education in ancient India*, Varanasi, Nand Kishore and Bros., 1957, p. 8.

C. 1. THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

The call of the Eternal had reached the Indian *rishis* or seers. They realized that all men are children of the Eternal, with the removal of darkness before them and with heavenly illumination. Hence, they wanted to illumine the vista of all men with heavenly light. They called upon them all to attain that light of knowledge. Pupils responded and thronged to the preceptors. The cottage of the teacher became a residential school. Thus originated the *guru-kula*⁴⁹ system of education. In this system of education, the school was run on family lines, the guru being the father-teacher and the pupils, his sons. Besides this, the schools were largely located away from the din and bustle of cities in the countryside, in an atmosphere of solitude and serenity conducive to concentration and study. The family atmosphere that reigned in these schools, coupled with the natural surroundings, helped the students to mature in a free atmosphere.⁵⁰

It is to be noted here that we are using the term '*guru-kula*' in a general sense to refer to the system of education that was prevalent in India, approximately between 2000 B.C. and 300 A.D. It is obvious, that during these long years, this system underwent many changes. It is practically impossible and perhaps even superfluous to try to individualize them here.

49 In ancient India, the child left the home of his parents and went to live in the house of his teacher, which was his school. This was a small establishment called *ashram*. It was run by the teacher, who admitted only a limited number of select resident pupils. The system of education here was known as the *guru-kula* (teacher's house) system. According to this system the pupil lived with the teacher as a member of his family, ministered to his needs, obeyed his commands, treated him with divine reverence and was taught the sacred scripture, his religious duties, and the arts and sciences which would be useful to him.

50 Cfr. PANDIT M. P., *Light on the Tantra*, Madras, Ganesh, 1957, pp. 118—119.

2. THE 'GURU' IN HINDU TRADITION

The concept of 'guru'⁵¹ is one of the most important features of Indian culture. The word 'guru' has already become popular in all languages. Originally a Sanskrit term, it indicates any respectable person, a teacher of any subject, a religious leader, or a spiritual guide. In common usage, however, the word has a predominantly spiritual significance in as much as it stands for the preceptor or spiritual guide, the counsellor and the ideal of an aspirant in his spiritual journey. It is in this sense, that some texts interpret guru as indicative of the one who reveals the deep and secret truth or of the one who removes from the aspirant the darkness of ignorance and leads him to spiritual illumination.⁵²

The word 'guru' has been derived in two ways: firstly, it is derived from 'gur' which means 'to raise, to lift up, to hurt, to kill, to make effort, to eat, to go', with the noun-making termination 'u'. According to this derivation, a person is called a guru, because he tortures, kills or eats up his disciple's ignorance and elevates or makes an effort to elevate his character and ultimately leads him to the path of salvation. Secondly, guru is derived from 'gr' meaning 'to sing, to swallow'; accordingly a person is called a guru because he preaches *dharmā* to his disciples, or swallows his ignorance. In course of time, this term was restricted to the brahmins, whose main business was to preserve learning.⁵³

Among the various types of gurus recognized by the Hindu tradition, the most important ones are the *sikṣa-guru* (teaching guru) and the *dikṣa-guru* (initiating guru). No clear-cut distinction can be made between them because their functions overlap. Yet one may observe, that the characteristic duty of the former is instruction. He teaches his pupils the sacred scriptures and the related sciences. The latter, on the other hand, has the specific function of giving initiation

51 Cfr. Manu 2, 149 says that whoever confers on another the benefit of knowledge, whether great or small is the latter's guru.

52 Cfr. PANDIT M. P., *Light on the Tantra*, pp. 118—119.

53 Cfr. McMULLEN C. O. (Ed.), *The concept of guru in Indian religions*, Delhi, I.S.P.C.K., 1982, pp. 3—4.

to worthy candidates in the spiritual discipline and awakening their inner powers and quickening their spiritual growth and final realization.⁵⁴

Originally, the institution of guru was connected with the vedic studies. The members of the higher castes had the sacred duty of learning the vedas under a competent guru, who might have been the father of the pupil or another person who knew the scriptures.

“An Aryan must study the whole veda together with the *Rahasyas* (*Upanishads*) performing at the same time various kinds of austerities and the vows prescribed by the rules (of the vedas).”⁵⁵

The vedas had to be learnt perfectly well and the study of it considered a vow, as it is clearly mentioned in the book of laws :

“The vow of studying the three vedas under a teacher must be kept for thirty-six years, or for half that time, or for a quarter, or until the student has perfectly learnt them.”⁵⁶

Scholars are of the opinion that in the beginning, the father alone may have taught his son, as it is quite clear from scriptures :

“The *brahmana*, who performs in accordance with the rules (of the veda) the rites, the *garbhadhana* (conception-rite), and so forth, and gives food to the child, is called the guru (the venerable one).”⁵⁷

In the course of time, the sacred studies became rigidly institutionalized. One was eligible for the study of the vedas only after having received the sacrament (*samskara*) of initiation (*upanayana*). The essential parts of the elaborate rite of initiation are the formal reception of the aspirant by the guru, the investiture of the sacred cord made of three strands, and the imparting of the sacred formula

54 Cfr. AVALON A. Pseud. of Woodroffe J. (Ed.), *Principles of Tantra*, Madras, Ganesh, 1952, pp. 536—537.

55 Manu 2, 165.

56 Manu 3, 1.

57 Manu 2, 142.

(the *gayatri mantra*). Thence forward he proudly wears the sacred thread as an external mark of a high caste Hindu.⁵⁸

3. THE CREDENTIALS OF AN IDEAL GURU

Though there seemed to be no dearth of gurus in India, it was far from easy to find gurus who would satisfy the accepted description of an authentic one. The scriptures themselves made no secret of the fact, that many were the gurus who robbed pupils of their wealth, but rare were the gurus who conferred spiritual illumination on them.⁵⁹

The tradition demanded a very high level of spiritual perfection from a guru, that he was considered the very image of God Himself:

“The teacher is the image of *Brahman*, the father, the image *Prajapati* (the Lord of created beings), the mother, the image of the earth, and (an elder) full brother, the image of oneself.”⁶⁰

The guru was a representative of a particular sect or school and as such he did not claim to be teaching anything in his own name, but transmitting faithfully the original doctrine handed down from time immemorial by the very first guru of the school in question through an uninterrupted succession of gurus and pupils. The humble acknowledgement of his indebtedness to earlier gurus was regarded as a necessary credential of an authentic guru. The vedantic tradition specified the other requisites and qualifications of a true guru under the following heads: he should be *srotriya* (versed in scriptures), *avṛjina* (sinless), *akamahata* (desireless), and *Brahmanista* (established in *Brahman*).⁶¹

The scriptures were accepted as the deposit of eternal, infallible truth; they were the ultimate authority regarding the transcendental Truth, which the guru experienced in his spiritual enlightenment and

58 Cfr. Manu 2, 44.

59 Cfr. PANDIT M. P., *Light on the Tantra*, pp. 95—96.

60 Manu 2, 226.

61 Cfr. SBE 15, pp. 32—33.

in his turn transmitted to his disciples. The knowledge required of the guru was not that of a critic or a scholar. He need not necessarily be an intellectual, who can analytically examine and critically evaluate the purport of the scriptural passages. He had to be the one who had really digested the true spirit and message of the scriptures. The scholars may speak above the heads of the people, but to speak to their hearts—and that was the job of the guru—one should possess the spirit.⁶²

The guru had to be a master of himself: overcome sin and evil, selfish desires and cravings. He had to be free from pride and vanity, hypocrisy and jealousy, falsehood and worldly passions and egoism in all its overt and covert manifestations. An imperfect and evil person could not be an efficient guide and example to those who sought after spiritual enlightenment. Only a perfect man could be a master of himself, dispassionate and tranquil in all circumstances of life. The Hindu sages strongly underlined equanimity as one of the most important characteristics of a perfect guru. Equanimity was to be manifested in daily life by one's remaining unaffected by the pairs of opposites, such as joy and sorrow, friend and foe, heat and cold, success and failure. Equanimity was considered to be the touchstone of real detachment. But detachment did not mean to renounce many things and be bound to a little, rather to maintain one's peace and tranquility, when one loses all that one has, be it little or much. The guru had to be detached above all from his own petty self. As a consequence, he could dedicate himself completely, and without any self-interest for the welfare of others.⁶³

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the qualifications of an ideal guru are clearly expressed :

“Those who set their hearts on me and ever in love worship me, and who have unshakable faith...those who worship the Imperishable, the Infinite, the Transcendent, Unmanifested; the Beyond all thought, the Immutable, Never Changing,

62 Cfr. ACHARUPARAMBIL D., “The Guru in Hindu Tradition” in *Ephemerides Carmeliticae Teresianum*, 31 (1980) 1 p. 8

63 Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 9—10.

the Ever One; who have all the powers of their soul in harmony, and the same loving mind for all; who find joy in the good of all beings—they reach in truth my very self... The man who has a good will for all, who is friendly and has compassion; who has no thought of 'I' or 'mine', whose peace is the same in pleasures and sorrows, and who is forgiving; ...he whose peace is not shaken by others, and before whom other people find peace, beyond excitement and anger and fear—he is dear to me. He who is free from vain expectation, who is pure, who is wise and knows what to do, who in inner peace watches both sides, who shakes not, who works for God and not for himself—this man loves me, and he is dear to me. He who feels neither excitement nor repulsion, who complains not and lusts not for things; who is beyond good and evil, and who has love—he is dear to me. The man whose love is the same for his enemies or his friends, whose soul is the same in honour or disgrace, who is beyond heat or cold or pleasure or pain, who is free from the chains of attachments; who is balanced in blame and in praise, whose soul is silent, who is happy with whatever he has, whose home is not in this world, and who has love—this man is dear to me. But even dearer to me are those who have faith and love, and who have met me as their End Supreme : those who hear my words of truth, and who come to the waters of Everlasting Life."⁶⁴

We have an accurate description of a true guru clearly laid out in the *Vedanta Sara* :

"A true guru is a man who is in the habit of practising all the virtues; who with the sword of wisdom has lopped off all the branches and torn out all the roots of sin, and who has dispersed, with the light of reason, the thick shadows in which sin is shrouded; who, though seated on a mountain of sins, yet confronts their attacks with a heart as hard as

diamond; who behaves with dignity and independence; who has the feeling of a father for all his disciples; who makes no difference in his conduct between his friends and his enemies, but shows equal kindness to both; who looks on gold and precious stones with the same indifference as on pieces of iron or potsherd, and values the one as highly as the other; whose chief care is to enlighten the ignorance in which the rest of mankind is plunged...He should be deeply learned, and know the vedanta perfectly. He is a man who has made pilgrimages to all the sacred places...He must have performed his ablutions in all the sacred rivers...He must be perfectly acquainted with the four vedas...This is the character of a true guru; these are the qualities which he ought to possess, that he may be in a position to show others the path of virtue, and help them out of the slough of vice.”⁶⁵

A true guru needs no propaganda. He makes no show of super-human powers and miracles. Even when miracles are wrought by him, he would rather attribute them to the faith of the people who were benefitted by the extraordinary forces that always surround a God realized person. An instinctive preference for being hidden is the hallmark of a true guru. People hear about him when they are ready to hear, and he draws those seekers to himself when they are prepared to benefit from his personal help. As Sri Ramakrishna, the vedantic guru puts it :

“Bees come of themselves to the full-blown flower, when the breeze wafts its fragrance all around. Ants come of themselves to the spot, where sweets are placed. No one need invite the bee or the ant. So when a man becomes pure and perfect, the sweet influence of his character spreads everywhere, and all who seek the Truth are naturally drawn towards him.”⁶⁶

65 DUBOIS J. A., *Hindu manners, customs and ceremonies*, Oxford, at Clarendon Press, 1928, pp. 123—125.

66 *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, Mylapore, (s.e.), 1960, p 74.

4. THE HINDU 'SISHYA' (PUPIL)

The study of the vedas was the first duty of every twice-born person (*dvijati*). It was laid down by the sacred law-giver that the whole veda together with the secret doctrines (*Upanishads*) was to be learnt by every twice-born.

"Let a *brahmana* who desires to perform austerities, constantly repeat the veda; for the study of the veda is declared to be in this world the highest austerity for a *brahmana*... A twice-born man who, not having studied the veda, applies himself to other (and worldly study), soon falls, even while living, to the condition of a *sudra* and his descendants (after him)."⁶⁷

The Hindu scriptures and tradition very severely warn the guru against initiation to unworthy pupils. The guru should first of all ascertain the quality and the preparation of the pupils, because only the duly qualified pupils will be in a position to grasp the true meaning and spirit of their instruction and follow it up perseveringly. It is difficult and complicated to launch out for a precise definition of '*sishya*'.⁶⁸

The *Kularnava Tantra* declares that if a guru initiates one who is unworthy through desire for wealth or through fear, greed or the like, then the curse of the Divinity will fall on the guru and the

67 Manu 2, 166—168.

68 Prof. Jain, a disciple of Swami Muktananda, says: "The definition of *sishya* is very wide. A person who comes here once every two years may claim to be a *sishya* of Baba (the Guru), and the same term may be applied to someone who stays with him twenty-four hours a day and is going to be with him for the rest of his life. So, it is really wide: but a true *sishya* is one who has become one with his guru or who is trying to become one with him. That is, who does not think what he does not want him to feel. He does not will anything that he does not want him to will." BRENT P., *Godmen of India*, (s.l.), Penguin Books, 1973, p. 271.

In our work the terms '*sishya*' and '*pupil*' are used indiscreetly.

initiation given by him will be fruitless.⁶⁹ The *Chandogya Upanishad* gives the following injunction :

“Varily a father may teach this (doctrine of) *Brahman* to his eldest son or to a worthy pupil, but to no one else at all. Even if one should offer him this earth that is encompassed by water and filled with treasure, he should say : ‘This, truly, is more than that! This, truly, is more than that!’”⁷⁰

The competent sishya must be filled with a yearning for freedom from the encumbrances of worldly life, and earnest longing for release from the bondage of his existence as an individual caught in the vortex of ignorance. Here we give the defects that disqualify a person from being a pupil as enunciated in the *Kularnava Tantra*:

“A guru should not take as his sishya one who is possessed of any of the following or similar faults: He should not accept one who is born in a family cursed by a *brahman* or almost extinct; without any good quality on the maternal side; one who has been already initiated by a good guru; an unbeliever; imbecile; with an overweening idea of his own learning; having less or more than the usual number of or deformed limbs; paralyzed, blind, deaf, dirty, diseased, excommunicated, foul-mouthed; careless about the rules of dress; full of faults; with imperfect limbs, gait and speech; ever inactive, under the influence of sleep or drowsiness; lazy and addicted to gambling and similar vices; whose appearance does not betoken devotion; mean-minded, wanting in loyalty, and given to exaggerated, improper and obscene talks, wanting in feeling for others; with no will of his own; ready to receive initiation and do other acts, not out of any particular desire of his own, but at the instigation of others; impure as regards wealth and wife; given to performance of acts prohibited by the scriptures, and omitting to do those which they enjoin;...of ill repute; braggart or liar; cruel;

69 Cfr. AVALON A. (Ed.), *Principles of Tantra*, p. 580.

70 SBE 1, p. 44.

indecent in speech; ignorant; unbeliever; a bore; one who slanders people behind their back and speaks well of them before their face; one pretending to a knowledge of *Brahman* which he does not possess; plagiarist; or self-praiser, envious, given to evil-doing or peevish."⁷¹

According to the *Gandharva Tantra*, a worthy sishya should possess the following good qualities :

"...very sweet of tongue; stainless in body and speech; wearing white cloth; pure in habits; incapable of speaking ill of others, or showing disrespect to gods; never covetous of others' food, wives, and land; unwilling to give pain to others; kind to all creatures; sharp witted; a master of his sense; a believer devoted to guru; pure; calm-minded; without avarice; constant in his friendships; assiduous to obey guru's words; ever firm in devotion to guru, *mantra* and *devata*."⁷²

Sacred knowledge was not to be divulged to unworthy pupils for any reason whatsoever. Innumerable are the texts that warn the teacher regarding the care he should take in guarding the knowledge from being sown in barren soil :

"Even in times of distress a teacher of the veda should rather die with his knowledge than sow it in barren soil. Sacred Learning approached a *brahman* and said to him: 'I am thy treasure, preserve me, deliver me not to a scorner; so preserved I shall become supremely strong. But deliver me, as to the keeper of thy treasure, to a *brahman* whom thou shalt know to be pure, of subdued senses, chaste and attentive.'⁷³

It becomes evident that, if it was difficult to get a competent guru, it was still more difficult to find a qualified sishya. As a Hindu scholar would put it:

71 AVALON A. (Ed.), *Principles of Tantra*, pp. 584—585.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 585.

73 Manu 2, 113—115.

“Even today it is not impossible to find ten good gurus out of every hundred. But does one find even a single sishya out of a thousand, who is competent to be a sishya according to the scriptures?”⁷⁴

It was believed, that if a person was a sincere seeker of spiritual enlightenment, God Himself would send a proper guru to him. Just as competent gurus will never be wanting in worthy pupils, so also worthy pupils will never be wanting to competent gurus. In other words, a pupil gets the guru he deserves. In any case, the guru has the grave responsibility of duly preparing the pupil by trials and training before giving him the initiation (*upanayana*). It is only with the initiation rite that the guru-sishya (teacher-pupil) relationship is formally established.⁷⁵

D. THE EXPRESSIONS OF GURU-SISHYA RELATIONSHIP

1. Religion

The Hindu tradition is never tired of insisting that the true guru, the guru *par excellence*, is God and God alone. He is the inner Guru of every human being. He is guiding progressively but invisibly each individual man to his glorious destiny by the inpouring of His presence and grace. But unfortunately, not all are capable of following the unseen Guru within. Most men need an external support, a living influence, a tangible example, a present instruction. This is provided by the human guru, in whose person, God mercifully conceals His Godhead in order to help the weakness of the spiritual seeker.⁷⁶

We have already seen that the formal studentship began for the first three castes with the observation of certain rites and rituals grouped under the name of the *upanayana* ceremony, during which among other things, they prayed for the protection and help of the gods. Part of the initiation formula reads thus :

74 AVALON A., (Ed.), *Principles of Tantra*, pp. 563—564.

75 Cfr. BRENT P., *Godmen of India*, p. 275.

76 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 276.

"By the impulse of the god *Savitar*, with the arms of the two Asvins, with Pushan's hands I initiate thee, N.N."⁷⁷

Polytheism was very much prevalent, as we have seen earlier, and is expressed by the words of the guru entrusting the sishya to the various gods. The formal relationship that was established between the guru and sishya was very much rooted in God, as it is clear from the words of the guru :

"*Agni*, I give this student in charge to Thee. Sun, I give this student in charge to Thee. *Visve Devas*, I give this student in charge to Thee, for the sake of long life, of blessed offspring and strength, of increase of wealth, of mastership of all vedas, of renown, of bliss."⁷⁸

According to the *Mahabharata*, in a full-fledged hermitage-school (*ashram*), there was a common hall for prayer as well as for the worship of god *Agni* called the *Agni-sthana*. The pupil was expected to pray twice daily, early in the morning and in the evening :

"...he shall daily worship during both twilights with a concentrated mind in a pure place, muttering the prescribed text according to the rule."⁷⁹

The concepts of sin and forgiveness were present in the ancient Hindu society. Purity of life was held in high esteem. Every morning and evening the pupils sought forgiveness by means of prayer. Prayer was considered an efficacious means by which forgiveness of sins could be obtained, as it is evident from the sacred laws :

"He who stands during the morning twilight muttering (the *Savitri*), removes the guilt contracted during the previous night; but he who recites it, seated, in the evening, destroys the sin he committed during the day."⁸⁰

77 SBE 29, p. 62.

78 SBE 29, p. 64.

79 Manu 2, 222.

80 Manu 2, 102.

Every Aryan pupil had to observe all the various rites and rituals enjoined on him as a member of the high caste. Any failure on his part would make him an outcaste.

“But he who does not worship standing in the morning, nor sitting in the evening, shall be excluded, just like a *sudra*, from all the duties and rites of an Aryan.”⁸¹

We have seen that the guru-sishya relationship was very much founded on God. The ancient Hindus had recourse to God in all the more important moments of their lives. Although the guru was held in high esteem, great dependence and veneration was manifested to God by both the guru and the sishya. Each day, before the class began, the guru and the sishya prayed together thus :

“Almighty! do protect us both, together; give food for both of us at the same time; may both of us apply our energies towards acquisition of knowledge in harmony and co-operation; may our studies be illustrious and brilliant; may there never be any feeling of estrangement amongst us two! Peace! Peace! Peace!”⁸²

2. (a) The Educative Environment

In ancient India, the student, after his initiation, stayed in the house of the guru (*guru-kula*) throughout the entire period of his education (*brahmacharya*).

“Let an Aryan who has been initiated, (daily) offer fuel in the sacred fire, beg food, sleep on the ground and do what is beneficial for his teacher, until (he performs the ceremony of) *Samavartana* (on returning home).”⁸³

The pupil’s membership of the family of his guru constituted a constant stimulus to the ideals to which he is dedicated, while it also operated as a protective sheath, shutting out unwholesome

81 Manu 2, 103.

82 *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, put into English by Shree Purohit Swami and W. B. Yeats, London, Faber and Faber, 1981, p. 69.

83 Manu 2, 108.

influences. The student felt that he was not lost in a crowd. He felt one of a family where he has a distinct place.⁸⁴

Apart from the special educative value of the teacher's home as the school, there was the factor of its environment or setting as an integral part of the scheme. The school was set in sylvan surroundings. The pupil's first duty was to walk to the woods, cut and collect fuel and fetch it home for tending the sacred fire for worship (*agnihotra*). The ceremony of *agnihotra* brought home to the pupil the reality of religion in the form of sacred sacrifice.⁸⁵

The begging of daily food had been enjoined on the student as a religious duty. This injunction occurred in the sacred texts from the vedic age downwards :

"Let him fetch a pot full of water, flowers, cowdung, earth and *kusa* grass, as much as may be required by his teacher and daily go to beg food."⁸⁶

The rule of begging was laid down for the student in order to teach him humility and to make him realize, that it was due to the sympathy and help of the society that he was learning the heritage of the race. This rule further removed the distinction between the rich and the poor and brought education within the reach of the poorest. It was also useful in reminding the society of its duty and responsibility about the education of the rising generation.

"He who performs the vow (*of studentship*) shall constantly subsist on alms, (but) not eat the food of one person only; the subsistence of a student on begging food is declared to be equal (in merit) to fasting."⁸⁷

Sacrifice, study of the vedas and alms-begging was the first duty of the student. Austerity was the second. A student dwelling in the house of a teacher, settling himself permanently in the house of a teacher, was the third.

84 Cfr. MOOKERJI R. K.. *Ancient Indian Education*, p. xxviii.

85 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

86 Manu 2, 182.

87 Manu 2, 188.

(b) The Educative Presence of the Guru

In the *guru-kula* (house of the teacher), the pupil was expected to do personal service to the guru like a son. He was to give the guru water and tooth-stick, carry his seat and supply him bath water. If necessary, he was to cleanse his utensils and wash his clothes. Further, he had to do all sundry work in his guru's house, like cleansing the rooms, bringing fuel and tending cattle. It was held that no progress in knowledge was possible without service in the teacher's house. The guru, however, was prohibited from assigning any work that was likely to interfere with the studies of the pupil. The presence and guidance of the guru helped the pupil to acquire an all-round education to life.⁸⁸

Once the initiation ceremony was over, the pupil was not left to learn merely by trial and error. He was first and foremost instructed well in all the duties of his state of life by the guru himself. It was a duty on the part of the guru to instruct the pupil in all the duties and to explain the various rules and regulations.

"The student who has been initiated must be instructed in performance of the vows (acts of discipline, *vrata*), and gradually learn the veda, observing the prescribed rules."⁸⁹

Although the pupil lived in the house of the guru, meticulous were the laws that were prescribed for the students in various fields, especially the norms of showing respect to the guru.

"Let him not answer or converse with his teacher, reclining on a bed, nor sitting, nor eating, nor standing, nor with an averted face. Let him do that, standing up, if his teacher is seated, advancing towards him when he stands, going to meet him if he advances, and running after him when he runs; going round to face the teacher, if his face is averted, approaching him if he stands at a distance, but bending towards him if he lies on a bed, and if he stands in a lower place. When his teacher is nigh, let his bed or seat be low;

88 Cfr. ALTEKAR A. S., *Education in ancient India*, p. 60.

89 Manu 2, 173.

but within sight of his teacher he shall not sit carelessly at ease...Let him not sit with his teacher to the leeward or to the windward of him; nor let him say anything which his teacher cannot hear. He may sit with his teacher in a carriage drawn by oxen, horses, or camels, on a terrace, on a bed of grass or leaves, on a mat, on a rock, on a wooden bench, or in a boat."⁹⁰

Very detailed rules were laid down about *pratyutthana* (rising from one's seat to receive a person), *abhivadana* (saluting a man), *upasamgrahana* (saluting by clasping the feet of the teacher or another with one's hands), *pratyabhivada* (returning a salutation), and *namaskara* (bowing with the word 'namah').⁹¹

3. THE LOVING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GURU AND SISHYA

The relationship between the teacher and the pupil was of the happiest kind, in spite of all the minute regulations that governed the conduct of the pupil. The pupil looked up to his preceptor as his father. According to the Hindu sages, the guru was the spiritual father of the pupil.

"...among those (three) the birth which is symbolized by the investiture with the girdle of *Munga* grass is his birth for the sake of the veda; they declare, that in that birth the *Savitri* (verse) is his mother and the teacher his father. They call the teacher (the pupil's) father because he gives the veda; for nobody can perform a sacred rite before the investiture with the girdle of *Munga* grass."⁹²

Consequently, the guru was to treat the pupil as a father would treat his child, with love and affection and the student was expected to treat the guru with respect. Speaking of the attitude the guru should have towards the pupil, the *Apastamba Dharmasutra* says :

90 . . . Manu 2, 195—198 and 203—204.

91 KANE P. V., *History of Dharmasastra*..., pp. 335.

92 Manu, 2, 170—171.

“Loving him like his own son, and full of attention, he shall teach him the sacred science, without hiding anything in the whole law. And he shall not use him for his own purpose to the detriment of his studies, except in times of distress.”⁹³

The relationship between the guru and the sishya was direct and not through any institutions, since they both lived in the same family. The student usually went to such a teacher as attracted his attention by his high reputation and scholarship. The teacher selected such pupils as appeared to him sincere, zealous, and well-behaved. Under such circumstances, the relationship between the teacher and the student ought to be naturally very cordial and very intimate. They were united by mutual reverence, confidence and communion of life.⁹⁴

The guru was genue in speech and looked after the welfare of his pupil. The exalted position of the guru did not prevent him from being loved. The Hindu sages mentioned explicitly the need of being loved rather than feared. The laws of Manu are replete with verses that exhort the guru to be sweet and gentle in speech :

“Created beings must be instructed in what concerns their welfare without giving them pain, and sweet and gentle speech must be used by a teacher who desires to abide by the sacred law...Let him not, even though in pain, speak words cutting others to the quick; let him not injure others in thought or deed; let him not utter speeches which make others afraid of him, since that will prevent him from gaining heaven.”⁹⁵

According to the Hindu scriptures, the guru deserved more respect than even one's own parents because whereas the parents were the cause of a person's natural birth, the guru was the cause of one's spiritual rebirth, without which the natural birth would mean only an unending chain of trials and sufferings.⁹⁶ By censuring

93 SBE 2, pp. 31—32.

94 Cfr. ALTEKAR A. S., *Education in ancient India*, pp. 61—62.

95 Manu 2, 159 and 161.

96 Cfr. Manu 2, 146.

his teacher, the pupil would become an ass in his next birth, and if one defamed his teacher falsely, one would become a dog. The pupil was expected to do only things that would promote the good of the teacher.⁹⁷

There existed a perfect harmony of hearts, which promoted loving relationship between the guru and the sishya. Such a harmony was wrought by God (*Brihaspati*), who was the guiding light both for the guru and the sishya. But one gets the impression that the figure of the pupil was somewhat eclipsed by the guru, who held a unique and very privileged position in society.

At this juncture, it would be apt to quote one passage from the initiation ceremony that describes the relationship that should exist between the teacher and the pupil. During the ceremony, the teacher would gradually move his right hand over the pupil's right shoulder and touch the place of his heart saying :

"Thy heart shall dwell in my heart; my mind thou shalt follow with thy mind; In my word thou shalt rejoice with all thy heart; may *Brihaspati* join thee to me! To me alone thou shalt adhere. In me thy thoughts shall dwell. Upon me thy veneration shall be bent. When I speak, thou shalt be silent."⁹⁸

4. JOY AND CHEERFULNESS

There are allusions to the fact that life in *ashrams* where more than one pupil was taught, was indeed characterized by joy. About the *Saptajan ashram* mentioned in the *Ramayana*, we read that life in that *ashram* was so delightful that those who entered it did not think of returning to the next stage of life, which was that of the householder. The passersby could hear from this ashram flares of trumpets, songs and recitations in sweet voices, which spoke volumes for the serene atmosphere that prevailed in those ashrams.⁹⁹

97 Cfr. Manu 2, 191—206

98 SBE 30, p. 152.

99 Cfr. *Ramayana* as cited by Sarkar S. C., *Educational ideas and institutions in ancient India*. Patna, Janaki Prakashan, 1979, p. 104.

The *ashrams* were not monasteries, where there was only prayer and silence, but 'families', where students learnt in an atmosphere of love and cheerfulness. The *Atharva* veda has also references to the jolly and warm college (*ashram*) unions.¹⁰⁰

Scholars are of the opinion, that though the *Sambhita* can give only the texts as they were spoken, their melodies were taught by oral and also instrumental rendering. Music was known to the *Rig veda*, as also the instruments producing music by means of percussion, wind, and string, such as drum (*Dundubhi*), lute, and lyre or harp (*Vina*) with its seven notes recognized and distinguished, together with the flute (or reed) called *Nadi*. The *Samaveda* throws light on the fact that it was responsible for the development of Indian Music and its School.¹⁰¹

5. THE PUPIL'S GRATITUDE AND CONTINUED RELATIONSHIP

A very striking feature of the ancient Indian educational system was the total absence of any prior agreement on fees paid to the gurus. *Gautama* says that at the end of his studies, the student request the teacher to accept the wealth that he could offer or ask the teacher what should be given. Only after paying or doing what the teacher wants or if the teacher allowed him to go without demanding anything, the student should take the ceremonial bath and return home. The great significance implied was that the *dakshina* (offering) given to the teacher at the end of the study was simply for pleasing or propitiating the teacher and was not a complete equivalent of or compensation for the knowledge imparted.¹⁰²

The laws of *Manu* say that the student need not give anything to the teacher till his *snana* (ceremonial bath), which indicates the completion of his studentship. When he is about to return home,

100 Cfr. *Atharva Veda* as cited by Sarkar S. C., *Educational ideas and institutions in ancient India...*, p. 7.

101 Cfr. MOOKERJI R. K., *Ancient Indian education*, pp. 63—64.

102 Cfr. KANE P. V., *History of Dharmasastra...*, p. 359.

he may offer to his guru some wealth : the gift of a field, gold, a cow, or a horse, even shoes or umbrella, a seat, corn, vegetables and clothes (either singly or together) may engender pleasure to the guru.¹⁰³

The *Upanishads* eulogize *brahmavidya* by declaring it to be more valuable than the gift of the whole earth together with all its wealth. The *Smritis* declare that even if the guru teaches a single letter to the pupil, there is nothing in this world by giving which the pupil can get rid of the debt he owes. The *Mahabharata* says that the teacher's satisfaction with the student's work and conduct is indeed the proper *daksina*.¹⁰⁴

The ancient Hindu teacher was devoted to his work and not to the monetary return. The society also honoured him only so long as he followed the injunctions of the scriptures. It is desirable to remember in this connection that the *brahmins* were not allowed to accumulate wealth, because they were always expected to lead a life of poverty. Penance and self-denial were to be their constant objectives and not ephemeral pleasures pursued by common men.¹⁰⁵

The cordial relationship that existed between the guru and sishya continued also in later life. Even when the student had returned home after his education, he was to call on his teacher frequently, bringing him some presents. The teachers also used to return these visits. The teacher's visit was not without its benefit to the pupil; he used to utilize the occasion to ascertain how far the ex-student was keeping up his reading and studies. The mutual contact between the teacher and the pupil thus continued in later life and was not without mutual benefit.¹⁰⁶

103. Cfr. KANE P. V., *History of Dharmasastra...*, p. 360.

104 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 361.

105 Cfr. APTE D. G., *Our educational Heritage*, p. 118.

106 Cfr. ALTEKAR A. S., *Education in ancient India*, pp. 63—64.

CHAPTER II

The Concept of Don Bosco's 'Amorevolezza' (Loving Kindness)

A. 1. JOHN MELCHIOR BOSCO IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Don Bosco lived out his whole life (1815—88) within the nineteenth century, a span of years covering a period so near to and yet so different from our own. It was the time when the industrial revolution and the phenomenon of urbanization were beginning to make their presence felt in Europe.¹ It was a time when telegraph, railways and steamships were transforming communication between nations and continents, widening social contacts, increasing professions, transforming social roles and leading to changed patterns of behaviour.²

It was a time when nationalism had become a force to be reckoned with; when the historical process leading to the unification of nation states was no longer merely an ideal but a reality rapidly becoming fact. For Italy, it was above all a period in which the old and the new, the liberal and the radical, the conservative and the intransigent, clashed. The peninsula began to experience ever more decisively the impact of laicist secular ideologies on the structures of a society that was officially Catholic and in which the Church held a uniquely privileged position in law, influence and the very

1 Cfr. DE ROSA G., *Storia contemporanea*, Bergamo, Minerva Italica, 1980, pp. 74—86.

2 Cfr. CAIZZU B., *Storia della società Italiana dell'Unità ad oggi*, Vol. 3, Torino, Unione Tip. Ed., 1975, pp. 68—85.

class consciousness of the people themselves. It was the time, before ecumenism, when strong positions were held and defended concerning matters of faith, and religious minorities were not always treated with that equality before the law which today is considered a human right, not the concession of liberal or benign government.³

The spirit of a man is shaped by his life. Don Bosco did not escape from this common law. His life unfolded in nineteenth century Italy, under the pontificates of Pius VII, Leo XII, Pius VIII, Gregory XVI, and above all, of Pius IX and Leo XIII. In what was then the small kingdom of Sardinia and from 1861 on the kingdom of Italy, he witnessed the *Risorgimento* and the unification of the peninsula, achieved at the cost of the Papal monarchy. During his life, the century passed from a certain form of Gallicanism and of Jansenism to the spirit of Vatican I and of the triumphant spirit of Saint Alphonsus of Liguori.⁴

Don Bosco was preoccupied and even worried about problems that were gigantic in addition to those of youth. They were problems prevalent in his own times concerning the Church, regarding freedom, religious and moral propaganda, work, workers' associations, and the like. However, in the words of Pope John XXIII, to an onlooker Don Bosco was always a priest of the boys—a priest dedicated entirely to the religious, moral and civil instruction and formation of youth. He applied himself with gentleness and firmness, as he considered it most vital for the Church and for the society.⁵

We have to see and understand Don Bosco's educative mission and activity in the historical context of his own time. It was a period of renaissance; a time in which not only his own native Piedmont, but the whole of Italy witnessed decisive events and radical transformation in economic, social, political, cultural and religious fields.

3 Cfr. SPINI G., *La posizione delle chiese evangeliche di fronte allo Stato*, Torino, Claudiana, 1970, pp. 92—93.

4 Cfr. CACCIATORE G., *S. Alfonso de Liguori e il Giansenismo*, Firenze, Libreria editrice Fiorentina, 1944, pp. 293—300 and 569—574.

5 Cfr. BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema Preventivo di Don Bosco*, Zürich, Pas-Verlag, 1964, seconda edizione, p. 74.

In the subsequent pages we shall limit ourselves to a bird's eye view of the situation.

2. THE POLITICAL FIELD

The political, social, economic and cultural diversity was notable in Italy that was politically fragmented into eight states. A climate of restoration existed between 1815 and 1848 in Italy and particularly in Piedmont. Liberal and democratic ideals and movement were in vogue. In Piedmont there was the transition to constitutional regime under King Charles Albert. In 1848—49 Piedmont witnessed the first war of independence. The consequent new juridical situation brought in grave problems for the Catholics—freedom of the press and religious propaganda, anticlericalism, conflict of conscience between attachment to the past, adhesion to the present and openness to the future.⁶

Camillo Benso di Cavour was the president of the council of ministers in Piedmont between 1852—61, who was at the head of a coalition formed by different groups. With the progressive fall of the moderate tendencies, there was growing suspicion on the clergy and the Catholics, intolerance and anti-Catholic laws. Such a state of affairs was evident from the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1848, the exile of Mgr. Franzoni, the Archbishop of Turin in 1850, the laws against clerical privileges and ecclesiastical immunity.

A second war of independence was fought in 1859. There was enmass exile and imprisonment of bishops especially after 1860. There was the Cavourian proclamation of Rome as the capital of the new kingdom of Italy in 1861. However, the major part of Italy was brought under a single regime after the second war of independence.⁷

Finally there was the third war of independence in 1866 and the dramatic capture of Rome in 1870. This brought the temporal powers of the Church to an end and consequently a long breach

6 Cfr. BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema Preventivo...*, p. 75.

7 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

between the Church and the Italian State. A growing absence of Catholics both in the parliament and in the government was evident. In short, it may be said that the effort for national unification and the end of the temporal power of the Church constituted the principal events of this period.⁸

3. THE RELIGIOUS FIELD

Don Bosco, educator and pedagogist, occupied a prominent place in the religious history of his time. Indeed, he was considered as one of the most outstanding protagonists. It was a period that witnessed the transition from a marked ecclesiastical presence in the political and cultural ambient to an ever increasing separatism. This was not only imposed by the agnostic and oppressive regime, but also favoured by Catholics, who were incapable of realizing the necessary distinction between the religious and political field. Further, such Catholics were not prepared sufficiently to evaluate the true significance of events, of transformation in reality, of profound motivations; they were not careful in interpreting the aspirations and new requirements of liberty, autonomy and progress, which were also legitimate.

However, the Catholic Church presented clear symptoms of interiorization, of deepening and of development in the cultural and religious plane. Such symptoms could be vividly seen in the missionary revival, establishment of diplomatic relations with very many nations by concordats, intense doctrinal clarifications and the emergence of the primacy of the Pope, the papal infallibility and various other signs which were characteristic of the age.

Naturally, Piedmont was not extraneous to the complex religious problem. In fact, what concerned the whole of Italy took on an eminent and paradigmatic position in Piedmont. It is not within the scope of this work to elaborate the religious situation of the period, which can be profitably read in the various writings of historians and scholars.⁹

8 Cfr. BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema Preventivo...*, p. 75.

9 Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 76—80.

4. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC FIELD

Don Bosco lived and worked in an environment that was predominantly agricultural and rural from the socio-economic point of view. There were signs of partial process of pre-industrialization before 1870, although true industrialization took place only much later. Though the nineteenth century represents a period of industrial revolution for several nations of Europe, in Italy it was an economy that was fundamentally patriarchal and domestic to a great extent.

A reawakening was noticed by experts, of opinions and economic facts particularly after 1850. One of the centres that witnessed this reawakening was Piedmont and in particular the city of Turin. In fact, there was a notable demographic, housing and economic expansion in Turin during the second half of the last century. Such an expansion cannot be explained only by historico-political causes, but also, and perhaps above all, by economic causes—famine in the countryside, expansion of small workshops in the city, the consequent expansion of buildings, improvement of communication and various initiatives of the city and private administration.

Thus can be explained the typical phenomenon of immigration from the hills and countryside. Don Bosco's first apostolate benefited the youngsters who belonged to this category of immigrants, who came in search of work.¹⁰

5. THE CULTURAL, EDUCATIVE AND SCHOLASTIC FIELDS

The nineteenth century presented rich aspects, that interfered with the typical educative activity of Don Bosco. His activity was well placed in a climate of real pedagogic and scholastic explosion on the European, Italian and regional plane. Although, it is not easy to establish precisely the extent of his contacts and dependence, it is certain that Don Bosco did not remain an outsider to the ideas and events of his days.

On the plane of religious educative apostolate, it would be apt to point out the rebirth of the formula of the oratories, especially

10 Cfr. BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema Preventivo...*, pp. 80—81.

in the region of Lombardy. It was a formula suitable to the requirements of the times, to promote catechetical instruction and religious education of youth. Father Peter Braido observes, that it is easy to document analogies and explicit dependence of the regulations of the oratories of Don Bosco on the identical institutions of Milan and those of St. Charles Borromeo.¹¹

The educative ideas of Don Bosco are expressed above all in the documents that begin from 1859 and the subsequent years. However, they reflect greatly his sentiments, ideas and mentality acquired in the family under the maternal care and example of his mother Margaret and the rural environment of his early schooling, and matured during the course of his formation in Chieri, in the seminary, in the ecclesiastical college (*Convitto Ecclesiastico*), the first experience of his oratory days and in the hospice, where he continued to cultivate a family atmosphere.

The educative activity of Don Bosco developed always more and more in an environment touched in some way by the partial process of pre-industrialization and urbanization. However, his system was one that was popular, rural and traditional that geared to promote religiosity and popular morality in a peasant society with the dominant tone of the patriarchal family.¹²

B. A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

1. THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT OF HIS EARLY YEARS

John Melchior Bosco was born on August 16, 1815, in a small hamlet called Becchi, some twenty-five kilometres from Turin, in the region of Piedmont in north Italy.

"The day consecrated to the Assumption of Mary into heaven was the day of my birth, in the year 1815, in Morialdo, a suburb of Castelnuovo D'Asti."¹³

11 Cfr. BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema Preventivo...*, pp. 81—82.

12 Cfr. E 1, 11—20.

13 MO 17.

In reality, according to his baptismal certificate dated 17th, this little event took place on the 16th of August.¹⁴ From another point of view, the exact date matters little. The spirit of the youthful John Bosco would be shaped at first by the quiet world of the family circle and the rural surroundings. He barely knew his father, Francis (1784—1817), and lived with his mother Margaret Occhiena (1788—1856), his revered and sometimes feared paternal grandmother, Margaret Zucca (1752—1826), his step-brother Anthony ((1808—49) born of the first marriage of Francis, and his elder brother Joseph (1813—62).¹⁵

The great confidence and trust in God has been left behind as a legacy of exhortation by the father of the family and carried out by John Bosco's mother. At the age of sixty, he could still recall the moment in which his mother had led him out of the room, where his father had died.

“ ‘Come John, come with me’, my sorrowing mother repeated. ‘If Daddy does not come, I do not want to come’, I replied. ‘Poor son’, resumed my mother, ‘come with me, you no longer have a Dad’. Having said this, she burst into tears, took me by hand and led me away while I was crying because she was crying.”¹⁶

Margaret was an energetic countrywoman, intelligent, hard-working and rich in supernatural spirit. She highly respected God and had an unlimited confidence in Him, Who was a loving and provident Father. Her three sons, one adopted and two of her own, were aware of this fact.¹⁷

14 Cfr. BOSCO G., *Scritti sul sistema preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù*, a cura di P. Braido, Brescia, La scuola editrice, 1965, p. 6. note 1.

15 Data were checked in the parish registers and are found in *Don Bosco nel Mondo*, Giordani I. (et al), Torino, LDC, 1966, 3a edizione, in the table after the text.

16 MO 19.

17 Cfr. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco and the spiritual life*, New York, Don Bosco publications, 1979, p. 39, note 6.

At the age of nine, John Bosco had a dream,¹⁸ that set him on the road to priesthood. This dream became the central reality of his early life, turning him into an apostle to his companions. The explicit command of the mysterious person of the dream would become the core of his educational system in later life :

“Not with blows, but with love and kindness...”¹⁹

John did not remain locked up in the house. He was an alert boy, somewhat talkative. He liked to set traps, raid nests, raise birds; at times he fell from trees rashly climbed, and never missed the shows put on by jugglers at the neighbouring fairs and markets. He liked the company of the neighbouring country boys and he knew how to be their leader. His skill in commanding easily controlled them. All were amazed at his acrobatic feats, because already at the age of eleven he could perform sleight of hand tricks, do death-defying leaps, and walk on his hands. He could walk, jump, and dance on a tight rope, just like a professional acrobat. He had also learnt to read. His stories attracted people of all age and condition, whom he entertained and instructed in the faith.²⁰

A zealous and kind priest, Father Calosso, attracted by the exceptional qualities of John, initiated him into the study of the Latin grammar. This good priest cared for both the intellectual and spiritual growth of the boy. However, this happiness was to be short-lived, for on November 21, 1830, the priest passed away. The impression made on the lad must have been great, if one considers the words of John as he recorded them in his personal memoirs :

“I have always prayed and as long as I have life, everyday, I shall pray for this outstanding benefactor.”²¹

2. HIS EARLY EDUCATION AND SEMINARY FORMATION

After the death of Father Calosso, Margaret decided to overcome the resistance of Anthony towards John's education by dividing

18 Cfr. MO 22—25.

19 MO 23.

20 Cfr. MO 27—29.

21 MO 41.

the inheritance. Anthony took his share of inheritance and left the family. In this way, John was at last able to attend the public school at Castelnuovo (1831), and then the municipal school of Chieri (1831—35).²² The world of the Piedmontese restoration welcomed him in its very strict and religious schools. Let us listen to him as he speaks, not without nostalgia, of the scholastic organization which reigned in the high school of Chieri :

“Here it is good that I record the fact that in those times religion formed a fundamental part of education...On week days, Mass was heard in the morning. At the beginning of the classes the *Actiones* and the *Ave Maria* were recited devoutly. At the end the *Agimus* and an *Ave Maria* were said. On Sundays and feastdays, all the students were gathered in the parish church. As the young people entered, a spiritual book was read, followed first by the singing of the *Little Office of the Blessed Virgin* and then by Mass and an explanation of the Gospel. In the evening there was catechism, vespers and an instruction. Everyone had to go to the Sacraments, and to prevent any negligence of these important duties, the students were obliged to present once a month at Mass a ticket proving they had gone to confession. Anyone who had not fulfilled this duty was not allowed to take his final exams, even though he might have been among the best students.”²³

In this setting, John pursued all his secondary courses. Besides his studies, he was also involved in many other activities because he very much liked to sing, to play musical instruments, to declaim, and to act. He took part in these varied entertainments with great zest. He harmonized his frequent and regular religious practices with entertainments and secular reading. He had founded in his school the *Societa Dell'allegria* (Society of Cheerfulness) among his companions.²⁴

22 Cfr. MO 44—83.

23 MO 54—55.

24 Cfr. MO 52—53.

For a certain period of time, young John Bosco believed that he had a vocation to the Franciscans, and he was received as a postulant into the Order. His counsellors persuaded him, however, not to follow that path. Thus in 1835, he began his life as a diocesan seminarian.²⁵ The rather unfriendly attitude of his professors made him wish for a style of education that would be a little more cordial.²⁶ Cleric John found himself emotionally restrained during his seminary days, which affected even his physical development. His reaction drove him to severe self-discipline and great asceticism.²⁷ The great day came on 5th June 1841, when His Excellency, Archbishop Franzoni, ordained John Bosco a priest of God forever. Then for the first time he was called by the Italian title of Don²⁸ (Father) the title by which the world knows him—Don Bosco.

3. THE BEGINNING OF HIS APOSTOLATE

Father Joseph Cafasso had been for several years John Bosco's guide in both spiritual and temporal matters. On the advice of this spiritual director, the next three years after his ordination were to be spent at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* of Turin. This *Convitto* was meant for the pastoral formation of the junior clergy and the spirit of the institution differed very noticeably from that of the seminary in Chieri.²⁹

25 Cfr. MO 85.

26 Cfr. MO 91.

27 Cfr. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol. I: vita e opere, Roma, LAS, 1979, p. 58. The first two chapters of this important study of Don Stella (pp. 25—84) throw much light on John Bosco's adolescence.

28 After his priestly ordination, John Bosco was always called Don Bosco. The title 'Don' is an abbreviation of the Latin '*Dominus*' meaning 'master'. In Italy, 'Don' is used as a title for priests. It was used also for noble men of high standing in society, particularly in the southern part of Italy and in the island of Sicily.

29 Cfr. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia...*, Vol. I, pp. 85—102.

Father Luigi Guala, the Rector of the *Convitto*, chose the tradition of the Jesuit Fathers in moral and dogmatic theology and the primacy of love over the law. Kindness replaced the rigorism then in vogue.³⁰ Anyone who graduated from the seminary at Chieri did not, however, experience a radical change. In spite of the emphasis given to studies, intellectual pursuits did not lure the students of the *Convitto* more than the students of the seminary. Pious devotions and the practice of apostolic activities had an important part in their lives in order to compensate for studies.³¹ Under the direction of his two masters, Guala and Cafasso, Don Bosco learnt how to be a priest, something for which the seminary of Chieri according to him had not sufficiently prepared him.³²

The training he received at the *Convitto* received its final form from his spiritual guide, Father Joseph Cafasso (1811—60). It will always be difficult to establish exactly the extent of the influence of this future Saint on the formation of Don Bosco.

“If I have done any good, I owe it to this worthy priest, in whose hands I put everyone of my decisions, every course of my studies, every act of my life.”³³

He was for Don Bosco a guide and a model of a true priest and apostle, especially between 1841 and 1860. Underlying the overly emphatic words of his funeral oration in 1860, we can discern the admiration which the young priest John Bosco had for Cafasso's virtues, which he not only admired but taught himself to imitate. Just as Father Guala had set his eyes on Father Cafasso, when he was looking for a collaborator at the *Convitto*, so Don Bosco was attracted to him, drawn by his virtues. His virtues were indeed outstanding as Don Bosco wrote a biography of this saintly priest and in it he exalted,

30 Cfr. MO 122.

31 Cfr. MO 121, 123. See also MB 2, 51—52.

32 Cfr. MO 121.

33 MO 123.

"...his profound humility, his sublime piety, his extraordinary intelligence, his heavenly innocence, and his consummate prudence."³⁴

Don Bosco's urban apostolate began in Turin on December 8, 1841, with the catechism lesson for a poor ignorant boy named Bartholomeo Garelli. However, he had to wait until he graduated from the *Convitto* in order to have a permanent appointment. He gave his best efforts in the service of pre-delinquents. From 1841 certain scenes which he witnessed in the prisons of Turin had shaken him.

"To see a crowd of young men, from the ages of twelve to eighteen, all healthy, strong, intelligent, but to see them there idle, being eaten up by vermin, deprived of material and spiritual food, was a thing that horrified me."³⁵

Don Bosco founded an 'Oratory' for boys; that is, an oratory in the original sense of the word—a place where boys could enjoy pleasant games after they had fulfilled their religious duties.³⁶ At the beginning, the oratory was open only on Sundays and on feastdays. Soon hundreds were attending the oratory. Most of the lads were brick-layers, who came from distant villages. Some were quite destitute, and Don Bosco tried to supply them with clothing and food for some weeks.

Don Bosco's intention was to gather only those who were in the greatest need, especially those who had been in prison.³⁷ Sundays were spent in a Christian manner: attendance at Mass with opportunity for a reception of the Sacraments and religious instruction in the afternoon. The rest of the day was given over to all

34 BOSCO G., *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso*, Torino, G. B. Paravia e comp., 1860, p. 75.

35 MO 123.

36 BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi*, Firenze, tip. delle Murate di Stefano Jouhaud e C., 1864, pp. 70—71.

37 Cfr. MO 130.

sorts of games and activities.³⁸ The early days were encouraging, but it was not long before all sorts of difficulties from all quarters began to arise. Added to these, it was a problem to find a suitable place to gather his boys. Finally on Easter Sunday, 1846, after much wandering, Don Bosco led his boys to the Valdocco quarter of Turin.³⁹

4. THE DEVELOPMENT AND SPREAD OF HIS APOSTOLATE

Don Bosco's work gradually began to develop. On all sides he saw a great number of youngsters of all ages, drifting about the streets and public places, especially on the outskirts of the city, playing, getting into mischief, blaspheming and seriously misbehaving. It was not only their moral situation that was deplorable, but also their way of life, their living quarters, their work were just bad and often the root of the trouble.⁴⁰

While dedicating himself to the more urgent need by giving himself body and soul to the young workers, who could easily have monopolized him completely, Don Bosco did not neglect the other category, namely the students. In fact, this interest in them began before 1847. In the beginnings of the oratory, he had recruited some of the better instructed boys to help him in teaching the others. These 'little teachers' formed by him eventually became the first members of the students' section.⁴¹ In 1847 itself, he received the first boarding student, who went for lessons into the city but lodged with him and the first artisans.⁴²

38 Cfr. MO 129. An account of a day at the oratory is to be found in MO 174—178.

39 Cfr. MO 134.

40 Cfr. MB 3, 410. Don Bosco's difficulties during this critical period is clearly focused towards the end of this chapter.

See also MO 211—222.

41 Cfr. MO 184.

42 Cfr. MB 3, 252.

In accepting students into his home, already packed with artisans, Don Bosco was inspired by a definite aim: to form future priests.⁴³ A great idea was taking shape in his mind, the plan made more definite by his periodical 'dreams': to prepare innumerable collaborators for the morrow—priests and clerics, who would help him in his enterprise. In 1850, he started giving Latin lessons to a boy of thirteen, who was later to become his successor, Michael Rua. Living not far from the oratory, he became a boarder only two years later. Together with the other students of the oratory, Michael too went to the secondary school in the city. As with the artisans, Don Bosco was not happy about this continual coming and going from the city. Therefore, as soon as he had even the makings of his own personnel, Don Bosco decided to start classes at home.⁴⁴

Don Bosco had a profound taste for youth associations and sodalities for the purpose of educating his boys. An outline of the educative work of Don Bosco would be incomplete, if we omitted to show that they really were an 'essential and indispensable factor' among other things.⁴⁵ These associations fulfilled the purpose Don Bosco had in mind: making a valuable contribution to the personal and social education of the boys of the oratory.

"I believe that such associations can be called the key to piety, the safeguard of morality, the support of ecclesiastical and religious vocations."⁴⁶

43 Father Braido says: "... his interest in the care of ecclesiastical vocations is perhaps of the most disregarded aspects of the personality of Don Bosco, and yet one of the most dominating and one of the chief tasks of his family of educators." Braido P., *Il Sistema Preventivo...*, pp. 345—349.

44 Cfr. MB 5, 360—361, 548—549.

45 This is the opinion of Father Braido. It will be useful to consult his chapter in his book: *Il Sistema Preventivo...*, pp. 377—387.

46 MB 12, 26.

5. THE FOUNDING OF RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES

In 1852 Don Bosco had been named director of the three oratories in Turin by Bishop Franzoni. During the following years, he developed very quietly the framework of the project which he was envisioning. In 1855 young Michael Rua (1837—1910), his future successor, made his private vows. But the society was not truly born until four years later.

In 1858 Don Bosco had gone for the first time to Rome for an audience with Pope Pius IX, to whom he had entrusted a letter of recommendation from Bishop Franzoni and an outline of a 'Rule' for his society. The Pope had received him very kindly, and according to Don Bosco's later recollections had advised him: (1) to create a society with simple vows, because without vows the necessary bonds between members and between superiors and subjects would be lacking; (2) not to impose a special habit on the members nor practices or rules, which would distinguish them from people of the world.⁴⁷ These ideas suited Don Bosco very well. He made them his own. They were confirmed by the example of Antonio Rosmini, the founder of the Institute of Charity and by the ideas of Urbano Rattazzi.⁴⁸ In 1880, Don Bosco was able to respond to an official inquiry about the oratory of Valdocco with an adequate description of the society he founded.⁴⁹ This was called the Salesian Society.⁵⁰

47 Cfr. BOSCO G., *Cenno storico sulla congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relativi scharimenti*, Roma, Poliglotta, 1874, pp. 6—7.

48 Don Bosco was in contact with Antonio Rosmini for about ten years. See E 1, 31.

The conversation of Don Bosco with Urbano Rattazzi took place, according to Lemoyne, in 1857—see MB 5, 696—700.

49 Cfr. E 3, 600.

50 The term 'Salesian' is derived from St. Francis of Sales. Don Bosco had a special devotion to this saint, who was a model of meekness and gentleness. He took this saint as the Patron of the religious society he founded. Thus the members of his religious society came to be known as Salesians.

The Salesian Congregation took shape after 1860, thanks to the tenacity of its founder and to the effective support of the Church officials in Rome, especially Pius IX. On 18th December 1859, fourteen Salesians met together with Don Bosco and the minutes of the meeting state :

“All those present were pleased to consider themselves a society or congregation which would have as a goal helping one another grow in holiness and promoting the glory of God and the welfare of souls, especially of those most in need of instruction and education.”⁵¹

The Society was granted a *decretum laudis* (literally, a ‘decree of praise’) in 1864, and a decree of approbation by the Holy See in 1869. In 1872 Don Bosco founded the congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to instruct and educate young girls. Further in 1876, he instituted the association of Salesian Co-operators, which captured, with some changes, the last phase of his plan.

As time went on, the number of Salesians increased, and Don Bosco was able to establish new foundations in various cities of Italy, then in France, and later in Spain. Before his death, several missionary expeditions had been sent to south America. Today, there are Salesian centres in almost every country of the world.

Don Bosco had suffered various ailments towards the end of his life. Shortly before Christmas 1887, his health broke down. On the night of January 27, 1888, the first Salesian Bishop, later Cardinal, John Cagliero, just returned from the mission field of South America, administered to Don Bosco the last rites of the Church. On January 31, 1888, as the bells of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, his own church, rang out the morning *Angelus*,⁵² Don Bosco breathed his last.

51 MB 6, 335—336.

52 ‘*Angelus*’ is a prayer recited by all Catholics every day in the morning, at noon and in the evening to honour the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ. The faithful were reminded of it by the ringing of the church-bell in every parish.

C. THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM

1. THE SALESIAN PRIEST-EDUCATOR

In his work for youth, Don Bosco drew inspiration from all available sources—the books he read, the people he met, the saints he loved. He accepted anything from anybody provided it was for saving souls—“Give me souls, take away the rest.”⁵³ It is no exaggeration to say, that he launched his real youth education programme only after his ordination. The ordination was the fulfilment of a long cherished dream and it gave a definite and decisive colour to his work and to his life itself. In his work for youth, his thought, his practical judgements, and his direction of souls seem conditioned by varying circumstances and people.⁵⁴

Don Bosco was not an educator first, in the sense that he went about collecting ideas and theories from varied sources to create a new system to education. On the contrary, he was a priest every inch of his being and his priesthood was not just an added pedagogical aid. In connection to this, he himself has this to say to Minister Bertino Ricasoli :

“Your Excellency, please do remember that Don Bosco is a priest in the confessional, at the altar, a priest amidst his boys, as a priest in Turin so he is in Florence, a priest in the poor man’s home as in the palaces of the king and his ministers.”⁵⁵

This stands to prove that he was first and foremost a priest and his system of education was an outcome of his priestly zeal for the salvation of souls. Hence it is a pedagogy of leading souls to God by preparing poor and abandoned youth to take their place in society.

53 BM 2, 409—410. St. Francis of Sales’ motto read thus: ‘*Da mihi animas caetera tolle*’. Don Bosco inscribed this motto on the wall of his room.

54 Cfr. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia...*, Vol. I, p. 18.

55 MB 8, 533—534.

In his mission to educate poor and abandoned youth, the need of a Patron to inspire an all-pervading charity prompted him to choose Saint Francis of Sales as the Patron of his society. One of the reasons for this choice is given in the following words of Father Lemoyne :

“Don Bosco considered the spirit of Saint Francis of Sales as best adapted to the times for the education and instruction of youth.”⁵⁶

Don Bosco wanted his Salesians to be permeated with the spirit of gentleness, patience and charity of this great saint. Father John Bonetti testifies about Don Bosco's imitation of these virtues:

“We saw him a model of meekness, peaceable and so self-controlled that he never seemed pressed by problems. We were convinced that he must have exercised continual self-control to such a heroic degree as to succeed in becoming a living copy of Saint Francis of Sales' love for his fellow-men.”⁵⁷

2. DON BOSCO SPEAKS ABOUT HIS SYSTEM

Don Bosco's little booklet on the preventive system is not a scientific or scholarly work on his way of educating. It is rather a succinct statement of some of the educational principles he evolved from his experience with youth. Hence when he used the term 'system', he does not seem to have meant a complete body of knowledge systematically arrived at, but a practical way of dealing with youth based upon certain observations and convictions of his. Don Bosco was in trouble when it came to systematizing his thoughts, constantly going back to retouch and modify it. His masterpiece was to be the unwritten book of life-experience. This living pedagogy, open to the Spirit and marked by a moral magnetism which so captivated young hearts, was that spell-binding magic. Even though we know his experience through anecdotes, stories, short sentences

56 MB 2, 253—254.

57 BM 2, 197.

and incomplete synthesis, it is possible to have an organic view of the principles underlying his system :

“...watching the way he acted and grasping his intuitions, to rebuild a complex and organic vision both of his motivating theoretical principles and of his methodological applications.”⁵⁸

Father Fascie wrote to the effect that we must avoid any over-speculative interpretation or abstruse theory of Don Bosco's style in education. He adds :

“Theoretical pedagogy loses sight of one thing: the towering strength of good example. Christ regenerated the world not merely with his doctrine, but with his example. Don Bosco acted in like manner. The world is grateful for Don Bosco's golden words, written on his preventive system, but still more grateful for the wonderful living example he has left us.”⁵⁹

Although much has been written by scholars of Don Bosco's system of education, it would be worthwhile to keep in mind the statement of Father Braido :

“The basic fount and document of Salesian education will always remain Don Bosco's life: concrete daily experience, without which his writings can never be fully understood.”⁶⁰

There is so much literature regarding the preventive system available to a student, that at times it is puzzling for one with little experience to make a choice. Don Bosco had been requested by his followers to put in writing some of his thoughts on the preventive system as it is evident from his own words :

58 BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema Preventivo...*, pp. 59—63.

59 FASCIE D. B., *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco*, Torino, SEI, 1927, p. 32.

60 BOSCO G., *Scritti sul Sistema...*, the fly-leaf.

"On several occasions I have been asked to express verbally or in writing some thoughts about the so-called preventive system, which is in general use in our houses."⁶¹

At this juncture, it would be apt to quote Don Bosco's own words regarding the concept of this system as he understood it:

"There are two systems which have been in use through all ages in the education of youth: the *preventive* and the *repressive*. The *repressive system* consists in making the law known to the subjects, and afterwards watching to discover the transgressors of these laws, and inflicting, when necessary, the punishment deserved. According to this system, the words and looks of the superior must always be severe and even threatening, and he must avoid all familiarity with his dependents...Quite different from this and I might even say opposed to it, is the preventive system. It consists in making the laws and regulations of an institute known, and then watching carefully so that the pupils may at all times be under the vigilant eye of the Rector or the Assistants, who like loving fathers can converse with them, take the lead in every moment and in a kindly way give advice and correction; in other words, this system places the pupils in the impossibility of committing faults."⁶²

It is evident from Don Bosco's own words that both these two systems have been in use through all ages in the education of youth. Then, one might wonder what could possibly be the original contribution of Don Bosco.

3. DON BOSCO'S ORIGINALITY

Don Bosco saw the human miseries of his time and was spurred on to do something to alleviate them. What most deeply touched his heart was the material no less than the spiritual destitution of promising youth, who came from the most needy and pitiful strata of society. Being a realist, Don Bosco never for a moment hesitated

61 Constitutions p. 257.

62 Constitutions pp. 257—258.

to absorb all that was good in the contemporary educational literature and practice. Before Don Bosco there was Don Cocchi with his oratories;⁶³ Don Pavoni with his trade schools;⁶⁴ the Christian Brothers with their system of education.⁶⁵ Professor Rayneri, a contemporary of Don Bosco, was already aware of the importance of games in education :

"An educator cannot overvalue games in his work. Games open up the hearts and minds of the pupils to their full extent and certain notions and inclinations which no one could otherwise suspect will unknowingly surface during a game, so that in a flash the man to be is revealed in all his goodness or deformity."⁶⁶

Don Bosco was not unfamiliar with the saying of Professor Allievo too :

"Teaching is not only a harmony of two intelligences which understand each other and together open up to the knowledge of truth, but even more it is the sympathy of two hearts which feel for each other and together open up to a love doing good to all."⁶⁷

The above saying only anticipated the centrality given by Don Bosco to the heart—love—in education. The presence of earlier similar educational theoreticians and dedicated educationalists in no way robbed Don Bosco of his uniqueness and originality. The apostolate to which he dedicated himself was not new in the Church, but the method was a novelty in his time. With Don Ceria we must indeed say thus :

"The originality of Don Bosco lies in the unmistakable spirit with which he put these norms into practice."⁶⁸

63 Cfr. BRAIDO P. (Ed.), *Esperienze di Pedagogia Cristiana nella storia* Vol. II: Sec. XVII—XIX, Roma, LAS, 1981, p. 308.

64 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

65 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

66 BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema Preventivo...*, p. 125.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Don Bosco did not invent, but used the existing ideas and practices in new forms and ways. In this he was helped in an extraordinary manner by supernatural illumination. With Cardinal Alimonda, we can say that Don Bosco divinized pedagogy.⁶⁹

4. THE TRINOMIALS OF DON BOSCO'S SYSTEM

The basis of the preventive system that Don Bosco made use of is very evident from his own words :

"This system is based entirely on reason and religion and above all on kindness;..."⁷⁰

The scope of this paper does not permit an elaborate treatment of the trinomials of the preventive system. We shall not discuss at length the whole system, nor exhaust everyone of its particular features. In passing we mention certain concepts regarding reason and religion

(a) Reason in Don Bosco's System

Although Don Bosco made great use of reason in his education of youth, it does not seem that he has given a clear-cut definition of this term. In his own booklet he writes thus :—

"Reason and religion are the means an educator must constantly apply ; he must teach them and himself practise them, if he wishes to be obeyed and to attain his end."⁷¹

In stating that reason is one of the three fundamental principles of his system of education, Don Bosco is not expressing a novelty. Indeed, no proper education is possible without assuming reason in the pupils, and without the educator being reasonable in his method of approach in education. As a practical person, he did not conceive of it in philosophical terms. Moreover, he does not seem to be very precise in his use of the term. He has often used the

69 Cfr. BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema Preventivo...*, p. 22.

70 Constitutions p. 258.

71 Constitutions p. 260.

term '*ragione*' (reason) and '*ragionevolezza*' (reasonableness) meaning the same. We have to infer the meaning from the context. Don Bosco attached great importance to reason, which is evident from his own words :

"Religion and reason are the two mainsprings of my system of education...In this educational method, religion—like a bit in a fiery steed's mouth—thoroughly controls the youngster, while reason—like a bridle—steers his course. The secret of my method of education is summed up in two words : religion and reason—religion, genuine and sincere, to control one's actions; reason to apply moral principles to one's activities."⁷²

(b) Religion in Don Bosco's System

In Don Bosco's days too, the youth was exposed to dangers on all sides. He penetrated the problem and took effective steps to remedy the sad situation. The great means of saving youth and society was religion. Don Bosco spoke of it most convincingly :

"Religion and reason are the two sources of all my educational system. The educator must persuade himself that all, or almost all youth have a natural intelligence to know the good that is done to them personally, and that they are also gifted with an impressionable heart ready to manifest gratitude. When the educator has succeeded in penetrating their souls with the principal mysteries of our holy religion, which tell of the immense love of God for man; when he has arrived at a point where gratitude for the benefits of God begins to vibrate in their hearts; when, in fine, by means of religion they have become persuaded that real

gratitude to God must consist in doing the will of God and in keeping His precepts, then he may rightly believe that a great part of the work of education has been performed. Religion in this system, has the office of the curb put into the mouth of a fiery courser, which dominates and directs him; while reason, on the other hand, takes the place of the bridle and produces the desired effect. My system of which you desire to know the secret is based upon a true and sincere religion, which dominates the actions of youth, and upon reason rightly applying those holy dictates to one's rule of action."⁷³

Don Bosco's pedagogy was permeated by an awareness of the distinction between what was illusory and what was lasting. It followed, that to embrace those things which are illusory was to waste time. If in the final analysis, the prime aim of man was to know, love and serve God, then the central truths of Christianity were the things to be accentuated.⁷⁴ 'To know about the end, and what the means to that end were, was the inherent right of every individual. Don Bosco, throughout his career, spoke to his boys on the end of Man: Sin, Death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven.'⁷⁵ In this sense, Don Bosco's pedagogy has a clear conception of the end-in-view; his educational programme, based on the pupils' co-operation, actuated in an atmosphere of trust, friendliness and confidence, which placed an optimistic construction upon that end—the salvation of one's soul. Father Braido claims that educators like Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Dewey lacked Don Bosco's conception of what constituted the end of education.⁷⁶ Those educators mainly concentrated on the means, whereas Don Bosco's pedagogy was a Christian theological conception of means to that end.⁷⁷

73 LEMOYNE G. B., *A character sketch of Venerable Don Bosco*, New York, Salesian Press, 1927, p. 122.

74 Cfr. MB 8, 114—115.

75 Cfr. MB 6, 385—386.

76 Cfr. BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema preventivo...*, pp. 140—149.

77 Cfr. MB 3, 251.

D. THE CONCEPT OF DON BOSCO'S "AMORE-VOLEZZA"⁷⁸

1. (a) ITS CRUCIAL PLACE

Don Bosco's system of education is based on love and he spoke of his method as the relationship of confidence, love and affectionate collaboration between the pupils and teachers. The little booklet written by Don Bosco on the preventive system speaks thus of the application of this system :

"The practice of this system is wholly based on the words of Saint Paul who says : *Caritas patiens est, benigna est. Omnia suffert, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet.* 'Love is patient and kind...Love bears all things...hopes all things, endures all things.' "⁷⁹

In this sense, Christian Charity, which translates itself on the part of the educator as reason and loving kindness and on the part of the pupils as confidence, friendship and spontaneous collaboration, is the font of the educative system of Don Bosco.

The foundation of this system was love, even chronologically. It went back to his childhood days, to the dream he had, when he was nine years of age. In it the guide told him those prophetic words that remained always imprinted in his mind and shed light on his educational system.

78

The following are the main literary sources for a research on the concept of Don Bosco's '*amorevolezza*' (loving kindness) :

Don Bosco's letters from Becchi of 1845—46; the biographies of his boys Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco, written by Don Bosco himself in 1859, 1861 and 1864 respectively; the confidential records (*Ricordi confidenziali*) sent by Don Bosco to the first Rector of Mirabello, Don Rua, in 1863; the memoirs of the oratory of St. Francis of Sales from 1815 to 1855, written by Don Bosco; other declarations—*Pèlerin, Journal de Rome*; testimonies and studies by Lemoyne and Caviglia.

Since this research is very limited, it was not possible to make use of all these sources to the full.

79

Constitutions p. 260.

"Not by blows, but by gentleness and charity you must win over these boys."⁸⁰

Those words came to his mind during his boyhood days, when he was disappointed because the Pastor never had a kind word for the children. He remembered them as a seminarian, when he saw that the staff was quite unapproachable for the students. He should have recalled these memories in a special manner on December 8, 1841 at the sight of the poor boy, Bartholomeo Garelli, being maltreated by the rough sacristan. The ill-treatment received by Garelli and the desire to mitigate the evil impression that the lad had consequently received became the incidental cause for Don Bosco to begin his work for the poor and neglected youth.

Don Bosco had learnt through experience, that loving kindness tempered with patience, was an attractive trait, whereas rudeness, impatience, annoyance and hypersensitivity were not so.⁸¹ He realized too, that to show equanimity to others, to have them interested in what was being said or done, one had to be friendly, kind and charitable towards people. To speak unkindly about anyone was not only uncharitable, but left a bad impression on persons endowed with at least a minimum of good judgement.⁸²

Don Bosco's educative mission depended to a large extent, on his being able to attract both teachers and pupils to his ways. Hence, he became aware through his early ministry, of the magnetism of friendliness generated by loving kindness. The loving kindness he had shown to the inmates of the Turin gaols, their friendly responses towards him and the co-operation he received from them, convinced him of the necessity of having loving kindness as a basic characteristic of his preventive system.⁸³

In the early days of his educational activity at Valdocco, it was largely his personal love and kindness which drew the boys to him.⁸⁴

80 MO 23.

81 Cfr. MB 1, 371.

82 Cfr. MB 1, 77.

83 Cfr. MB 2, 83.

84 Cfr. MB 2, 351—355.

When he had occasions to be absent from the oratory, he was apprehensive about how the other teachers would treat the boys. Don Bosco's letter to Father Borel clearly manifests his apprehension:

"I am glad that Father Trivero is giving you a hand there; but tell them to take care lest he be too strict with the boys; I know that some of them resent that. Please see to it that the oil of charity renders all things agreeable at the oratory."⁸⁵

(b) THE NATURE OF LOVING KINDNESS

What attracted and attached boys to Don Bosco was his great love for them. They waited for him to take part in their games, and on seeing him, they ran to meet him and escorted him to the playground, where a most lively game was begun. So great was the love that each bore Don Bosco that on one occasion they were ready to fight among themselves because each one thought himself to be Don Bosco's favourite. They all brought out proofs; but according to these proofs each one became convinced that the Saint had borne each and everyone of them a fatherly and tender affection. Canon Ballesio, a past pupil of Don Bosco gives this testimony:

"When a boy appeared before Don Bosco for the first time, Don Bosco's natural goodness inspired him with respect and confidence, but at the same time, his searching eye penetrated into all and divined the talents and the heart of the boy. And it was a general opinion among us that his was a supernatural gift. When he recognized a pupil's capacity he kindly, and as it were, magnetically drew him to himself and kindled the boy's heart with the noble flame burning in his own breast and with the intimacy of a friend, made him share in his noble work."⁸⁶

Don Bosco's words, actions and writings regarding the dealings with the young were impregnated with love. In his booklet on the preventive system, he insisted with the directors and teachers to

85 MB 2, 393.

86 LEMOYNE G. B., *A character sketch...*, p. 114.

speak to the students as affectionate fathers and brothers and to guide them in a kind way. He repeatedly affirmed that reason, religion and loving kindness were essential elements for the proper education of the young to produce salutary results. Even in disciplinary action, which should be rare, the basic attitude of the educator should be one of love.

“Let every Salesian strive to make himself loved, if he wishes to be feared. He will attain this great end if he makes it clear by his words, and still more by his deeds, that his care and solicitude are directed solely towards the spiritual and temporal welfare of his pupils.”⁸⁷

The confidence of the boys must be won by destroying every distance and every barrier that separates the educator from the boys. This is accompanied by certain familiarity. The teachers should mingle freely with the pupils outside the class rooms and enjoy their laughter and jokes.

Don Bosco did not believe in trying to dazzle or impress anyone. Those who were witnesses of his mature years have preserved a record of a smiling man, simple and possessed of an exquisite kindness, which consisted in a habitual effort to cheer up the neighbour, stop him from being sad and keep him in God's grace. His words mesmerized some of his listeners. He lavished on his sons, his Salesians, on his co-operators, both lay and clerical, an infinite number of attentions such as disinterested acts of assistance, small gifts, friendly letters, attentive gestures, words of reassurance, which were expressions of his love, the mere recollection of which would restore peace to their hearts.⁸⁸

87 BOSCO G., 'The Preventive System in the education of the young', as found in Morrison J., *The educational philosophy of St. John Bosco*, Hong Kong, Tang King Po School, 1976, p. 116.

88 Cfr. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio*, Torino, SEI, 1929, pp. 76—77, 224—231.

Father Albera speaks from his own personal experience :

"All those who had the good fortune of living at his side attest to the fact that his looks were always so full of love and affection towards all students."⁸⁹

Even among adults, many thought they were his favourites because he always naturally wished to spread happiness around him, and he found his joy in doing this.⁹⁰ He preferred on principle a type of loving kindness which was visible, palpable and a gentleness in his way of acting, in his appreciation of the virtues of others, in his silence about their defects and in his determined effort to look for their human and supernatural good. He wrote to Cagliero thus :

"Have charity, patience, gentleness, never give humiliating reprimands, never inflict punishments, do good to all you can and evil to none."⁹¹

Don Bosco had a thousand ways of expressing his loving kindness. His insistence on this fundamental attitude is evident from his innumerable letters. In 1874, he wrote to Father Bonetti thus :

"Act in such a way that all those you talk to become your friends."⁹²

Concerned about elevating others to God, Don Bosco willingly put on an attractive kindly appearance which his dream at the age of nine had urged him to assume. He asked the Salesian directors to use gentle expressions when they gave orders and added :

"Experience has shown that this approach becomes very effective in good time."⁹³

Don Bosco's kindness and gentleness—handmaids of love—were authentic virtues in themselves and a key-position was given

89 ALBERA P., *Lettere circolari ai Salesiani*, Torino, SEI, 1922, p. 289.

90 Cfr. MB 18, 490.

91 E 4, 328.

92 E 2, 434.

93 BOSCO G., *Scritti sul Sistema...*, p. 290.

to this in his educative method. It used to happen at times, that when Don Bosco was writing a letter, he would compose some verses as he had done so often in his youth.⁹⁴ One day in 1876, one of his correspondents received these unpretentious lines :

“Try always to be kind
Be always of good cheer
For all good deeds sincere
Alone do bliss endure.”⁹⁵

(c) THE ROLE OF THE HEART

Deep within a man who makes a very rational decision, Don Bosco discovered what he termed the heart. By this term, we should understand from the context, connotative terms such as the will, love, the expression of the whole soul, or even more, to use contemporary language, the expression of the whole person.⁹⁶ He learnt that the special knowledge he should acquire was that of the heart. In time he became such a master of this art that he wrote to the students of Mirabello :

“I want you to give me your heart so that I can offer it every day to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament when I say Mass.”⁹⁷

Such was Don Bosco's ordinary way of speaking. Father Albera gives us a testimony :

“Don Bosco educated others through his loving, charming, winsome and transforming ways. He spread around him an atmosphere of contentment and joyfulness and seemed to

94 Cfr. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco and the...*, 168, note 98.

95 E 3, 119.

96 Cfr. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, Torino, tip. G. B. Paravia e com., 1859, p. 14: Dominic Savio's heart was filled to overflowing with holy joy at the news that his first communion was approaching.

MB 11, 249: The heart of Jesus symbolizes his love.

97 E 1, 332.

banish all troubles, sadness and gloom. All of us knew that as a Father he cared for us. This thought sufficed to make us happy...His every word and action revealed how united he really was with God, the Perfect Love. He drew us to him with the fullness of the supernatural love which burned in his heart : its flames consume us too and joined together with the sparks of love that God had enkindled in our own hearts...The holiness of his life supernaturalized the many natural gifts which he had and it was this holiness that held the secret of his holy magnetism that drew and changed human hearts."⁹⁸

Don Bosco had a master-key to open the hearts of his boys and it was vividly shown in his letter of 1884 :

"As you see familiarity breeds affection and affection breeds confidence. This is what opens hearts; the boys can open up without fear to their teachers, assistants and superiors. They become frank both inside and outside the confessional and in general they show great docility to the commands of those of whose love they are sure...The reason for the present change in the oratory is the lack of confidence in their superiors on the part of many boys. In the past hearts were wide open to the superiors, for the boys loved them and obeyed them promptly. Today however, the superiors are seen precisely as superiors and not at all as fathers, brothers and friends. That's why the boys are afraid of them and don't love them. If you want to see everyone of one heart and one mind again, then, for the love of God, you must break down the fatal barrier of distrust and put a happy spirit of confidence in its place."⁹⁹

Don Bosco was convinced that an open heart eventually gives itself up effectively to God, provided one takes care to orient it to him. On the occasion of the first General Chapter of his Society,

98 STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità Cattolica*, Vol. II. Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità Roma, LAS 1981, p. 470.
 99 Constitutions pp. 268, 273.

he spoke to the directors of the houses regarding the need of impressing upon the hearts of the boys the God-dimension.

“As far as possible, we have to try to impress religion upon the hearts of all and to impress it as deeply as possible.”¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless it is clear, that the heart of the student does not belong to his educator—even if the student responds by wishing to offer it to him. It belongs to God to whom it must always return. Familiarity and loving kindness, a spirit of cordiality and affection were worth more for him, all things considered, than indispensable reason itself. All the spiritual progress of his boys would be imbued with affective love or to use his manner of expression, ‘dictated by the heart’. The excellent results of Don Bosco’s method of education are potent proofs of the motivating force of friendliness and cordiality. In it the language of the heart has an indispensable role, as it is clearly demonstrated in the little treatise on the preventive system:

“...the educator can always speak to them in the language of the heart, not only during the time of their education but even afterwards. The educator, having once succeeded in gaining the heart of his pupils can afterwards exercise a great influence over them, and counsel them, advise and even correct them, whatever position they may occupy in the world later on.”¹⁰¹

2. (a) THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

Don Bosco felt that education was also the work of the environment and that the youth learnt much from the society in which he was brought up. He believed that the young are more naturally actuated in an educative structure which was essentially that of a family. In his pedagogical writings and in his educational experimentation, the family elements of his institutions were clearly shown. The educator attempted to create the rapport of the natural family by a constant living together and a constant caring and loving attitude.

100 MB 13, 284.

101 Constitutions p. 260.

Don Caviglia, speaking about the various biographies which Don Bosco wrote with a view to edify and impress on the minds of his pupils the good spirit he tried to instil in the oratory, observes thus :

“The biographies continue to create in the minds of the young readers of the oratory, that great efficacy of example which helped in the formation of an ambience and an atmosphere which is that of a great family. In fact, it was this tradition or habit of the family which complemented what was taught to the students collectively and individually. The old students would say to the new students : ‘Here we do like this’. This tradition or atmosphere was always one of the essential instruments of Don Bosco’s educational work not only in their exterior formation, but especially in their spiritual formation.”¹⁰²

Don Bosco was a firm believer in the rights and duties of the family to impart education to the children. He also believed that the best and the most needed education was imparted in the family. Hence, an education that aims at getting closer to this ideal and which is at the same time imparted not in the family but in an institution due to some unavoidable causes, must get as close as possible to the ideal. Regarding the preventive system that was practised in the oratory of Valdocco and the spirit of the family that existed there, a correspondent of the Paris newspaper *Pèlerin* reported :

“We have seen this system in action. In Turin the students form a big group in which there are no lines but move around as in a family. Every teacher is surrounded by a group without irritation or conflicts. We have admired the joyous facts of these students and could not help exclaiming : ‘Here is the finger of God.’”¹⁰³

In a true family, sincerity and openness are virtues that should be cultivated. Don Bosco insisted on these when he said :

102 BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema preventivo...*, p. 189.

103 MB 16, 168.

"I open my heart to all of you and if there is something, wrong I will tell you that in private or in public. I have no mysteries. What is in my heart is also on my lips. Do likewise, my sons. If there is something wrong, confide it to me before others come to know of it and we will do whatever we can to remedy the situation."¹⁰⁴

In the famous Rome letter of 1884, great insistence was given to breaking down the fatal barrier of distrust and the way to achieve it is :

"...by a friendly relationship with the boys, especially in recreation. Affection cannot be shown without this friendly relationship, and unless affection is seen, there can be no confidence. He who wants to be loved must first show his own love. Our Lord made himself little with the little ones and bore our infirmities. He is our Master in this matter of friendly approach. A master who is only seen in the master's chair is just a master and nothing more, but if he goes into the recreation with the boys, he becomes their brother... When a person knows he is loved, he will love in return, and when a person is loved he can get anything, especially from boys. This confidence sets up an electric current between boys and superiors."¹⁰⁵

(b) THE SPIRIT OF JOY IN DON BOSCO'S SYSTEM

Don Bosco considered joy and cheerfulness as indispensable factors for the success in education. In his booklet on the preventive system, he wrote the words of Saint Philip Neri :

"Let the boys have full liberty to jump, run and shout as much as they please."¹⁰⁶

If loving kindness was to be an integral part of Don Bosco's system, then its offshoot—cheerfulness or joy was to be its corollary.

104 MB 7, 505—506.

105 Constitutions pp. 273—274.

106 Constitutions p. 261.

It was claimed that the family-spirit atmosphere of the oratories gave expression to cheerfulness, because its characteristics were love, freedom and joy.

One of the expressions of loving kindness was spontaneity coupled with joy and cheerfulness. There is no education without love and Don Bosco expressed this love in a thousand ways. In concrete, we cannot talk of love, if we do not create the atmosphere of a family—heartfelt and loving confidence—in which the dominant note is joy and which excludes all officialism and bureaucracy.¹⁰⁷

The means to cheerfulness, as suggested by Don Bosco, were to be found in free and guided activity, in singing, music and great freedom in games.¹⁰⁸ Other activities he advocated for the promotion of happiness were excursions, acting, reciting and gymnastics. The playground was to be the place where children could give full rein to their surplus energies while exchanging pleasantries with their teachers and where much of the give-and-take of Don Bosco's pedagogy was to occur.

“Recreation or the life in the playground plays a great role in the realization of the educational ideals of Don Bosco. It is one of the professional trinomina—recreation, study, and piety. The discipline of each work, piety and life in the playground has in the Salesian system, an importance of its own and in relation to the other two, so much so that if one is lacking, the other two will suffer. The newness or the originality of Don Bosco in the formulation consists in the fact that he sanctified the joy of living. He considers joy as having a spiritual, pedagogical and methodological value which contributes towards the construction of a proper model for the adolescents. Into all that is contributed by ascetics, pedagogy, morals and psychology in the education of the young, Don Bosco inserted his new note of happiness which is open and is shared by the educator himself. This sharing of the educator in the joy and happiness

107 Cfr. BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema preventivo...*, p. 188.

108 Cfr. MB 11, 222.

of the students helps towards his being a companion and a friend to his students. From his early childhood, Don Bosco realized the value of happiness and this became one of the first factors of his pedagogy."¹⁰⁹

Don Bosco believed that anything that enters the child's soul through joy goes much deeper, adheres more tightly to his intelligence and memory and reaches more surely to the essence of his being and the core of his character. Moreover, the essential goal of the preventive system is reached by winning the confidence of the boy. After the tender affection of the educator which the child must feel, there is nothing which can flood his heart and urge him on to confidence better than an atmosphere of joy in which he lives. He believed in the extreme importance for children of associating pleasure and virtue, effort and joy, from the first moment of a child's formation. He considered that it would be a disaster if after so many years of education, the child would have the impression that work, religion and duty are all beautiful but dull things.

3. (a) THE EDUCATIVE PRESENCE OF DON BOSCO

Don Bosco's love for his boys was manifested in very many ways particularly by his educative presence among them. It was a loving presence that animated them and helped them towards their religious, moral and cultural progress by involving them in the human and Christian realities. His personal interest in the welfare of the youth with whom he worked, made his existence a participation in the lives and activities of the pupils.

"Understand that as far as I am concerned, I am all for you day and night, morning and evening and at whatever time. I have no other intention than that of providing your moral, intellectual, physical and spiritual advantage. But to succeed in this I need your help. If you give it to me, I assure you that the help of the Lord will not be lacking and we will also do great things together."¹¹⁰

109 BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema preventivo...*, p. 199, note 35.

110 BM 7, 503.

Don Bosco recommended the Salesians to be with the students and help them as loving fathers and brothers, who were interested in their welfare both spiritual and material. He gave a shining example by his own life.

"He was always in the midst of the boys. He roamed here and there, approached one new, then another, and without letting them know he asked questions to know their nature and their need. He whispered a confidential word in the ear of this or that boy; he stopped to console or help some sad-looking boy to regain confidence and be cheerful. He was himself always happy and smiling."¹¹¹

Don Bosco makes specific mention of the great need of educative presence in his pedagogical works. In his work on the preventive system he writes thus :

"...It consists in making the laws and the regulations of an institute known and then watching carefully so that the pupils may at all times be under the vigilant eye of the Rector and the Assistants, who like loving fathers can converse with them, can give advice and corrections in a charitable manner; in other words, this system removes from the pupils all possibility of committing faults."¹¹²

The picture of Don Bosco among his boys, surrounded by smiling and happy faces of varying ages and descriptions is very charming and vivid. Whenever he was unimpeded by other pressing duties, Don Bosco would be among his boys. His solicitude was so great that Father Lemoyne remarks about his presence among his boys even when he had his own clerics to assist them.

"...nothing escaped his attentive observation. He knew fully well the disorders that could result because of so many youths so differing in age and condition. He did not stop assisting even when he had his clerics...wanting to show through

111 BM 3, 119.

112 Constitutions p. 258.

example the place of assistance in his method so as not to leave his youth alone."¹¹³

A question that normally arises in the mind of a reader of Don Bosco's method, is whether too much assistance could destroy liberty and whether it is a part of repressive or preventive system. The supervision, taken in itself, could be repressive or preventive. As Father Braido remarks :

"What makes it a part of the preventive system is the attitude of the educator and the acceptance of the educator's presence by the students."¹¹⁴

In education, it is safe to presume that whatever is offered with love by the educator and accepted by the pupils prevents the possibility of its becoming oppressive or harmful. The three principles of *reason, religion and loving kindness enter* into supervision to make it a loving offer by the educator and a free and ready acceptance by the pupil. In Don Bosco's concept, assistance is the kind and paternal care that a confrere takes of those entrusted to him, to keep them from sin and to lead them to virtue. Father Augustine Auffray, interpreting the mind of Don Bosco says thus :

"This system called for that type of discipline necessary to keep a school as orderly as befits an educational institute, while it closes an eye to all unnecessary trifles. The assistance have to be assiduous, not burdensome; they must not be like the stone-wall that does not give the young plant room to grow, but like the gardener, who takes care that it gets plenty of air and light as well as the right kind of soil."¹¹⁵

Don Bosco's preventive system of education and his pedagogical methods had begun to attract the attention of Protestant Churches and foreign departments of education. Father Ceria mentioned in his biographical works of Don Bosco, that certain Protestant groups in Nice were interested in his methods and educational ideas.¹¹⁶

113 MB 3, 119.

114 BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema preventivo...*, p. 208.

115 AUFFRAY A., *A Saint's Pedagogy*, New Jersey, Newton, 1959, p. 2.

116 Cfr. MB 12, 118.

(b) THE PERSONAL RAPPORT WITH THE PUPILS

Don Bosco, aware of the dangers of mass education, insisted on a person-to-person relationship between the pupils and their teachers. This rapport was characterized by a continuing personal communion. Its effectiveness consisted in the dialogic relationship between teacher and taught, both personalized and individualized, carried into every facet of the preventive system, and underlining pedagogical policy in relation to: correction, provision for the felt needs of the young, giving a sense of belonging and security to the student, promoting a sense of confidence between educator and educand as among the students themselves. The '*Magna Charta*' of the Salesian Superior shows us the practical working of Don Bosco's system and personal rapport and the great pains he took in training his first Rector.¹¹⁷

Don Bosco established this rapport by using means centred on Christian charity, and which were eminently effective in winning confidence. First, he made himself always available. He took a keen interest in the studies of his boys, their sports, their hobbies, dramatics, debates and Sodalties. Don Bosco exclaimed :

"The young must not only be loved, they must be made to feel that they are loved."¹¹⁸

Second, the educator gained the confidence and respect of the pupil through love, not fear. This was achieved through warm and expansive kindness, persevering and never-ending patience by avoiding harshness and sarcasm which hurt the young and weaken their self-respect. Paradoxically too, Don Bosco had written :

"An educator should seek to win the love of his pupils if he wishes to inspire fear in them."¹¹⁹

Third, a friendly kind approach was used in counselling or correcting. The pupil realizes that a friend is at hand. His heart will open and unfold every anxiety and need. Don Bosco had advised

117 Cfr. BOSCO G., *Scritti su Sistema...*, p. 282, note 1.

118 MB 17, 110.

119 Constitutions p. 264.

his Salesians that on every occasion advice had to be given or a suggestion made, that was to be done in such a way that the student felt happier for it.¹²⁰

Fourth, a boy's confidence was to be won by overcoming generation gaps or age barriers. This is accomplished by a certain familiarity. Outside the classroom, there is free mingling with the pupils, enjoying their laughter and jokes. Such occasions give the students an opportunity "to see us not as teachers but as interested friends". Don Bosco explained further that once the confidence of the pupil is won, he is won over for the rest of his life :

"...having once succeeded in gaining the confidence of his pupil, he can subsequently exercise a great influence over them and counsel them, advise and even correct them, whatever position they may occupy in the world later on."¹²¹

Lastly, and encompassing all the methods or suggestions offered, it was through love in the Christian sense, in a charitable disposition towards his pupils, that the gap between educator and pupil would be bridged. When Archbishop Richard Pittini was asked to write a forward to Forbes' work on Don Bosco, he wrote thus :

"He did not talk much: he acted. He did not write long and elaborate educational treatises : his example is the best one. When asked about the secret of his immense success with youngsters, he simply answered : 'Love...'.¹²²

4. THE TRADITIONAL FEAST OF GRATITUDE

A whole chapter could be devoted to the filial devotion and enthusiasm that preceded the traditional feast of gratitude which was the feast of the family. This feast was repeated year after year with great solemnity and grandeur in honour of Don Bosco on the feast of Saint John the Baptist.¹²³ The feast of Saint John was very

120 Cfr. BM 4, 395.

121 Constitutions p. 260.

122 MORRISON J., *The educational philosophy...*, p. 13.

123 Cfr. BRAIDO P. (Ed.), *Esperienze di pedagogia...*, Vol. II, p. 373.

advantageous to the new and old students. Therefore Don Bosco allowed them to celebrate it with the greatest pomp and show. Don Giacomelli narrates thus :

"I pointed out to Don Bosco that for his feast the boys put up too great a show, but Don Bosco replied, 'These feasts do a world of good to the boys. They stimulate in them love and respect for the superiors and thus create a family.'"¹²⁴

The positive results that the educative system of Don Bosco produced is clearly testified by the presence of innumerable past pupils that flocked to him on his name-feast day. They brought him little gifts that spoke volumes for their grateful hearts and the valid education they received at the oratory of Don Bosco. In 1898, Don Griva wrote thus :

"Who cannot possibly remember the feast of Saint John the Baptist, the name-feast of Don Bosco? As long as he was alive, his sons, on this occasion, used to sing the glory of their father in a thousand ways and tongues."¹²⁵

Professor Maranzana, in 1893, described the beauty of this feast of gratitude. On such occasions, when his past pupils gathered around him, Don Bosco exhorted them to live up to what they learnt at the oratory and to keep up that same spirit. Several of his past pupils used to go to him for personal advice.¹²⁶

Some may think that since Don Bosco was surrounded by exceptionally good boys such as Savio, Magone, and Besucco, it was very easy to create such an ambient. This would be quite incorrect. Caviglia, who knew the environment of Valdocco very well, has made the following testimony :

"The field in which Don Bosco worked was not made up of the best boys. The words 'poor and abandoned' must be taken literally. This was the situation of Don Bosco's Valdocco and the habitual situation in which Don Bosco's activity

124 MB 9, 886.

125 MB 9, 884.

126 Cfr. MB 9, 885.

evolved. His charitable work and his system of education are especially meant for the children of the poor."¹²⁷

It is just here that the humility, largeness of heart and geniality of Don Bosco is revealed. He did not choose youngsters, who were exceptional or who belonged to a privileged class to establish his 'New School' or his 'New Education'. His pedagogy which was truly new, was for the poor and the humble. They needed first and foremost a 'family' and hence Don Bosco stressed on loving kindness, which educates in the atmosphere of a joyously united family.¹²⁸

127 BRAIDO P., *Il Sistema preventivo...*, p. 194.

128 Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

CHAPTER III

The 'Guru-sishya' Relationship and Don Bosco's 'Amorevolezza'

A. A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

We have had an overall view of the two pedagogies that were prevalent in two different worlds, that too, at two far distant periods of history. We have tried to expose the brahmanic system of ancient India in as much as it referred to the guru-sishya relationship and the centrality of the concept of loving kindness in Don Bosco's educational method.

In the first chapter, we have seen that education in ancient India was exclusively directed towards a particular class, namely the caste people, who formed an elite of the then prevailing society. They were the *brahmans* or the priestly class, whose duty it was to offer sacrifice and perform ceremonial rituals intended to bring prosperity. They jealously guarded the hymns and ritual formulae used at sacrifices and transmitted them to their own heirs. As the influence of the priests increased during the course of time, the rituals of the sacrifice became more and more complex. However, the transmission of the sacred lore remained confined within the priestly class without ever being divulged to the rest of the society. We have also seen that during the course of ages, education or rather instruction, was extended to the next two castes in the order of superiority, namely, the *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas*, but the imparting of such education was more or less a monopoly of the priestly class.

Don Bosco's pedagogy was altogether different in as much as it was directed to the needy and those in danger and not reserved to an elite group, who normally form the privileged section of the

society. Prof. C. Danna of the university of Turin, a contemporary of Don Bosco, wrote most eloquently about the educative activity of Don Bosco, as early as 1849. On feastdays, Don Bosco used to gather some four hundred to five hundred youngsters, who were above the age of eight in order to keep them away from dangers and to instruct them in the maxims of Christian morality. His festive oratory provided these children with the possibility of fulfilling their religious duties as Christians. Then he would provide them with good and enjoyable recreation. Besides, he taught them the sacred history of the Church, catechism, principles of arithmetic, metric decimal system, and reading and writing to those who did not know. The hospice attached to the oratory, where Don Bosco provided food and lodging to those most in need and in rags, evoked the gratitude of the people around.¹

We have seen that the brahmanic education, not only was directed towards the high castes, but even further, was meant for the students of such castes devoid of all defects. From the qualifications of an ideal pupil, we can say that the students were expected to be perfect and ideal in every sense of the term. It is no wonder that a Hindu scholar exclaimed that even today it is not impossible to find ten good gurus out of every hundred. Yet it is doubtful whether one finds even a single sishya out of a thousand, who is competent to be a sishya according to the scriptures.² Instead, we have seen that the beneficiaries of Don Bosco's educational system were quite different. They belonged to the normal middle class who were in danger and need, deprived of moral and religious assistance.³

However, notwithstanding the distance in time and space between brahmanic system and Don Bosco's system, we may find a certain type of convergence in the field of religious sentiments, family environment, love relationship, joy in education, grateful recognition on the part of the pupils and past pupils and the like.

1 Cfr. DANNA C., "Giornale della società d'istruzione e d'educazione" nella Cronichetta, 1 (1849) 1, pp. 459—460.

2 Cfr. AVALON A., *Principles of Tantra*, pp. 563—564.

3 Cfr. DANNA C., *art. cit.*, pp. 459—460.

The scope of this chapter is not to make any far-fetched or forced comparison between guru-sishya relationship and Don Bosco's loving kindness, but rather to see the possible relationship that could exist between the two. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to make any analytical and detailed comparison. Instead, we shall follow another line of treatment. In the first place, we shall select a few dominant points that may be considered as converging in both the pedagogies. This will be followed by a contraposition of some of the diverging points, and finally, we shall focus our attention on some of the elements that could be possibly made to converge with the utilization of a little imagination, creativity and adaptation.

B. SOME CONVERGING POINTS

We have seen that the society that nurtured the brahmanic educational system was rural and predominantly agricultural. The nucleus of their social and political structure was the patriarchal family that lived in villages. The father-figure, the village headman, and the king were figures of authority. So too was the environment in which Don Bosco lived and worked. The waves of industrial revolution had reached several European countries, but in Italy the economy was fundamentally patriarchal and domestic to a great extent. There is beyond doubt a similarity of social context that saw the unfolding of the two pedagogies.

We can draw a line of convergence between the Hindu guru and Don Bosco at least from the point of view of their vocation, but always taking into consideration the two different contexts in which they operated. The guru belonged to the priestly class of the Hindu society. The Hindu tradition was never tired of insisting that the true Guru, the Guru *par excellence*, was God and God alone. He is the inner Guru of every human being. But not all are capable of following the unseen Guru within. Most men required an external support, a representative of God, a living influence. The human guru, in whose person God mercifully concealed His Godhead, provided help and support to the spiritual seeker. We have also seen the various duties of the guru in the first chapter.

Don Bosco too was a priest, but a Catholic priest and he himself affirmed that on several occasions during his life. He was the

representative of Jesus Christ, the High Priest, and his sole intention was to lead his boys to God in the person of Christ. How often he asked his boys to offer him their hearts so that he could offer them to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament! Here we do not intend to enter into the theology of the Catholic priesthood or the Hindu priesthood. The transmission of the sacred lore was a primary duty of the guru, which he fulfilled by teaching the vedas to worthy aspirants. Don Bosco's life's mission was educating youth, particularly the poor and the abandoned.

From our exposition of the brahmanic education and that of Don Bosco, we can notice a very strong religious element or God-dimension in both. A notable feature of the ancient Hindu society was the dominance of religion over political or economic field. *Dharma* was the guiding principle of every activity in the Hindu society. The *upanayana* or initiation ceremony was a religious rite, by which the young student was placed under the protection of the gods as he commenced the particular life-stage of studentship. Prayer had the pride of place in the lives of both the guru and the sishya. In the first chapter, we have quoted the beautiful prayer offered by the guru and the sishya before they began their morning classes.⁴

We have given a brief accent on the centrality of religion in the educational system of Don Bosco, as it is one of the trinomials of his system. No one who is familiar with the life and educational activity of Don Bosco will ever doubt the dominant role of religion in the life and work of the Saint. Don Bosco's oratory was a place where boys, after having fulfilled their religious duties on Sundays and feastdays, could enjoy themselves in pleasant games. The presence of God is so very evident in the life at the oratory, as it can be clearly noticed in the biographies of Savio, Magone and Besucco written by Don Bosco himself.⁵

Another point of convergence is the family environment that existed in both the pedagogies. The guru-sishya relationship un-

4 Cfr. *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, p. 69.

5 Cfr. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia...*, Vol. II, p. 101.

folded itself in a family setting. The Hindu pupil, as we have noted, became part of the guru's family after the initiation rite and continued to live with the guru until the completion of his formal education. In fact, the system of education of ancient India takes its name from this particular characteristic, namely, the *guru-kula* system or the teacher's house system.

Don Bosco firmly believed that the young was more naturally actuated in an educative structure, which was essentially that of a family. The boys who lodged with Don Bosco were under the paternal assistance of Don Bosco, the maternal care of his mother, Margaret, and the brotherly help of clerics like Rua and Buzzetti.⁶ Father Braido clearly affirms that the spirit and structure of Don Bosco's institutions was essentially that of a family.⁷ We do not intend to elaborate at present the family spirit that existed in both the pedagogies, as the expressions of it differed.

The presence of the guru to his pupil and the constant presence of Don Bosco to his boys could be said to be converging. The presence of the guru was an all-round education to life itself. Such presence produced many great men and earnest seekers after truth, and their output on the intellectual side is by no means inconsiderable. They developed many noble educational ideals, which are valuable contributions to educational thought and practice.⁸

Don Bosco's constant educative and fatherly presence among his boys was proverbial. He spent the whole day for the good of his boys. He had no other intention than that of providing for the moral, intellectual, physical and spiritual advantage of his boys :

"He dedicated himself with his full energy for our welfare. He was always at our disposal with his mind, heart and great affection. He was with his children right from early morning. He would hear confession, celebrate Mass and administer Holy Communion. He was never alone. He had never a moment for himself. He would be either with his

6 Cfr. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia...*, Vol. II, p. 56

7 Cfr. BRAIDO P. (Ed.), *Esperienze di pedagogia...*, Vol. II, p. 364.

8 Cfr. KEAY F. E., *History of education...*, p. 183.

children or would be receiving innumerable people, who would besiege him in the sacristy, under the porticoes, in the playground, in the refectory, along the staircases, and in his room. It was so in the morning, during the day and in the evening. Today, tomorrow, always! He was attentive to everything; he knew well hundreds of his children and would call them by their name. He was asking about everything, giving advice to everybody and instructing all."⁹

The Hindu pupil acquired knowledge for salvation, which was called *para vidya* and knowledge for worldly affairs called *apara vidya*. If education is described as a preparation for life or for complete living, we must say that the ancient Indian gurus would fully have accepted this doctrine.¹⁰

Don Bosco too, not only taught his boys Christian morality but also the means to earn a livelihood, which in Hindu terms would be called *apara vidya*. The Cardinal Archbishop of Turin, Gaetano Alimonda, in his month's mind funeral discourse on Don Bosco, vividly testified to this :

"For every type of work, there is need of instruments and in order that the various types of work may be efficiently done, there is need of instruments fit for each one of them. Don Bosco understood this fact very well. For this reason, we see him providing machinery and instruments for the most useful trades in which he was instructing his children, besides letting the boys, who had intelligence and good will, to pursue their studies. He started workshops for shoemakers, tailors, turners, carpenters, blacksmiths. He started classes for band-players, singers, printers, smiths, bookbinders and the like."¹¹

9 BALLESIO G., *Vita intima di Don Giovanni Bosco nel suo primo oratorio di Torino*, Torino, Tip. Salesiana, 1888, pp. 9—10.

10 Cfr. KEAY F. E., *History of education...*, p. 184.

11 ALIMONDA G., *Giovanni Bosco e il suo secolo*, Torino, Tip. Salesiana, 1888, p. 22.

We have seen that the guru, after the initiation rite instructed the pupil with appropriate explanation of the rules and regulations pertaining to the studentship. So too, Don Bosco himself mentioned that one of the requisites of the preventive system was that the rules and regulations of the institute be made known to the pupils. Here we notice a point of convergence between the two pedagogies.

As we come to the core of the guru-sishya relationship, our attention is directed to the two protagonists, namely the guru and sishya. We have seen that the guru was the father-figure that led the sishya from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. Those of the higher castes, who entered upon the life-stage of studentship were considered twice-born and this second birth was given by the guru. The guru was to treat the sishya as a father would treat his children, with love and affection.¹²

Innumerable are the instances and testimonies that speak volumes for the paternal and loving heart of Don Bosco. Every letter of his, written to his boys, individually or collectively stands as an evident testimony. Ceria used to say that one who does not see Don Bosco as a father among his sons does not comprehend him at all. He worked continuously to provide them with food, clothing, a place to stay and above all, he tried to give them his love. Here we cite a part of one of his own letters to a boy in order to affirm our statement.

“...you have understood the sentiments that I have towards you. Yes, my dear, I love you with all my heart, and my love tends to do everything in my power to make you progress in studies, in piety and to win you for heaven... Indeed with paternal affection for you...”¹³

It was not only that Don Bosco spoke to his boys as a father, but that his boys too perceived and considered him so. They showed their sincere and filial attachment to their father even when they were already grown up and well-placed in society. Beautiful indeed are the words of Giacinto Ballesio, one of his own past pupils!

12 Cfr. KANE P. V., *History of Dharmasastra...*, p. 322, note 766.

13 E 1, 194.

"I shall narrate to you the life of Don Bosco, which, much more than poetical praises, deserves a place in history. I shall try to describe to you Don Bosco as he was living among us. He was constantly thinking, loving, fearing and hoping, speaking and working, slogging and sacrificing himself for his sons, whom Heaven had entrusted to his care. And I shall do so for two reasons. First of all, to assure him that his sons loved him with a deep love. His memory among them will be considered always a blessing. Secondly, in contemplating together his love, his sacrifices and his holy examples, we are reminded that the honour we had of having such a great father entails a great duty on our part. Here around his recently-mourned tomb, we renew the resolution of conducting ourselves always as his worthy children."¹⁴

Another point of convergence could be the gentleness in speech on the part of the guru and that of Don Bosco. The sages of old explicitly mentioned the need of being loved rather than feared. The laws of Manu are replete with verses that exhort the guru to be sweet and gentle. Manu recommends that in imparting instruction about the right path of conduct, one should use sweet and persuasive (not high-toned) words.¹⁵

Don Bosco insisted with his collaborators to imitate the sweetness of Saint Francis of Sales. We cite one of his own letters to corroborate our statement.

"Dear Father Dalmazzo, work, but always with the sweetness of Saint Francis of Sales and the patience of Job..."¹⁶

Openness and cohesion of hearts existed in both the pedagogies. The fusion of hearts that existed between the guru and sishya was evident from the words spoken by the guru at the initiation rite of a sishya :

14 BALLESIO G., *Vita intima...*, pp. 6—7.

15 Manu 2, 159.

16 E 4, 313.

"Thy heart shall dwell in my heart; my mind thou shalt follow with thy mind; in my word thou shalt rejoice with all thy heart."¹⁷

There was no secret between the guru and the sishya. He taught with full attention, loving the pupil as his own son, producing such harmony of hearts.

In the oratory of Don Bosco, the hearts were open with utter simplicity and candour. There was so much of heart-to-heart talk between Don Bosco and his boys. It would not be a bold statement if we say, that Don Bosco was a master of the pedagogy of the heart. He won the heart of his boys in order to guide them to the right path. It was his firm conviction that education was in the realm of the heart and so he assiduously worked to win over their heart.¹⁸

The fusion of hearts is obvious from the letters and writings of his. He wrote to cleric Giovanni Cinzano and the students of Valdocco thus :

"...within a short while I shall be with you again and you will be the masters of my heart."¹⁹

We could say that to some extent joy and cheerfulness characterized both pedagogies. We do not have much documentary evidence about the prevalence of joy in the home of the guru. But there existed *ashrams*, where more than one pupil were taught. We have seen that one of the characteristic marks of those *ashrams* was joy. In fact, some of the students who entered those *ashrams* never returned to the world but continued to be perpetual students.²⁰ We have also seen from the Ramayana the students' life in the *ashrams*, where they learnt in an atmosphere of love and cheerfulness.

Joy was certainly a characteristic mark of the oratory of Don Bosco. He wrote in his booklet entitled '*Il giovane provveduto*'

17 SBE 30, p. 152.

18 Cfr. MB 5, 367.

19 E 2, 361—362.

20 Cfr. KANE P. V., *History of Dharmasastra...*, p. 351.

(The Companion of Youth) of the Christian aspect of joy in the words '*Servite Domino in laetitia*', which meant 'Serve the Lord in Gladness'.²¹ The means to cheerfulness were to be found in free and guided activity, singing and great freedom in games as Don Bosco himself advocated. He let the boys run, jump and shout as much as they pleased.

Another element that is very much converging is gratitude. We have already seen in our exposition that the students in ancient India visited their gurus frequently even after the completion of their formal period of studentship. They often brought to their gurus some presents as a sign of their gratitude, and to consult them on various points in their lives. In Don Bosco's oratory, the traditional feast of gratitude was celebrated with great pomp and solemnity, which stimulated love and respect for the teachers.²²

C. SOME DIVERGING POINTS

The external religious environment in which the two pedagogies unfolded themselves was very much different. The brahmanic educational system flourished in the Hindu religious environment, while Don Bosco's system operated in a Christian religious environment. We have seen that *dharma* regulated every activity of the ancient Hindus. In the course of ages, there was much evolution in the Hindu religious thought, as we have seen naturalistic polytheism, monotheism and monism in the vedic hymns.

Don Bosco lived in a period that witnessed the transition from a marked ecclesiastical presence in the political and cultural ambient to an ever increasing separatism. It is not within the scope of this paper to enunciate the differences between Hinduism and Christianity.

Caste pervaded the entire gamut of Indian social organization. It guided the destiny of a Hindu, right from womb to tomb and

21 Cfr. BOSCO G., *Il giovane provveduto*, Torino, Tip. Paravia e comp., 1847, p. 28.

22 Cfr. MB 9, 884.

from cradle to grave and beyond. It determined, for example, whom he will marry, how he will marry, where he will live, how he will live, what he will eat, how he will eat, where he will work, how he will work, how and where he may possibly die, where he will be buried or cremated, how he will be buried or cremated and also what will happen to him after death. In short, caste determined every aspect of life in India.²³

Evidently, such clear-cut social division or caste system did not exist in Italy. As in any other society, there existed the poor and the rich, the working class and the aristocracy. Instead, the social division among the Hindus clearly affected other spheres of life. Education was the prerogative of the *brahmans*, which in the course of time was extended to the *kshatriyas* and the *vaisyas*. Those three castes formed a sort of elite group in the society and were recognized as such by the rest of the society. The whole *Veda* together with the secret doctrines (*Upanishads*) were to be learnt by every *dvijati* or twice-born.²⁴

The type of boys for whom Don Bosco dedicated his entire life belonged by no means to an elite group. When he met any youngster in great need, tattered and in rags, he did not spare any moment to take him to his own house, where he lived with his mother Margaret. Although Don Bosco was a poor priest, he and his mother looked after such poor boys, provided them with board and lodging until the boys themselves were able to earn an honest living for themselves.²⁵

Cardinal Alimonda mentioned in his discourse the type of boys that interested Don Bosco :

"In visiting prisons, he found young people with aggressive face, engulfed in vice, without any sign of assistance from anywhere, and what is worse—forgotten even by their relatives! In going up the attics of many houses to help those

23 Cfr. PUNIT A. E., *Social system in rural India*, Delhi, Sterling publishers, 1978, pp. 82—83.

24 Cfr. KANE P. V., *History of Dharmasastra...*, p. 327.

25 Cfr. DANNA C., *art. cit.*, p. 460.

in need, he found children abandoned in filth and rags. Going around the streets he often found vagabonds and insolent unemployed youth. Sometimes some of them threw stones and mud at him."²⁶

It is interesting to note that the Hindu student had to beg his daily food. This had a great religious significance in as much as it was meant as a lesson in humility. It was also meant to create an awareness in the society that had the responsibility of helping the growing generation that had to imbibe the heritage of the race from the gurus. It was quite the contrary in the case of Don Bosco's boys. We have already remarked that they were boys in need of material and spiritual assistance. Indeed, Prof. C. Danna of the university of Turin wrote in 1849 :

"When he met some youth in dire misery, he would never be satisfied unless he took him to his house, gave him some clothes and some food. He would keep him till he found a work for him, so that the youth may have the hope of a less dark future. By doing this, he was in a better position to take care of his mind and heart."²⁷

Another point of divergence is that the Hindu pupils went in search of renowned gurus, who attracted students by their reputation and scholarship. The gurus mostly confined themselves to one place.²⁸ Instead, we have seen that Don Bosco took care of the poor and neglected youth, who were in need of spiritual and material assistance. In the early days of his educational work at Valdocco, it was largely his personal loving kindness that drew the boys to him.

In our first chapter, we have seen that the guru and the sishya lived in one family. Yet one thing that draws our attention is the meticulous way laws and regulations were prescribed for the students. In the history of *Dharmasastra*, P. V. Kane, one of the most noted Indian authors, makes this comment :

26 ALIMONDA G., *Giovanni Bosco...*, p. 9—10.

27 DANNA C., *art. cit.*, p. 460.

28 Cfr. KANE P. V., *History of Dharmasastra...*, p. 328.

"In ancient times the student had to serve the teacher by tending his cattle, had to beg for food and announce it to the teacher and to look after his sacred fires and to learn the veda only in the time that would be left after doing work for the guru. Besides these, the rules concerning his conduct towards the teacher, the teacher's wife and son, concerning the method of salutation and showing respect, the food, drinks, and actions allowed or prohibited to students are too numerous to be set out in detail."²⁹

It was a different picture altogether in the oratory of Don Bosco, where the boys moved around as in a family. Every teacher was surrounded by a group of students without irritation, conflict or any sort of formality. Ballesio has given us this testimony :

"Thus governed Don Bosco his, or rather, our oratory, with the holy fear of God, with love and with the edification of good example. Someone might call it a theocratic regime. We call it a governing by persuasion and love, which is most worthy of man. Nobody can deny the wonderful results of this regime. Hundreds of young students and artisans did their duties with real enthusiasm and love."³⁰

The guru-sishya relationship seemed to have been very much governed by clear-cut norms. The guru and the sishya knew the duties and obligations that were enjoined on them by their state of life. It is not easy to pinpoint the various expressions of this rapport between the guru and the sishya, as it calls for a more profound and elaborate research.

In the oratory of Don Bosco we have seen that much insistence was given to loving the boys and to make them feel that they are loved. Don Bosco was indeed very expressive in his loving kindness. He made use of several synonyms to express this loving kindness. For instance, he used words like love, affection, friend, sweetness, benevolence, heart and the like. The various expressions of such loving kindness translated into loving relationship could be clearly

29 KANE P. V., *History of Dharmasatra...*, p. 331.

30 BALLELIO G., *Vita intima...*, p. 12.

noticed in the life at the oratory. They were particularly characterized by being present at recreation, games, a father-son relationship manifested by means of profound and constructive dialogue, 'word in the ear', the Sacrament of Confession, cordial and collective colloquy during the 'good night talk', spiritual direction and so forth.³¹

D. SOME ASPECTS THAT COULD BE MADE TO CONVERGE

Don Bosco had never closed his great plan of youth reform and social restoration in strait-jacket. Neither had he laid down abstract formulae, which are to be used always and everywhere. In order to understand his method in the historical perspective and to translate it according to various situations and cultures, one requires a formation in history. Here we would consider it apt to cite Father Braido :

"The working plan of Don Bosco is not a system of abstract formulae, capable of being used and implemented always and everywhere. It is clearly an *historic formation*, painfully constructed in a day-to-day action. It is a formation well-shaped by psychological, cultural and local conditions, both in the elements that constitute it and its ideal aspirations. It is, therefore, neither possible nor reasonable to carry such working plan and to transplant it in another context. Among other things, the fact that this plan is in tune with whatever is authentically human, valid and sincerely religious, and the never retracted uncompromising character of the religious attitude of Don Bosco, would not allow such simple transposition. As at its beginning and in its further development, this method was characterized by a concrete 'historical' footing, so now and in the future, this method will never be adequately appreciated and used, unless it is related historically to the social and cultural 'revolutions' which took place during the last century. It must be related also with

31 Cfr. BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco*, Brescia, La scuola, seconda edizione, 1969, p. 70.

the different historical, economical, political, structural, spiritual contexts in which it is asked to be incarnated. This is much more required, when it is the case, not of some privileged groups of young people, but when it is the case of great masses of young men living in all continents.”³²

Taking into consideration what has been said by Father Braido, we proceed on to consider some aspects of both the pedagogies that could be possibly made to converge.

We have seen that *dharma* was the total configuration of ideals, practices and conduct in the Hindu society, which permeated every strata of life. The guru had God as his End Supreme and taught *dharma* to his pupils in order to lead them to the Supreme Being. So God was the ultimate end of every learning. In fact, P. V. Kane has this to say regarding the importance of *dharma* :

“A student must stay with his teacher who performs his *upanayana* till he completes his study, unless the teacher himself swerved from the path of *dharma* and became a sinner and that if the teacher cannot teach the subject, the pupil may resort to another teacher.”³³

Evidently, Don Bosco too aimed at leading his boys to God, but God as understood in the Christian context. In fact, in 1879, Don Bosco wrote to Costamagna :

“...God has made us in such a way that we can love and help with our prayers here on earth in order that one day we may find all of us united together with Jesus in heaven.”³⁴

The guru led the pupil by helping him out of the slough of vice and showing the path of virtue. His very life was an example, strong to attract the pupil to such a life. It is enough to look at the long list of qualities mentioned in the credentials of an ideal

32 BRAIDO P., “Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'utopia della società Cristiana” in *Quaderni di Salesianum* 6, Roma, LAS, 1982, p. 29.

33 KANE P. V., *History of Dharmasastra...*, p. 330.

34 E 3, 515.

guru that we have seen in the first chapter, to convince ourselves of the high degree of perfection that was required of him.

Don Bosco's system of education too aimed at leading the boys to a virtuous life. Here too, we have the testimony of Cardinal Alimonda :

"In his house, in his boarding schools, filled as they were with apprentices, students, simple lay men and clerics, it is a command that the conduct of the young people should be directed by this principle : the practice of good should be rendered easy, not burdensome. Also whenever evil may appear, at once a remedy should be applied, so that it may not spread. In a word, it is the Preventive System."³⁵

One cannot possibly doubt about the degree of perfection acquired by Don Bosco, since his entire life was a living testimony to that. Of course the connotations of perfection are not precisely identical in Hindu religion and in Catholic religion. Moreover, there are common traits. Our affirmation about the perfection attained by Don Bosco is confirmed by Ballezio :

"History surely will not be able to make others understand Don Bosco's interior life, his continual sacrifice, which was calm and sweet, invincible and heroic at the same time; his great endeavour and love for his children; the trust, the esteem, the reverence, the affection that he was inspiring in us; the great authority, the idea that he was a saint, a learned man, almost like the example of moral perfection that we had of him. History definitely will not be able to recapture and to transmit to others or make others believe, the sweetness of one of his words, a glance of his, a sign of his, would raise up our hearts. Only one who has seen and experienced it can understand it! Even the best biographies of various saints will miss the spell that such persons exercised on their contemporaries and those intimate with them.

The perfume of their conversation and of their virtues disperse into the space of times. But we have seen him; we have 'experienced' Don Bosco in person."³⁶

Another aspect that could be made to converge in both the pedagogies is the concept of sin. We have seen that the Hindu students were expected to pray for the forgiveness of sin every morning and evening. The very motive in learning the sacred scriptures was to be free from sin, because all sins were cleansed by means of knowledge alone.

One of the main preoccupations of Don Bosco was to keep his boys far away from every sin. In the oratory, they had all the possibility to play, jump and shout about in order to enjoy themselves; however, Don Bosco always recommended them to keep away from sin. In the Hindu context, it was prayer and knowledge that freed one from sin, whereas Don Bosco made use of the means provided by the Catholic religion, namely the Sacrament of Confession. It is enough to read the biographies of his own boys, Magone and Besucco, to see the importance that he gave to this Sacrament.³⁷

According to the Hindu sages, the guru was the spiritual father of the pupil. He was to treat the pupil as a father would treat his children, with love and affection, and the pupil was expected to treat the guru with the greatest respect. The various expressions of the guru-sishya relationship are not elaborately treated in our study. But it is quite evident, that love was considered as an indispensable quality of the guru. The modes and particularly the expressions of

36 BALLELIO G., *Vita intima...*, p. 9.

37 Cfr. BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e comp., 1861, pp. 209—210, in *Opere e Scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco*, a cura della pia società Salesiana, volume quinto, Torino, SEI, 1965.

Cfr. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentera*, Torino, Tip. dell'orat. di S. Franc. di Sales, 1864, pp. 57—59, in *Opere e Scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco*, a cura della pia società Salesiana, volume sesto, Torino, SEI, 1965

love differ from culture to culture. Therefore, one should be familiar with the way love is understood and expressed in a particular culture, in order to transmit love in an acceptable manner.

We have more than ample documentation of Don Bosco's way of expressing loving kindness. It was indeed characterized by heartfelt affection, familiarity, winning leadership, Christ-like patience, filial and brotherly relationship. We cite just one example to show the tender and affectionate heart of Don Bosco manifested in a letter :

"I speak to you with the words of a tender father who opens his heart to one of his most dear sons. Therefore, receive these words written by my hands as a sign of the affection that I have for you, and as an external act of my loving desire that you earn many souls for the Lord."³⁸

Indeed, Don Bosco expressed his love in varied ways; to one an affectionate word, to another a little caress, to another an affectionate look, a smile and so forth.³⁹ For Don Bosco to love youth did not only mean to arouse affection, but also to feel its attraction, to be subdued, to be aware of the indispensable role of one's life. He expressed it in words which surpass the conventional letter-writing style as exemplified in his letters to his boys from Saint Ignatius near Lanzo, from Rome and from Florence.⁴⁰

One of the qualities that stand out in the Hindu pupil was his great reverence for the guru. In all appearance the cult of the guru is idolatrous. But the point is that the cult of the guru is the cult of what the guru stands for. To the pupil he represents the Infinite in a finite form. In a more sober conception of this relationship, it is thought of as that of father and son, and so far was this idea carried out that the pupil was considered to be in closer relationship to the guru than to his real father.⁴¹

38 E 1, 288.

39 Cfr. BALLELIO G., *Vita intima...*, p. 17.

40 Cfr. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia...*, vol. II., p. 473.

41 Cfr. KEAY F. E., *History of education...*, p. 191.

CONCLUSION

Based upon our exposition of the guru-sishya relationship in the brahmanic educational system of ancient India, we can draw up a conclusion regarding what the ancient Hindus considered of great importance in education, namely, the guru-sishya relationship. We have had the possibility of viewing the loving relationship that really characterized Don Bosco's system of education. Our limited exposition gave us a clue to attempt a comparison between the two concepts, pertaining to systems of education, that prevailed in two different worlds, that too, at two far distant periods in history.

In our comparison, we noticed convergence of several aspects, naturally with consequent divergence, and the clear possibility for an adaptation. It was not within the scope of this research to pinpoint the ways in which such an adaptation is to be carried out. But it has thrown light towards the realization of a goal, that is and that ought to be the dream of all admirers of Don Bosco, namely to arrive at an Indian dimension of Don Bosco's preventive system. The attempt at a comparison further revealed to us that most of the values, upheld by Don Bosco during the last century, were already deeply rooted centuries ago in the Indian culture in the Hindu context. Although the expressions of guru-sishya relationship differ from the way in which Don Bosco expressed his rapport with his boys, yet, the fundamental principle underlying both the systems is the same, namely, a person to person relationship between the educator and the pupil.

The result of this research is to see, at least in general, the possibility of a relationship between an ancient educational system and that of Don Bosco. These findings may serve as an indication for a fuller study on this theme. Our exposition and comparison may be considered as a stepping stone towards a more profound and more complete research on the theme.

Ours then is a warm good wish for whoever wishes to embark further on this theme, which we have tried to develop in this paper. May the eagerness to know Don Bosco better and to understand his method in the cultural heritage of India be blessed by an Indian dimension of the educational system of Don Bosco.

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The Preventive System

L. Colussi sdb

NITIKA/Don Bosco, Calcutta 700 015, publishes this book to commemorate the Centenary Celebrations of St. John Bosco's Death. We wanted to bring alive to the world of education what is Don Bosco's most striking contribution—his PREVENTIVE SYSTEM.

This is the name of Don Bosco's educational system. Judging by the name only, one might think of it as an essentially negative method, inasmuch as, "placing youth in the moral impossibility of committing sin", by foreseeing and preventing the occasions does not, as yet, obtain from them practice of positive virtue. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the name, the Preventive method is eminently positive, since it is never imposed on purely passive subjects, but always requires their spontaneous collaboration.

The very vigilance of the educator over his pupils, common to all systems of education and at times so poorly tolerated by the young, is, in the Preventive System, in spite of its being constant and uninterrupted, positively welcomed and very efficacious. In fact the assistant does not fulfil the task of the everpresent guard who afterwards applies disciplinary measures according to need, but his vigilance is that of an older brother or of a friend, a collaboration which is indispensable to the fulfilment of the tasks the youth must perform, be it the acquisition of a trade, the undergoing of a scholastic examination, the preparation of a song or theatrical presentation, the winning of a game or the scaling of a mountain peak.

Thus the assistant is desired as the best and indispensable helper since he has won the heart of the boy. Consequently the "preventing by vigilance", however negative it may seem in form, changes itself into an efficaciously positive means. But the Preventive System contains other desirable positive elements. The educator must reason with his pupils, that is to say, make them see the motives behind the dispositions that regard them, so that, instead of enduring them, they accept them as being helpful. Evidently above and beyond proximate and immediate motives, and vastly more important, the Preventive System strives to present to the young supreme and

eternal motives, each action constructing the ideal sufficient for every virtuous act not only during the period of education but also for their whole lives.

That which is to become ideal in the moral order must first become ideal in the intellectual field. Now the Preventive System, in presenting high ideas can be said to prefer more modest means, with continuous activity, in preference to grand means but intermittent activity. A good example of one of these modest but constant means, proportionate to the inconstancy of the young and so effective with them is the "*Good Night*."

The Director of the pupils, every evening before they retire speaks to them for about two minutes, commenting upon some activity of the day in order to recall the eternal truths. It is said that night brings counsel. Such fatherly words, which conclude with wishing everyone present, "*Good Night*", fall like a seed at a time when the hearts of the boys are more apt to accept them. Among the extraordinary means, we have the annual spiritual retreat which really constitutes harvest time with grand resolutions made and decisive steps forward taken. The Preventive System, which not neglecting the natural means to attain a harmonious development of all the human faculties, principally stresses the means which place the young in direct contact with the fount of divine strength, prayer and the sacraments. The common prayer is that of every good Christian, very simple. But even when it is reduced to a short *Hail Mary*, repeated, for instance, at the beginning and the end of every action, it has great value. As regards to the sacraments of penance and Holy Eucharist—the young have the possibility of receiving the sacraments whenever they desire, especially during daily Mass, without the least sort of individual control. A kind invitation and easy access does away with the need for control.

It is clearly seen that the Preventive System is far from being only preventive. It is a strong mainspring for good; strong as the supernatural grace upon which it rests and without which it would have no value. In devising it Don Bosco certainly did not intend to accomplish a Copernican revolution, but, with the exception of some detail and the adaptation to present-day historical circumstances, he reintroduced the method of the Divine Teacher and of every other educator who is inspired by Him.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

'The Educative Rapport' is an effort towards inculturating valid systems of education, in this case, the Don Bosco Educative System, into the main stream of Indian's own traditional educative heritage, with the hope that many others will continue in the same direction.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHERS

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