

RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND MAHATMA GANDHI: THEIR THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION FROM A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT Post-colonialism, in its present theoretical formulation, is fraught with many contradictions. Thoughts of Tagore and Gandhi had many inherent contradictions regarding colonialism in general and British colonial rule in particular. Tagore grew up in the ambience of Brahma religion, a reformed offshoot of Hinduism. He became, in his early teens, a member of a secret society that had the grandiose aim of bringing about independence of India. Being a natural poet, his poetic outpourings in Bengali began to rejuvenate and recreate Bengali literature. In his late twenties he was entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the family estates in North Bengal. There he came into contact with the daily life of the village folk. He started his village reconstruction program there. In 1901 he established at Santiniketan, a cluster of villages away from Calcutta, his school called Brahmacharyashram. There he started his experiment in education. What he had learnt from North Bengal was applied here. Gandhi grew up in a traditional Hindu family. He was sent to England to become a Barrister. There was nothing extraordinary in his upbringing. He went to South Africa to work for an Indian businessman settled there. There he came face to face with an atrociously racist regime. His lifelong crusade against injustice began there. He organized two communes—Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm. There he began to teach the children of the inmates. Thus developed his idea of education. Coming back to India in 1915, he further concentrated on the subject of education in independent India. In 1937 he placed before the nation his concept of Basic Education.

BENGALI SARANSA Ekhonkar 'uttar upanibeshbad' tattwati niye anek bitarka achhe. Rabindranath ebong Gandhir 'uttar oupanibeshik' dharanaro samayer sathe sathe anek paribartan ghatechhe. Rabindranath brahmo adarshe baro hoyechhen, bariteo chhilo swadwshi bhavna. Tai kobi hishebeo tini chaichhilen bangla bhashar unnati korte. Boyosh jokhon tar tirisher kothay, takhon take uttar banger jomidarir dayitwa deya hoi. Okahanei tar gram punargathan kajer suchana. Unish

sho ek shale tar brahmacharyashramer suchana. Uttar banger gramini punargathaner abhignata tini ekhane prayog karen. Gandhiji ek sanatan hindu paribare janman. College sikshar pore tini inglonde jan baristari porte. Phire eshe tini dokshin afrika te jaan kormasutre. Sekhanei tar parichay gote atyachari barnabidweshi shwetanga sashoner sathe. Er biruddhe tini andolan suru karen. Eri phalasarutite tini sekhane phoenix settlement ar Tolstoy khamar gore tolen. Ashramer basindader chhelemeyeder tini porate suru karen. Parabortikale unish sho ponero shale tini e shamparke tar gyaner probhuta briddhi ghotan ebong unish sho saitrish sale tini buniyadi shikshar khosra desher samne hajir karen.

Introduction

It will be no exaggeration to state that the edifice of modern India rests on two pillars: two towering personalities of the twentieth century - Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was born in Calcutta (Kolkata of today), the then capital of British India situated in the eastern part of the country. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869 – 1948) hailed from Porbandar in Gujrat situated in the western part. Their thoughts – social, economic, political and religious – emerged from the very Indian context and culminated in a full-fledged anti-colonial and nationalist worldview though for both of them the transformation was slow yet steady. Both of them thought colonialism was an internal psychological construct and paid less attention to the externally superimposed domination of the alien power which, they felt, would crumble once the people were aroused. Both of them prescribed a philosophy of life based on Indian values, ethics and customs. Both the thinkers invoked ancient Indian wisdom as a weapon to fight not only British colonialism, but also the ignorance and superstitions prevalent in Indian society. For them, political emancipation was the disappearance of only the

external fetters. India needed to be freed from the shackles that bound the mind. Only education, they thought, could deliver the nation spiritually.

Post Colonialism: an Overview

Post colonialism, over the years, has acquired varied connotations in its usage. Simon During says, “Writing in 1984, before the term ‘Post colonialism’ had wide academic currency, I defined it as the self-determining will of the decolonised people to protect their cultures from western encroachment. That was in an essay often cited as getting it wrong, but even then sensing that the term’s moment of destiny was near, I equivocated conceding that this usage was ‘perhaps eccentric’. So it turned out to be. Post colonialism came to signify something rather remote from self-determination and autonomy. By deploying categories such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence or James Clifford’s ‘newly, traditionally’ – all of which laced colonised into colonising cultures – Post colonialism effectively become a reconciliatory rather than a critical, anti-colonialist category. It invoked modernity’s triumph over so-called ‘traditional society’, with the twist that this triumph radically unsettled modernity, most of all by dismantling the notion that the historical temporality enacts season’s unfolding which had underpinned colonialist development values and practice”(During, 1998, pp. 31-47).

In an essay entitled, “Universal history discovered : on critical theory and post-colonialism”, Antonio Y Vazquez – Arroyo says, “In 1998 a short essay published in *Interventions*, then a newly founded journal of post-colonial studies, Terry Eagleton made a provocative distinction

between 'Post colonialism' as a historical condition and 'Post-colonialism' as a theoretical endeavour that serves to map out the stakes in theorizing Post colonialism from the perspective of universal history. With characteristic facetiousness Eagleton spelled out the tension between the two. Post colonialism, without scarce quotes, is a term that denotes the part of the world that was formerly colonised directly by political means, and that now is colonised in different ways and by other means, mostly economic; a condition that can be periodized in reference to the emergence of new 'sovereign states' in the non-European world after world War-II, the wave of wars of national liberation (1965-1975) and the nationalist politics of the 1980s. This is a world marred by the complex intersections between the economic, the cultural and political in particular localities, yet bearing universal-historical dimensions such as the spread of modernity and capitalism.

Post colonialism, however, is a moniker used to signify a body of theory that emerged with force after experiences of political defeat and the substitution of political for cultural nationalism. Its emphases on hybridity, marginality and difference have made indispensable contribution to questions of subject formation in postcolonial predicaments and the representation of the subaltern in these settings. 'Post colonialism' has, for the most part, disavowed the dialectic of universal and particular, as well as any notion of historical bindingness – the latter understood as the inter play between the static and the dynamic, natural and unnatural history. These categories of negative universal history, however, are central to cognitively mapping the complexities of Post

colonialism in their particular instantiations, yet these are ultimately disavowed by Post colonialism. One need not fully endorse Eagleton's polemic to assert that for all its theoretical accomplishment 'Postcolonialism' seems unable to provide the critical theory of history necessary to account for the predicaments of power it attempts to map and theorise. Or, stated differently, by disavowing dialectical thinking 'Postcolonialism' is unable to muster the conceptual armature to fully apprehend the complexities of Postcolonialism" (Vasquez-Arroyo, 1998, 465-466).

The ephemeral nature of the Post-colonialist studies has been brought forth by Narsingha P. Sil in a wonderful essay entitled 'Post colonialism and Post coloniality : A Pre-mortem Prognosis'. He says, "Post-colonialism as theory, contrasted with postcoloniality as reality, was born sometime during the earlier period of the Cold War that had developed Sphinx-like following the World War II announcing the death of Europe and the rise of two extra-European superpowers. Naturally, the end of the War also began a decade-long process of decolonization, marking the end of European political domination over most of Asia and Africa. The collapse of the continent that owned almost one-half of the globe generated a profoundly unsettling soul-searching and re-examination of the values and norms of metropolitan civilization informed by the Enlightenment masculinist and quasi-racist rationality, although a critique of Western bourgeois views and values dates back to the works of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and later Rudolf Pannwitz (1881-1969), author of *The Crisis of European Culture* (1917) and Oswald Spengler

(1880-1936), author of *The Decline of the West* (1918)". (Sil, 2008, p. 20)

Tracing the origin of postcolonial studies, Sil said that during the interwar years (1919-39), European intellectuals became aware of the challenges to European control and dominance from the Philippines, Cuba, Puerto Rico, China, Morocco and South Africa. They were influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) which ideologically and openly opposed traditional European imperialism and colonialism and established global networks such as Communist International, or The Third International or Comintern founded in Moscow in March 1919, for the purpose of undermining the imperial system. Post colonial studies developed from those earlier moments but it expanded in the course of time. The Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) was begun by the historian Ranajit Guha in India in 1980s and it was further enriched by amalgamating the perspectives and insights of Critical Studies pioneered by Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and led by Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson and above all Stuart Hall. Cultural Studies scholars allied with post colonial and subaltern theorists in Australia such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin and Ranajit Guha. This interesting academic ensemble was further stimulated by feminist scholars, chiefly Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The SSG collectives borrowed the ideas of Antonio Gramsci (1881-1937) and adopted his terminology especially 'hegemony' and the 'subaltern'. They found in the Italian's writings (mainly *The Prison Notebooks*) "theoretical modes of understanding applicable to the developing world, to feudal incrustations and religions backwardness, to weak and wavering bourgeoisie seeking ways to constrict hegemony"(Sil, 2008, p. 22).

Sil concludes:

“There is a problem with postcolonial studies in the metropole”. As Kwame Anthony Appiah has observed, and I cite him with approval, “postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ingenuously call a comprador intelligentsia: a relatively small, western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery...Indeed some of the leading post-colonial theorists in Anglo-American academe are of South Asian Origin. Four of them with the exception of Homi Bhaba, the “superstar of Postcolonial studies” and currently at Harvard, who studied at the university of Bombay and Oxford – Dipesh Chakraborty of Chicago, who studied in India and Australia, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, University professor at Columbia, who studied in India and the United States, and her colleague in the Anthropology Department, the Political Scientist Partha Chatterjee, a completely home-grown historian, have had their undergraduate training at the Presidency College, Calcutta. Chatterjee, truly a global academician, holds simultaneous position at Columbia and the Centre for Studies in the Social Sciences, the prestigious institution of Calcutta where he is the director. The doyen of subaltern studies that has fueled the postcolonial, the historian Ranajit Guha, also had his undergraduate training at the Presidency College, Calcutta, obtained his doctorate in the United Kingdom, worked in Australia and retired in Austria where he currently resides in Vienna, Europe’s most Cosmopolitan City (Sil ,2008, pp.26-27).

A look at their intellectual production would point out that they write in an archaic language incomprehensible to most readers, oscillate between politics and economics and art and literature with utmost ease and happily confuse things in the name of inter-disciplinary research. Unless some coherent thoughts emerge having validity in the social sciences - and which can overcome the rhetoric-- Postcolonial studies will not have a bright future, as the name of the article of Sil suggests.

Post colonialism of Tagore and Gandhi

To understand the educational thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi from the post-colonial perspective, one has to understand the complex nature of Indian cultural history from the ancient times till the advent of the British rule.

Benoy Ghosh, a leading light of sociological research, wrote in his monumental book *Vidyasagar and the Bengali Society*, "On the western bank of the Hoogly (Bhagirathi) where the Sun set, a new dawn appeared. Historians assert that 23 June, 1757 saw the end of the medieval era and the emergence of the modern age." (Ghosh, 1999, pp.2-3). He was referring to the defeat of Siraj-ud-Daulla, the last Nawab of Bengal at the hands of Robert Clive, the chief of the British East India Company forces. Many Indian historians believed, particularly during the first one hundred years of the British rule, that the colonial occupation of the British was a boon for India. It paved the path of deliverance from despotic alien rulers.

For many such historians, India was truly colonized when the 'muslim' invaders came to India across the mountains of Afghanistan and occupied its territory. Says Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyaya, the discoverer of Mohenjodaro - Harappa and a great historian himself, "The

history of the decline of all civilized nations is embedded in darkness”. Hungry barbarians when they knock at the door of the civilized nations immersed in luxury are repulsed once; but they come back with the certainty that the weapons held by the soft hands of the civilized men are not tightly grasped. Then they can no longer be held back” (Bandyopadhyaya, 1974, p.1).

He was referring to the invasion of India by the ‘Muslims’. Thus, according to the historians, even of Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyaya’s stature, India came under an alien rule around five hundred years before the British appeared on the scene. Not only so. They thought that the British delivered India from a despotic medieval ruler.

The Indian intelligentsia, especially the upper castes, during the first one hundred years of the British colonial rule, welcomed the British administration’s far-reaching reforms involving all aspects of citizens’ lives – educational, cultural, administrative and also religious. Out of this admiration of the British and European thought took place the birth of Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth century, an enlightenment movement. Raja Rammohun Roy was the pioneer of this enlightening process and Tagore was one of its standard bearers.

For the Muslim upper class, the British were usurpers of their throne. Therefore for the first one hundred years, they did not cooperate with the British administration. The Muslim population, in general, toed this line. During the Muslim period, a large section of the Hindu lower caste population, to defend themselves from the onslaught of the Hindu landlords and escape the torture of the upper castes, had embraced Islam. They had nothing in common with the Muslim rulers except religion, who, in most of the cases did not even speak Indian languages and administered through Persian and Arabic. Thus the notion

of an alien rule was ingrained. The majority Hindu population and the minority Muslim population remained two separate streams and never mingled.

Hindu brahminical religion had no provision of admitting any non-Indian sect within the Hindu fold. The reformation movement of Vaishnavism of 15th. Century A.D of Sri Chaitanya was successful in a limited extent to reverse this trend. When Tagore founded his school he advised one of his close associates who took the responsibility to run the school on a day to day basis thus:

...That the attainment of humanness is not a selfish goal but a transcendent goal –this our forefathers knew. The education at the base of this humanness they called Brahmacharya. It contained more than memorizing and passing exams. Brahmacharya is a discipline (sadhana) preparing one for worldly duties—by self-control, by devout faith, by purity and by one-pointed dedication—for the mundane state of life and beyond the mundane state , for the discipline of eternal union (the divine) Brahman
This is the path of Dharma.....Concerning daily prayer. The students are to be taught to recite from memory the Gayatri mantra...(O’Connell, 2002, pp.65-69).

It is apparent that Tagore evoked the Upanashadic era of the ancient times which was essentially a Hindu era. The Tagores were Brahmos, an offshoot religion from Hinduism that believed in one God- similar to Christianity, the religion of the rulers. Later, of course, Tagore’s institution became more secular though it always followed the Brahmo ethos.

Gandhi was also an essentially Hindu political leader. He wanted to make India an ideal state - Rama Rajya - the just kingdom of Rama, the mythic ruler of Ayodhya. Every evening he used to sing Ramdhun, chanting of the Rama name.

All these evidences suggest that the post-colonialism of Tagore and Gandhi invoked a past that was essentially non-European and non-Islamic.

Rabindranath Tagore: Development of his thoughts

Rabindranath Tagore, the fourteenth child of Sarada Devi and Debendranath, was born in an illustrious landlord family of Bengal. His father Debendranath revived the Brahmo Samaj, a progressive and reformist religious movement within Hinduism after the death of its initiator Raja Rammohun Roy (1714-1833). Dwarakanath, Debendra's father, Tagore's grandfather and an associate of the Raja, was the greatest Indian businessman of his time and a philanthropist of the highest order.

The Tagore household was unique in Calcutta. Originally a trading family with close links with high-ranking British civil servants, it quickly flourished into an avant-garde nationalist force in Bengali social and cultural life. Stalwarts of Bengali and English literature had their evening assemblies at Jorasanko, the ancestral house of the Tagores. Ancient classics, like the *Vedas* and *Upanishadas* were studied there. *Tathobodhini Patrika*, the mouthpiece of the Brahmo Samaj that carried discourses and debates on the new religion, used to be published from here.

The Tagores of Rabindranath's generation were highly talented. Rabindranath's elder brother Satyendranath was the first native member of the Indian Civil Service (ICS).

Another elder brother, Jyotirindranath was a renowned playwright and actor. He translated *Moliere* into Bengali. Their wives were equally gifted. Satyendranath's wife Jnadanandini Devi was the first woman editor of India. She edited *Balak*, a children's magazine. Jyotirindranath's wife Kadambari was Tagore's muse, and a critique of his works. She set for Tagore the highest standards and was not satisfied with anything less. Tagore's sister Swarnakumari was the first woman novelist of India. The Tagores, therefore, were the pioneers in what practically was a movement for gender equality.

Tagore's education at home and at school could be a study in contrast. While at home he was provided the best of education – though rigorous – that developed him physically, mentally and intellectually, the education at the English-medium schools where he studied exasperated him in body and spirit.

At home, he would be woken up early in the morning to practise wrestling with a celebrated professional. As soon as it was over, a student of medical college would turn up to teach 'the lore of bones'. At seven in the morning the mathematics tutor would arrive to teach the young Tagore arithmetic, algebra and geometry. Sometimes there would be a lesson in natural science which would be followed by lessons in Bengali and Sanskrit.

Returning from school at 4:30 in the afternoon, he would find the gymnastics master waiting for him to give lessons on the parallel bars. No sooner was he gone than the drawing master would arrive. In the evening the English master would teach English classics, including *Macbeth* of Shakespeare, to a half-asleep Rabi. Learning that Rabi (shortened nickname of Rabindranath) was a natural poet, he would shut little Rabi in a room until he translated in verse the whole of *Macbeth* over a period of

time. The exercise book has been lost but a portion, containing the witches' scene was published in the *Bharati* edited by his eldest brother Dwijendranath in 1880.

Tagore later recalled in *My Reminiscences*, "Books tell us that discovery of fire was one of the biggest discoveries of the human race. I do not wish to dispute this – but I cannot keep feeling how fortunate the little birds are that their parents cannot light lamps in the evening. They have their language lessons early in the morning and how gleefully they learn them! But then they do not have to learn the English language!" (Kripalini, 1980, p.44)

This rigid time-table was supplemented by music. Music was the very essence of the Tagore household. The child picked up from classical, folk, devotional and contemporary music practised by *ustads* '(experts)' who were doyens of different *gharanas* or schools. Jadu Bhatta, one of the most outstanding exponents of the Bishnupur School of Classical Music, was a private tutor of the Tagore children.

Formal schooling for Tagore was a nightmare. He was first admitted at the age of five to Oriental Seminary, an English medium school. Returning home he would work off his repressed rage and fear by beating with a cane the wooden railings of the verandah of his house and playing the teacher with his dumb pupils. In his seventh year, Tagore was admitted to a normal school, supposed to be a model fashioned on the British pattern. The only recollection he had of this school was of one of the teachers who used foul language in the class room. Over the years, Tagore changed schools a number of times until, finally, he ceased going to school altogether.

From 1867 onwards, some nationalists began to organise a politico- cultural event called *Hindu Mela* or Indian Fair. Like other progressive movements of Bengal,

this fair was the precursor of the Indian National Congress that brought India's independence in 1947. In 1875 young Rabi, then fourteen years of age, recited his composition, a Bengali patriotic poem, at the Mela.

It was during this period that Rabi became quite friendly with his sister-in-law Kadambari who was a great connoisseur of the arts. Together they explored the new horizons of art, literature, music and drama, Rabi taking a leading role in composing songs and music, writing plays and enacting them on the family stage. Encouraged by his brother Jyotirindranath, Rabi published his first long poem running into 1600 lines.

Rabi now joined a secret society called Sanjivani Sabha (Society for Regenerating the Nation) founded by Jyotirindranath and another stalwart of the Bengal Renaissance, Raj Narayan Bose. Its aim was political liberation of India and was modeled after Mazzini's *Carbonari*. Needless to mention that the society was a juvenile attempt and not a serious endeavour, though it showed the political inclination of the Tagore family members.

After a phase of initiation and grooming at his brother Satyendranath's place in Ahmedabad and his friend's house in Bombay (Mumbai), Rabi set sail for England on September 20, 1878. There, in London, he had his first taste of English education at the London University where he attended Henry Morley's lectures in English literature. He studied with him some plays of Shakespeare and was much impressed. During this one and a half year's stay abroad, he appreciated the emancipation of the English women in a free society and wrote his impressions in letters sent for publication in the family magazine.

On his return, the fountain-head of his creativity burst open. He composed a drama in poetry called *Bhagna*

Hriday (The Broken Heart) in 34 cantos running into 4000 lines. He also wrote a musical dance drama (a unique contribution to the Bengali stage) called *Valmiki Pratibha* (The Genius of Valmiki). It was a drama in music as opposed to European opera. His fame as a poet was growing and he was felicitated by the Maharaja of Tripura, the head of a princely state and by novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, known as the Scott of Bengal.

Tagore's creative outpourings continued unabated. Once he came across a vision. He wrote, "...all of a sudden a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side'.(Kripalini, 1980, p.103) On this day he wrote *Nirjharer Swapnabhanga* (The Awakening of the Waterfall). This poem symbolised the beginning of his adult career as a poet and thinker.

By the time he was twenty-five, he was married and had written already a number of musical dramas, books of poems, a novel and a number of articles on social issues of the time. He made another trip to England in 1890 and on return published a book of poems called *Manasi* (Mental Images). Edward Thompson (writer of the first English book on Tagore who studied him in original Bengali) writes: '...the book is quiet certainty; it marks his attainment of maturity'. (Thompson, 1989, p.65)

Education and Village Reconstruction

By the end of the 1880s, under direction from his father, Tagore had to shoulder the responsibility of looking after the family estates. Thus began a phase in his life which brought him in close contact with the village-folks, mostly the poor and the underprivileged. He went to Selaidah (now in Bangladesh), on the bank of the river

Padma. A houseboat on the river was his headquarters. His stay over there also strengthened and widened his intimacy with nature. It provided glimpses into the varied landscapes of the countryside bequeathed with the natural offerings of the six seasons of Bengal, each unique in its smell, wind, shower, crops, flower, river, and meadows, and also brought him in contact with the village folk who were part of nature too.

This was a rich food for his poetry, short stories, novels and endeavours at village reconstruction. The daily drudgery and constant struggle against the freaks of nature, the atrocious indifference of the Government and the landlords, social orthodoxy, casteism, communalism and colonialism – all these provided him with a new impetus. He felt deep empathy with the hapless village folk.

On one hand, flowed from his pen all kinds of literary outpourings that filled most of the new magazine *Sadhana* published by his nephew Sudhindranath. His writings showed a strong bias in favour of the womenfolk, the outcasts, the have-nots, the insulted and the humiliated. On the other hand, he started his experiments in community development, almost two decades before Mahatma Gandhi came on the scene. Tagore did not consider it healthy that the individual would lose his/her initiative and look up to the state for help and guidance in matters where he/she could be the best guide. His programme for rural reconstruction was based on the twin principles of self-help and enlightenment. It was this realization, reinforced by painful memories of his own school days – where mechanical, lifeless rote learning was the order of the day – obliged him to take upon himself the role of an educationist and social reformer. His first

practical experiments in this field were conducted in his family estates at Selaidah and Potisar.

Years later, as he was setting up his school at Santiniketan, which in course of time grew into Visva-Bharati, the Indian International University, he founded a parallel institution adjacent to the school, called Sriniketan – a nucleus for experiments in large-scale rural development. His idea was to develop a live interaction between the students of his school and the peasants living in the surrounding villages. The peasants made their own schools and hospitals, built roads and water tanks, set up cooperative societies and banks and built up a structure of self-governance. The amount he received from his Nobel Prize was donated to the school at Santiniketan through an investment in the agricultural cooperative bank set up on his initiative at Potisar. The peasants got loans at a cheap interest rate and the school received a fixed annual income.

He sent his son Rathindranath to Illinois in the United States for training in agricultural science. On his return, he was put to work in the estates. A New York lawyer Myron Phelps, who happened to visit the farm of Rathindranath, said that he was surprised to find a genuinely successful American farm in the Bengal countryside. Even tractors were introduced there. Tagore encouraged growing subsidiary crops to supplement the main crops and introduced cottage industries and crafts to keep the labour employed throughout the year and help peasants eke out a better living.

He persuaded the peasants in his estate at Potisar to organise themselves into a welfare community known as *Hitaishi Sabha*. It covered 125 villages with a population of around seventy thousand. The Sabha raised its own funds to which the Tagore estate contributed. It maintained schools, hospitals and other centres of common welfare. It

was a self-governing institution. Tagore summed up his endeavour in a letter: “Arrangement has been made so that the villagers should be able to undertake welfare measures themselves by repairing roads, removing the dearth of water, settling their disputes by arbitration, establishing schools, clearing jungles, providing against famines by setting up Dharma-golas (Grain banks) etc. and in every way to contribute their own share in the welfare of the village to which they belong.” (Kripalini, 1980, p.158)

While the benevolent landlord was concerned with the welfare of the tenants, the artist in him was observing the life of the common people, their joys and sorrows, loves and despairs, deeds of heroism and cowardice, their capacity for sacrifice for the benefit of the family, caste or religion, their rebellion and submission. He painted the womenfolk of Bengal who daily sacrificed their personal comfort for the welfare of their children and family and the community at large.

He did not write ‘patriotic’ stories which would incite hatred against the foreigner. He hated foreign rule but believed that as a sick body falls prey easily to outside infection, so a society where the individual has lost all initiative and backbone naturally invites foreign exploitation. No people, who are conscious of their rights and willing to die in their defence, can be exploited for long. He strove hard to arouse in the people their sense of dignity.

The sleeping giant of nationalism was then beginning to stir. The British Government was nervous. In 1898, the Seditious Bill was passed to stifle all nationalist agitations. Tilak [Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920)], the scholar-politician, was arrested. The poet read his famous paper *Kantharodh* (The Throttle). When the plague broke out in Calcutta, the poet assisted Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble,

disciple of Swami Vivekananda, the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission) in organising relief and medical aid. The Boer War deeply disillusioned him about the claims of the Western democracies. He saw in its holocaust the ominous warning of impending massacres.

In 1898, Tagore moved his family from Calcutta to Selaidah and took upon his own hand their education. He had already written much on the fundamentals of teaching and now he put those principles in practice. He also thought of the need of a wider field for systematic experimentation. He, therefore, thought of finally shifting to Santiniketan where he would establish the school.

Tagore's imagination caught up with the idealized picture of the *Tapovana* or the *Ashrama* (forest hermitage) in ancient India where ancient sages lived with their disciples and taught them the principle and practice of simple living and high thinking. On 22 December, 1901, he inaugurated his school at Santiniketan, in the district of Birbhum of today's West Bengal in India. There were just five students and five teachers. He named it *Brahmacharya Ashram*.

All teachings were conducted in the mother tongue. He reasoned that a child's mind is extremely receptive of the things around. It learns with its limbs and senses long before it learns with the brain. It should learn to do things. The idea and practice of teaching through some craft was first developed at Santiniketan long before Mahatma Gandhi incorporated it in his scheme of Basic Education.

Nature is the best teacher. The classes were, therefore, held in the open under the trees, as appropriate in a tropical country like India. The students were encouraged to study and love nature in its changing moods and phases. No less important is the influence of music and the fine arts in training the child's emotions and sensibilities.

Education, to be real, must develop the whole person – her emotions and the senses as well as the intellect. Tagore said “..... educational institutions in our country are India’s alms-bowl of knowledge; they lower our national respect; they encourage us to make a foolish display of decorations made of borrowed feather”. He also said, “ for proficiency in walking it is better to train the muscles of our own legs than to strut upon wooden ones of foreign make, although they clatter and cause more surprise at our skill in using them than if they were living and real’. (Kripalini, 1980, p.199)

The small school of little children at Santiniketan strove to develop a teaching-learning practice that was anti-colonial, national and highly progressive but respectful to Indian tradition - a true exercise in post-colonial education.

In 1905, during the last year of his office, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, signed the proclamation for partition of Bengal, thereby beginning the process of driving a wedge between the two major religious communities which ultimately resulted in the trisection of the Indian nation. The whole of Bengal rose up against the colonial policy of divide and rule. Tagore jumped into the fray, making fiery speeches, composing patriotic songs and leading huge processions. Students were being expelled from schools and colleges. To arrange for an alternative, he, along with a few other leaders, formulated and put into practice a scheme of national education and set up the National Council of Education, Bengal, with Sri Aurobindo, the patriot, philosopher and saint as the first principal. Today’s Jadavpur University of Kolkata grew out of this movement for national education.

It was his expectation that this popular discontent against foreign rule could be harnessed for undertaking

constructive programmes of national regeneration. He planned and outlined such a programme in a series of remarkable lectures and essays in which he anticipated almost every basic principle of what later became a nationwide mass movement of non-violent non-cooperation under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Tagore, thus, alienated the colonial bosses who issued secret circulars asking Government servants and loyalists not to send their children to his school at Santiniketan or help it in any way. He became a political suspect and was under surveillance.

On January 28, 1912, the intelligentsia of Bengal celebrated his jubilee in the Town Hall of Calcutta – an unparalleled occasion, the first time such an honour has been done to a literary man in India, as if a prelude to what was awaiting him in Europe. Tagore was due to set sail for Europe, his third such visit after a long gap of almost twenty-five years, on March 19, 1912. But he was suddenly taken ill the previous evening and had to cancel the trip. He was extremely disappointed and returned to Selaidah, his headquarters on a house-boat. There, he began to translate, for the first time, some of his *Gitanjali* songs into English. Pages of two exercise books were filled up gradually. On recovery, he proceeded to Europe and presented the same to Rothenstein, the eminent painter, at his request. He in turn passed the same to W.B. Yeats who wrote later, “I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on top of the omnibuses, and in restaurants, and I had often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me”. (Das Kumar, 2008, p.39).

The book was published in London in 1912. Tagore received the Nobel Prize for literature for this book, *Gitanjali*, in 1913. All on a sudden, Tagore became, from

merely a literary figure of Bengal, to a world citizen, revered all over the globe not only for his poetry but for his world vision. He would now seek his home everywhere in the world and bring the world to his home. And so, the small school at Santiniketan was now (1918) transformed to a world university, Visva-Bharati, a centre for Indian culture, a seminary for Eastern studies, and a meeting place of the East and the West. Visva-Bharati, Tagore said, represents India where she has a wealth of mind which is for all. Visva-Bharati acknowledges India's obligation to offer to others the hospitality of her best culture and India's right to accept from others the best.

Tagore believed that "on each race is laid the duty to keep alight its own lamp of mind as its part in the illumination of the world. To break the lamp of any people is to deprive it of its rightful place in the world festival. Once India had such a mind which was lit by its own flame, fed with its own oil" (Kripalini, 1980, p.282), Visva-Bharati was offered as such a lamp of India in the post-colonial perspective.

Tagore said, "The mischief is that as soon as the idea of a University enters our mind, the idea of a Cambridge University, Oxford University and a host of other European Universities rushes in at the same time and fills the whole space. We then imagine that our salvation lies in a selection of the best points in each, patched together in an eclectic perfection" (Kripalini, 1980, p.283).

For an intercourse between the East and the West, Tagore invited some of the best minds of India and abroad. Bidhusekhar Sastri, Kshitimohan Sen, Kapileswar Misra from India, Rajguru Mahasthabir from Ceylon, Silva Levy from France, Moritz Winternitz and Vincenc Lesny from Czechoslovakia, Stella Kramrisch from Austria, Patrick Geddes, L.K. Elmhirst, C.F. Andrews from the UK:, Kimtaso

Kasahara from Japan, Gretchen Green from the USA, L. Bogdanov from Russia, Ngo-Chang-Lim from China, Sten Konow from Norway, Carlo Formichi and Giuseppe Tucci from Italy, to name only a few from among a large number of guests who embellished the cultural and educational skyline of Santiniketan and Sriniketan.

Tagore said, “In the festival of lamp of knowledge, if every nation lights its own lamp, then will this festival be successful. If the lamp of one nation is broken, or its existence is forced to go into oblivion, then the whole world becomes the loser.

“It has been proved beyond doubt that India contemplated deeply over the problems of the world and strove to solve it with its own intellect. The real education for our country is that which enables our mind to perceive the truth and express it with our own strength. Rote learning or training in repetition is not education of the mind; it is mechanical...The mind of India, which is now divided into the minds of the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Muslim, the Sikh, the Christian and others cannot accept anything nor give anything...therefore in Indian education, Vedic, Puranic, Buddhist, Jain, Islam – all these minds should be united. We have to know how India’s mind flowed through all these streams. Thus India can achieve its unity” (Bhattacharya, G., 2009, p.9).

Tagore believed that real education existed where new knowledge was being created. The principal aim of a university was to develop new knowledge; it was a secondary task to disseminate that knowledge. Thus guests, dedicatedly engaged to exploration, discovery and creation of new knowledge, were to be invited. Whenever

they would unite, there would emerge knowledge, not by imitating foreign universities.

Tagore believed that in all other countries, education had a link with the people's life. Only in colonial India was education directly linked with some white-collar occupations like clerkship, legal profession, medicine, civil service, police etc. Indian education had not reached there where peasants were cultivating, oilseeds were being crushed, potters' wheels were turning. In no other educated nation, such a calamity was to be found. The reason was that Indian universities did not have any roots in its soil, they were like parasites suspended from the branches of huge foreign trees. A real Indian university should utilize its knowledge in such areas as economics, agriculture, health and other practical sciences for the development of the villages surrounding it. This university should employ superior methods in agriculture, animal husbandry, cottage industries etc. and should develop economic self-sufficiency through cooperation and thus would connect the life of the teachers and students with the livelihood of the people living in the surrounding villages. Tagore proposed that such an ideal institution should be called Visva-Bharati, the abode of universal learning.

Tagore thought that in the West, life had a meaning. Education there strengthened and guided it. Many more objectives were fulfilled at the same time. In India, the aim of education was not quite transparent; it was only a means for achieving a livelihood. Livelihood was related to want, necessity. But life should be directed towards fulfillment – which was above necessity.

The school at Santiniketan was established with the above objective in mind. The first step was to establish it at a place away from distraction, in a peaceful

surrounding. It was not a 'school' – in the usual sense of the term. What was important was the call of the world of nature, not a small 'school'.

In all countries, Tagore felt, the lower aim of education was practical opportunity, the higher aim was fulfillment of life. This was the natural focus of development of the place of learning. Modern schools in India did not emanate from there. The foreign traders and (the foreign) King, for their narrow interest, established schools from above. Even teachers who transcended such narrowness were reprimanded.

This education had presumed that Indians were paupers. They needed to take everything from outside. This not only made education incomplete, Indians were forced to think of themselves as paupers. Even if sometimes they would shake off this mentality, this was construed as bragging.

Tagore reiterated that Visva-Bharati was a large concept. But it existed at Santiniketan in a small domain. Though it belonged to India, it had to be made into a prayer ground for the whole of humanity.

Everywhere in India, Tagore said, the people found shackles of all sorts. But the shackles which had incapacitated India were not of foreign make. They were indigenous.

“The Shiva comes in the guise of a poor beggar, but his richness reaches the knowledge of all with time. Visva-Bharati came to this *Ashrama* in the guise of a small school. It started its journey then, but that is not the end. It was a beggar then, begging from all over the world. Now it is ready to give. It has the riches of India. Now the world has come to India and said, ‘I have come’. If we tell it, ‘we are busy with our own affairs, we cannot think of you now’,

it would be a shame. If you cannot give, you will lose” (Bhattacharya, G., 2009, p.17).

Sriniketan-the village reconstruction wing of Visva-Bharati

Sriniketan is Tagore’s answer to the world of the true educational message of India. Vishva-Bharati, as Tagore envisaged, will create new knowledge in the realm of the arts and the sciences through active participation of the modern *rishis* from all over the world – from India and from abroad. This new knowledge would be applied in the reconstruction of the surrounding villages and a new nation would be born. The Rural Reconstruction Wing of Vishva-Bharati was established on February 6, 1922. The reconstruction effort received momentum when Leonard Elmhirst, a British agronomist from Cornell joined the team in November 1921.

A visitor to Sriniketan and Santiniketan during Tagore’s lifetime, had the following impression:-

I am reminded of the huge *Kuthi* which dominates Sriniketan – the sister settlement which has almost become a part of Santiniketan. At one time the Sriniketan *Kuthi* belonged to the East India Company from whom it passed into the hands of the late Lord Sinha.

It is here the Poet planned, with the help of Elmhirst, a centre of rural welfare activities as part of the Visva-Bharati scheme. Since then the centre has expanded, other buildings have sprung up and Sriniketan, like Santiniketan, is a flourishing settlement through the

activities of which the poet hoped to realize his long-cherished dream of founding a university as an integral part of the surrounding countryside. The casual visitor does not see much of this life, unless he chooses to walk across stretches of bare upland and along dusty roads, into the villages which surround these settlements. Then he will find many signs of rural welfare activities of the Visva-Bharati; villages, schools, dispensaries, cooperative societies. He will meet men and women belonging to the poorest stratum of the society.

No less important than these is the work of the crafts department of Sriniketan. In the Hall of Industries you will be given a demonstration of the working of whatever craft you are interested in – weaving, carpentry, tanning, leather-work or pottery. You will also be offered for sale beautiful products turned out by the workmen here the designs on which bear the impress of the Santiniketan school of art which Nandalal Bose has made famous the world over. Village work and crafts at Sriniketan, painting and research at Santiniketan are different aspects of work of Visva-Bharati. But nothing reveals the spirit of Santiniketan or Sriniketan more truly than the many festivals mark there the passage of time. Whether the occasion is the advent of the spring or the start of the ploughing season, the planting of trees or the gathering in of the harvest, the keynote is the same – the realization of the intimate bond that ties man to the earth, the mingling of the soul of man into the soul of nature (Home, 2006, pp.156-159).

Tagore said, “If we could free one village from the shackles of helplessness and ignorance, an ideal for the whole of India would be established ... Let a few villages be rebuilt in this way and I shall say they are my India. That is the way to discover true India” (O’Connell, 2002, p.191). Tagore’s objectives were to make the villages self-reliant and self-respectful, acquainted with the cultural traditions of their country and competent to make use of modern resources for improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic conditions.

Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhi was a great genius of enlightenment who reached almost every household of the nation. Under his leadership, the spirit of India was aroused. All of Gandhi’s movements had deep social connotations. Gandhi’s educational ideas were unique. Since the advent of the British rule, many educationists and thinkers had condemned the British-imposed colonial education system as unreal, inadequate, rootless, shallow, alien, demoralizing and denationalizing. Gandhi condemned it in moral terms - conceived and born in error, nurtured in sin.

Gandhi’s experiments in education began in South Africa with the foundation of the Phoenix settlement in 1904 and the Tolstoy Farm in 1910. He laid stress on education through craft. He used to say that there was no point developing the brain only. One had to develop one’s brain through one’s hands. If he were a poet, he would write a beautiful poem on the possibility of the five fingers of the hand... Books are never sufficiently interesting to hold the interest of the mind. The mind begins to wander. Only manual work brings you back to reality.

Gandhi wanted students to work for furthering the cause of freedom for the country suffering under the yoke of foreign rule. The aim of his philosophy of education was not only *Swaraj* (self-rule) but also *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all). His social and educational principles are explained in numerous books and articles. He envisioned true education coming about primarily through a particular pattern of life in a community and not merely through formal instructions in schools. To understand the evolution of his educational thoughts, one has to study the details of the life the man lived.

Biographical Outline

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, later known as Mahatma Gandhi, was born on October 2, 1869, at Porbandar, a small town (on the western coast of India) in the province of Gujarat. His father Karamchand Gandhi was the *dewan* (finance minister) of the princely state of Porbandar. Gandhi came of a middle class family belonging to the trading caste.

He first studied at a primary school at Porbandar. Gandhi, in his later life, could recall that he learnt the multiplication table with difficulty. He also recalled that he called the teachers names. Since nothing else Gandhi could recall from this period, he concluded in his autobiography that he did not have a sharp brain. When his father was transferred to Rajkot, another small town, Gandhi had to change his school, too. He studied in this school till he was twelve years of age. He remembered not to have ever deceived his teachers or friends in that school. He was very shy and did not have many friends. He used to rush home after the hours in school which was like a

cage to him. He was always afraid that his classmates would tease him on the least pretext.

An incident during his high school days could be a pointer to his later day sense of truthfulness. The Education Inspector visited his class and set a spelling test. He asked the students to spell five words. One of the words was 'kettle' which he spelled wrong. The class teacher prompted him with his toe to copy the correct spelling from his neighbour's slate. But Gandhi obstinately ignored the hint and was later chided for his 'stupidity'. He could never learn the art of copying recalled Mahatma Gandhi.

At the age of thirteen he was married to Kasturbai who was of the same age. He was still a student of the high school. He longed to see his wife after the school hours. He admitted in his memoirs that he was then full of lust to the point of being cruel to others. An incident which he considered a 'black spot' in his life took place on the night his father died. He was in attendance at the sick bed, but his thoughts hovered round the young wife lying in bed, waiting for his coming. When his uncle offered to relieve him, Gandhi was overjoyed and rushed to the bedroom. The poor wife was fast asleep. He woke her up. A few minutes later, a knock on the door interrupted his frenzy with the melancholy news that his father had expired. Incidentally, his wife was pregnant at that time. The newborn did not live for more than a few days. In his later life, Gandhi objected to child marriage with a crusader's zeal. Mohan passed his matriculation examination in 1887. He then got himself admitted to Samaldas College at Bhavnagar. He found the subjects tedious, the English medium difficult and the atmosphere uncongenial. As Gandhi got increasingly frustrated, he was visited by a family friend who suggested that to get a good job he

should become a barrister in England. Gandhi personally preferred medicine to law. However as practising human dissection was unthinkable for a member of his orthodox Hindu family, the legal profession stood out as the best option.

After procuring the necessary finance through borrowing and sale of jewellery of his wife, Gandhi set sail from Bombay on Sept 4, 1888. He was declared an outcast by his own community for crossing the 'black waters'.

The first few days in England were miserable. It became more so because of the vow he took before his mother that he would not touch women, wine and meat. The food he ate was tasteless and bland. One of his friends read out to him the theory of utility from Bentham. But the vow was a vow. He would rather suffer than to break the vow.

One day he discovered a vegetarian restaurant in Farringdon Street. The sight of it filled him with the joy of a child. Having had his first satisfactory meal in London, Gandhi bought a copy of Henry Salt's *A Plea for Vegetarianism*. Reading it, he was more than delighted. From now on he became a vegetarian by conviction.

His vegetarian contacts began to expand. He started to read a great deal on the subject. He was introduced to *The Ethics of Diet* by Howard Williams. He read in this book that Jesus was a vegetarian. He came across a book which suggested that many diseases could be cured by changing the diet only. All these readings had an enormous impact on him. He would in his later life experiment with the regimen even in the midst of grim political battles.

He was now introduced to the theosophical thoughts of Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant. It was through the Theosophists that he came to know the *Bhagabad Gita* in Arnold's English rendering. He also read Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, life of the Buddha. In Carlyle's *Hero and Hero*

Worship he read the teachings of Mohammed. He read the *Bible* and fell in love with the 'Sermon of the Mount'. His young mind began to unify the essential teachings of the major religions.

The callow youngster who landed at Southampton had by now matured considerably. He looked upon vegetarianism as an experiment with truth. He had, by now, developed his ethical sense and was prepared to express it. In one of the meetings of the executive committee of the Vegetarian Society, a motion was moved to expel a member for supporting birth control. Although Gandhi personally opposed birth control, he felt that the advocacy did not violate the principle of vegetarianism. He, therefore, opposed the motion.

Three years passed and Gandhi was called to the bar and enrolled in the High Court on June 11, 1891. The young barrister sailed back home the following day. It was not too tough for Gandhi to become a barrister. But it was quite difficult for him to take up practising law as a profession. He had studied Western laws but had no grounding in Hindu or Muslim laws. He was not confident. He felt helpless and nervous as he came to India. In Bombay, Gandhi continued with his experiment with diet while trying to establish himself in the legal profession. For the upkeep of a barrister with all the pomp and paraphernalia befitting it, a large sum of money was needed. But cases were not forthcoming. He used to doze in the court room for want of brief.

One day he was engaged to defend a petty suit in the Small Causes Court. As he rose to cross-examine the plaintiff's witness, his congenital nervousness overpowered him. His head was turning and he felt as though the court was also turning likewise. He could not ask any question. He sat down in confusion and returned the fee to the

client's agent. He then sought a part-time job as a teacher of English. Here, too, luck was against him. When the Principal found that he had no degree in the subject, he was refused the job.

After a luckless adventure of six months in Bombay, young Gandhi wound up his establishment and went to Rajkot in Gujrat. Whatever hopes he might have had of receiving state patronage or an appointment at the Court was dashed after an unhappy encounter with the British political agent.

In these hours of predicament, an opportunity opened before him, as if God-sent. A Muslim firm having large business interest in South Africa offered to send him there for instructing and assisting their counsel in a big law suit. The terms were attractive and the period of engagement was only one year. To escape from the humiliating dilemma in which he had been trapped and for a chance to try his luck in the big world outside, Gandhi gladly accepted the offer and sailed for Durban in April 1893.

Experimenting with Truth in South Africa

Disembarking at Durban, also called Port Natal, Gandhi was received by his employer Abdullah Seth. At the port itself, he observed that the way the whites were treating the Indians was anything but courteous. However, his first humiliating experience came on the second or third day of his arrival, when he went to the Durban court with his client. The magistrate kept staring at him and finally asked him to take off his turban. Gandhi refused and left the court room. Then Gandhi sent a few letters to the local Press defending his right to wear the turban. He was immediately dubbed an 'unwelcome visitor'.

After about a week's stay at Durban, his host decided to send him to Pretoria, the capital of the then Boer Republic of Transvaal. A first class ticket was purchased for him. When the train reached Mauritzburg, the capital of Natal, in the evening, a white passenger boarded the train. Seeing a 'coloured' man in the compartment, he contacted the railway official who ordered Gandhi to shift to the 'van compartment'. Gandhi refused. So a constable pushed him out and his luggage was taken care of by the railway authority. It was a bitterly cold winter night. Gandhi sat in the dark waiting room thinking 'Should I stand up for my right or should I go back to India?'

There was more to come. He continued the train journey the next evening. A bigger mishap lay in wait on the journey the next day from Charlestown to Johannesburg which had to be covered by stage coach. Gandhi was made to sit with the coachman on the box outside while the white conductor sat with the white passengers inside. In the middle of the journey, the conductor wanted to have some fresh air outside. So he asked Gandhi to sit on the foot-board. He refused and started explaining why. But then something terrible happened. Wild with rage, the man swore vilely, rained blows on the 'coolie' and tried to throw him down. Gandhi clung desperately to the brass rails, refusing to yield his seat and refusing also to be provoked to retaliate. Some of the white passengers protested at this cowardly assault, and the crestfallen conductor was obliged to let Gandhi remain where he was.

Having come face to face with the appalling conditions in which his compatriots were forced to live in the dark continent, one of Gandhi's first acts was to call a meeting of the Indian community. There he delivered the first public speech of his life. This time he did not fumble or

falter or sit down in shame. He unconsciously discovered the well of courage within him.

The speech was remarkable in the sense that it had no bitterness or rancour. Instead of ranting against the racial intolerance of the white minority, Gandhi dwelt on the duties and obligations of the Indians. Truthfulness in business, cleanliness in personal habit, the courage to stand by one another, and the feeling of being one people, irrespective of one's particular religion, caste and community were virtues worth cultivating – these were young Gandhi's advice.

Gandhi often said in his later life that he loved nothing better than being a teacher. No one was too young for him to teach and none too old to learn from him. His method and act of teaching was multipurpose. He instructed, moralized, preached, propagated, and disciplined – all simultaneously in one single process. This address in Pretoria was the first demonstration of this act as a teacher.

Phoenix Settlement

A few years later, when Gandhi had become quite well-known in South Africa as the undisputed leader of the Indian community, he read a book by John Ruskin *Unto This Last*. He found some of his deepest convictions reflected in Ruskin's thesis. Ruskin had argued that the true wealth of a community lay in the well-being of all its members, the good of the individual being contained in the good of all; that all work had the same value, the barber's no less than the lawyer's; that the life of one who worked with hands on the soil, or at a craft, was the most useful life.

Gandhi made up his mind to put these principles into practice. He bought a dilapidated farm of 100 acres with a little spring and a few fruit trees on it. With the help of one of his friends, Albert West, he shifted the office of the *Indian Opinion* to an improvised shed. There he started the experiment of making the residents do all the work by themselves. The settlers had their families shifted there. A real working community grew up – the motto was dignity of labour. The children – sons and daughters of the residents – all took part in the work joyously. They learnt through their work. Here Gandhi started his experiment in education in a unique way which would be refined at the Tolstoy Farm a few years later.

Tolstoy Farm

In 1906, Gandhi started his famous *Satyagraha* (urge for truth) which he called civil disobedience movement. Prospect for this movement appeared bleak. The tempo of the movement got slowed down and the spirit was flagging. Hardly any funds were left to meet the minimum recurring expenditure to keep the struggle going. In this hopeless situation, Gandhi took recourse to the path of self-help as a means of continuing this struggle. Kallenbach, his German collaborator, had purchased a farm of 1100 acres, about 22 miles from Johannesburg. He offered this in the service of the struggle - for housing and maintaining the families taking part in the civil disobedience movement. Here, among other things, Gandhi continued his experiments with education.

Everything, right from sweeping, cleaning, preparing food, doing agricultural work, making all necessary implements, including shoes, were being done by the settlers. So formal classes for the children could not be

organized in a disciplined and orderly way. The students used to come to the class in the afternoon, after finishing all sorts of manual work. The teachers were tired too. Apart from Gandhi, Kallenbach used to teach the children. Both the teachers and the students used to fall asleep owing to over-exhaustion. There were other difficulties. Students were from Tamil, Telegu, and Gujrati speaking milieu. There were Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The age group varied between seven and twenty. Girls and boys studied together. With great patience Gandhi taught this heterogeneous group. He discovered that story-telling was the best method of attracting the students' attention. As far as practicable he used the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction. History, geography and mathematics were taught in a lively and unconventional way. The students learnt to chant prayers.

The children mixed freely among themselves. The experiment was quite daring since any misadventure could have jeopardized the life of the settlement. The children used to sleep together, bathe together and pray together. Gandhi used to keep an eye on their behaviour.

Gandhi came back to India in 1915. He travelled extensively to arouse the Indian people from their ignorance and apathy and imbibe in them a new consciousness. He went to the remotest villages to organize peasants against inhuman conditions of living and ruthless exploitation. He organized workers and fought for their rights. He lived and worked with the so-called 'untouchables' and vowed to end the evil practice. All these experiences led him to refine his own ideas about education of the Indian masses. For a period of twenty years he continued working on these issues in India and, finally, placed his draft of Basic Education to the nation.

Gandhi considered that the British-imposed education in India made Indians intellectual slaves of the British empire. It was rootless, alienating and anti-national. He believed that education should be imparted through the mother-tongue. Education, especially primary education, should be conducted in such a manner that a relationship was established between the child's environment at the school and that at home. This could be done by educating the child in the craft he/she found most relevant. The family vocation and the child's education could thus be complementary. Literacy was not for Gandhi the be-all and end-all of all education.

Education and literacy were two different things to him. A person could be highly educated without being literate. The vice-versa was also true. Literacy that did not uplift a person morally was not desirable. Gandhi felt that physical education and craft education would develop the student's intellectual capabilities. Gandhi was opposed to too many text books. He preferred that students should be taught, at the initial stages, orally and through dialogue and story-telling. Text books might be introduced later, but not those usually written for rote-learning.

Text books which would connect the child with his/her environment should be written. Guide books for teachers were needed more than text books to enable the teachers to do their work properly. History, geography, mathematics should be taught in such a way that the child could find interconnection between his/her own life and the subjects taught. New kinds of text books, meant more for teachers than for students, should be written keeping these things in mind. Higher education, Gandhi felt, should not be provided at State expense. Gandhi wanted a mass movement for education of the adults.

Gandhi was aware of the 'lack of literacy retention' process of the adults and felt that if education and life-requirements could be harmonized and integrated, the adults would be able to utilize the new-found knowledge. The 'lack of literacy retention' could be checked in this way. Gandhi never emphasized alphabetization and did not consider it of much value. Gandhi wanted women to be educated as much as men. He felt that women were mother teachers of a nation. Therefore, they should be educated properly to play their special role as mother teachers. However, they would need special orientation in home science and child-rearing. Gandhi was against punishing children.

One of the principal aims of education for Gandhi was to make a person economically, politically and intellectually independent. This was his lesson from South Africa. In 1937, the Congress Party gained limited power in eight states. Gandhi now came up with his idea of Basic Education to be implemented in the Congress-ruled states. A national conference was convened at Wardha, in Maharashtra, to discuss and resolve the basic criteria of such educational scheme (22-23 October 1937). The following resolution was adopted:

1. Seven years of free and compulsory primary education should be provided to all children.
2. Mother-tongue should be the medium of instruction.
3. Seven years of training would be based upon productive labour-oriented education. For all-round development of the child, some environment-friendly craft would be taught.
4. Teachers would earn their remuneration through such trainings.

In February 1938, the Congress Party at its Haripura Congress, presided over by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, adopted a resolution endorsing the Wardha Conference proposition.

It is worthwhile to mention here that Gandhi did not envisage an educated India to be a nation where all her children had gone through schools and colleges under a formal education system. That was a gigantic task and the required financial resources could not be provided by an impoverished nation. For Gandhi, education was a holistic affair –an integral part of a person’s life and livelihood. He said, “..... take the case of a child in whom the education of the heart is attended to from the very beginning. Supposing he is set to some useful occupation like spinning, carpentry, agriculture etc., for his education and in that connection is given a thorough and comprehensive knowledge relating to the theory of various operations that he would be wielding. He would not only develop a fine, healthy body but also a sound, vigorous intellect that is not merely academic but is firmly rooted in and is tested from day to day by experience.

His intellectual education would include knowledge of mathematics and the various sciences that are useful for an intelligent and efficient exercise of his avocation. If to this is added literature by way of recreation, it would give him a perfect, well-balanced, all-round education in which the intellect, the body and spirit have all full play and develop together into a natural harmonious whole” (Fagg, 2006, p.9).

Gandhi’s scheme placed paramount importance on *knowing* through *doing* – which he visualised as craft-oriented. He felt that in post-independence India,

vocational education would be the mainstay for the overwhelming majority of the Indian population living in the rural areas. Therefore Gandhi said, “In India, at any rate, where more than eighty percent of the population is agricultural it is a crime to make education merely literary.” He said further, “Our children must from their infancy be taught dignity of labour” (Fagg, 2006, p.11). Education through craft would serve both these purposes, he probably had felt.

Gandhi’s prescription for education of India’s children in the post-colonial period stirred the educationists in no small measure. As the implementation of the scheme progressed in the Congress-ruled states, Indian educationists were quite divided on the efficacy of the programme. While a large number of educationists termed the scheme as the most appropriate, there were strong dissenting voices too.

Those who supported Gandhi’s programme hailed it as an appropriate tool for building a cooperative social order. It was pointed out that along with the creative aspect, social and economic aspects were also stressed there. Another argument of theirs was that craft education would break the social barriers, increase the production capacity of the workers and enable them to utilize their leisure advantageously.

It was also stressed by the proponents of Basic Education that the syllabus based on the entire curriculum relied on activity principle that selects three centres intrinsically interconnected – the child’s physical and social environment, the craft chosen and the medium of creative expression.

One of the most daring propositions of Gandhi’s Basic Education was that it would be self-supporting. Gandhi said, “But as a nation, we are so backward in education

that we cannot hope to fulfil our obligations to the nation in this respect in a given time during this generation, if the programme is to depend on money. I have, therefore, made bold, even at the risk of losing all reputation for constructive activity, to suggest that education should be self-supporting” (Fagg, 2006, p.12).

Now comes Gandhi’s concrete proposal “I would, therefore, begin the child’s education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. Thus every student can be made self-supporting, the condition being that the State takes over the manufactures of these schools” (Fagg, 2006, p.12).

Those who opposed Gandhi’s programme pointed out that even at Wardha a large number of delegates, though hand-picked, did not concur with the proposition of self-supporting education. They also pointed out that education for children should be play-centred and not work-centred. They pointed out that it was sheer cruelty to teach a child a craft below the age of twelve. Three and half hours of daily craft work was also considered to be a violence. Some experts pointed out that the scheme would hit the professional artisans hard by creating ruinous competition. Last but not least, the scheme would encourage child labour.

Human nature, they claimed, had three aspects; the cognitive, the affective and the co-native. The Wardha scheme over-emphasised the last aspect, piously hoping that the student willy-nilly would get trained in the first through the training in the last. The middle aspect was completely ignored.

A system of craft-education with no religious or moral foundation, with super-exaggerated emphasis on productivity coupled with suppression of colleges and

universities would produce intellectual and moral pigmies, they asserted. Gandhi had prescribed cessation of State support in higher education.

Some of the provinces in which the Congress ministries had started functioning took the cause of Basic Education in right earnest. The government of Central Province (now Madhya Pradesh) immediately appointed a committee to draw up a syllabus. The U P Government adopted Basic Education as official policy. In Bihar, Orissa and Assam, Basic Education was taken up as an experimental project. Basic schools were set up there. Kashmir took an active interest in the programme. Three national institutions – Jamia Milia Islamia, Andhra Jatheeya Kalasala and Vedechhi Swaraj Ashram – enthusiastically took up the cause by opening training centres. Unfortunately, however, the Congress Ministries resigned in 1939 and therefore the activities that started in these states were abandoned.

Conclusion

Both Tagore and Gandhi looked at education from a post-colonial perspective. Their experimentations bore the stamp of India's national heritage – the Vedas and the Upanishadas. Tagore's scheme was to transplant in modern India a slice of the ancient ashramic principles where students and teachers would live together in familial bondage. Learning would take place in a spirit of togetherness – both with human beings and the nature around. Individuality of the child would flourish through exposure in the realm of art, literature and music. Physically the child would take part in the day to day chores like in ancient times when the disciple along with the members of the Guru's family used to milch the cow,

feed the cattle, gather fruits and vegetables from the forest. Clearing the jungle, planting trees, taking care of the surrounding environment would be taken care of by the student. All these activities would give the child freedom of mind and action and would enable him/her to learn naturally and joyfully in an effortless way.

Gandhi also invoked the ancient Indian practices. In the past the child used to learn from the parent the trade practised in the family. With this as the main learning activity, he/she would learn the arts, especially literature in a cheerful mode. Work would make the child socially responsible and artistically creative. His/her personality would grow with time and experience. The underlying principle of Gandhi was that life is a duty, towards oneself, family and the community.

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