

# GANDHIJI'S EXPERIMENTS IN EDUCATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Gandhiji had a scientific attitude of mind. He observed facts, sorted them before accepting them; and after weighing them well, he drew his conclusions. He had no prejudices of any kind. A scientific attitude implies that facts should be faced and conclusions drawn without fear or prejudice. In short the scientist must be dispassionate; but it requires more than being a scientist to have the moral strength to follow conclusions thus arrived at. This quality of being able to follow one's convictions in spite of opposition, dangers, or failures required indeed great calibre. Gandhiji, besides having a scientific attitude, had this moral calibre which endowed him with the highest spiritual qualities and tremendous courage to follow whatever he considered right.

In the course of his very busy life he had occasion to observe various aspects of life in our country. None came into closer contact with the millions of India than he. His most absorbing passion was to work for them. Of these, none were as dear to him as children. He was never happier than when he was with them. It is this great devotion and love that Gandhiji had for the children of this land that made him evolve a new type of education for this country. He went to schools, met teachers, conversed with students, and saw the effects of the present day education in the country. This led him to conclude that the system of education that was established by the foreign government was not suited to the needs of our country. The result was he was constantly making experiments in education.

The various experiments he made started with the training of his own children. Later on, he had opportunities to try out his ideas at the Sphinx Park, the Tolstoy Farm, the Champaran Schools, Sabar-mati Ashram and latterly in numerous other institutions that were started in pursuance of his scheme of Basic education. These experiments constitute an exciting chapter in the history of modern education in India. The following pages seek to give a very brief account of them.

This book has been written at the request of the Ministry of Education, Government of India. The Government of India had constituted a Committee for the Promotion of Gandhiji's Teachings and Philosophy of Education. That Committee resolved that two books

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should be published—one dealing with Gandhiji's thoughts on education and the other with his educational experiments. They have kindly requested me to prepare both the books. The booklet on Gandhiji's Thoughts on Education has already been published by the Ministry of Education. This book describes in brief Gandhiji's various educational experiments in the course of half a century of work for the country. An undertaking like this involves great study, deep erudition and profundity of thought. I am painfully aware that I am lacking in all these qualifications. Apart from a study of Gandhiji's works from time to time when in jail or outside and in the midst of other heavy work, I cannot claim any exhaustive knowledge of the subject. I am grateful that the present assignment gave me an opportunity to study his works again.

In this book the experiments have been described in Gandhiji's own language as far as possible. If this humble effort will interest educationists and others in the subject, I shall consider myself amply rewarded. I am grateful to the Ministry of Education, Government of India for undertaking to publish this work.

T. S. AVINASHILINGAM

SRI RAMAKRISHNA MISSION VIDYALAYA,  
COIMBATORE

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Introduction .. .. .	i
I. Historical Background .. .. .	1
II. The School on the Tolstoy Farm .. .. .	5
III. Training for Character .. .. .	10
IV. Medium of Instruction .. .. .	15
V. Educational Value of Work .. .. .	18
VI. Experiment in Co-education .. .. .	21
VII. Champaran Schools .. .. .	24
VIII. Education at Sabarmati .. .. .	28
IX. Address to the Students .. .. .	34
X. The Gujarat Vidyapith .. .. .	42
XI. The Spinning Wheel as an Instrument of Education .. .. .	46
XII. The New Education .. .. .	51
XIII. The Wardha Education Conference .. .. .	56
XIV. Basic Education .. .. .	63
XV. Why Basic Education? .. .. .	67
XVI. Educational Methods .. .. .	71
XVII. Education of the Masses .. .. .	75
XVIII. Gandhiji's Philosophy of Education .. .. .	80
INDEX .. .. .	85

## CHAPTER I

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Gandhiji led one of the busiest lives, the like of which could have fallen only to a few. He was constantly occupied with large movements. He toured the nooks and corners of India many times in the course of his struggle for freedom. He came in contact with millions of men and women. He guided individually the destinies of thousands of children and adults. In addition he was the editor, while in South Africa, of INDIAN OPINION, in India, of YOUNG INDIA and later THE HARIJAN. Notwithstanding his numerous preoccupations, he always set apart some time every morning and evening for prayer. It is a marvel that one whose daily programme was so crowded could find time for experiments in education.

Gandhiji was not very highly educated according to academic standards. He passed from his school and qualified himself for the Bar in England. He was not a graduate of any university and much less did he specialise in education. He was not a teacher in the ordinary sense of the word and did not work in any school as such. But yet, he was deeply concerned with the educational system of our country.

This concern was the result of his innermost feelings. He loved this great country. He knew of its great past and had a vision of its great future. The domination of western culture which made us weak and slavish, pained him immensely. He was not concerned so much with poverty as this slavery. He considered that our poverty was the result of our slavery. A slave loses his initiative, his strength and his self-confidence. One who loses initiative, strength and self-confidence, can only be poor. He loses the zest for life. He feels that he cannot do anything great; he begins to beg and depend upon others. This resulted in the whole nation becoming poor. More than poverty in food, poverty in mind and poverty in high ideals pained him deeply. He found that the educational system that was imposed on the country was both the cause and result of this national slavery. If we were to make a new nation, we had first to train our children. Habits are formed, confidence is instilled and strength of mind achieved while children are young. If the nation was to rise, he thought that the prevailing educational system should be reformed. This problem constantly exercised his mind in the course of his meanderings, as he constantly experienced the evil effects of the existing system of education and the undesirable attitudes it was creating in the minds of our educated men and women.

Gandhiji loved children and loved them intensely. He was happiest when he was with them. Distinguished visitors who came to see him were amazed to find that he could give so much time to the children around him. The system of education that prevailed then, it seemed to him, was curbing their growth. It killed their initiative. It made their school-life joyless. The teachers forced the children to an inactive, passive life which destroyed their self-confidence and capacity to work. Gandhiji's love of children rebelled against this state of affairs. The one thought that troubled him most was how to combat this situation and do something to help the growth of children in the proper direction.

It was this revolt that made him active in the pursuit of a new and better type of education. A lesser man would have said or thought that he was engrossed in so much work that he had no time for this problem. But not so Gandhiji. He considered this vital and gave time for it. The result was that when he had an opportunity to deal with children, he tried to put into practice his own ideas and ideals in education. The first opportunity arose when he had to bring up his own children. He did not send his sons to the usual schools. He thought that the earliest school for a child, where proper attitudes could be created and the foundation laid for strength of character, was the home. In spite of his busy life, he gave some time to his children; he talked to them and guided them. In the course of his conversations with children were laid the foundations of his experiments in education.

The next opportunity that he had for putting his ideas into practice was at the Sphinx Park and the Tolstoy Farm. Gandhiji went to South Africa to practise Law. But fate ordained otherwise. He became the leader of the biggest freedom movement in South Africa. He inspired the Indians there with courage, strength and discipline and made them break the Black Laws in the Statute Book of that country. Hundreds of Indian men and women courted imprisonment. On their return they had to be maintained and their children had to be provided with education. And this gave Gandhiji an opportunity to try his experiments in education.

Gandhiji believed that character building was the essence of education. While knowledge of various subjects was good and necessary, the rock-bottom need for every person was to evolve a good character. As Sri Ramakrishna had said before him, "zeroes have value when they are put after '1' but if the '1' is missing, the zeroes are zeroes." Even so, Gandhiji believed that with character, knowledge was an embellishment and a distinction, but without character, knowledge counted for nothing except to make persons selfish exploiters. He, therefore, gathered around him a group of men and

women whom he could inspire and who believed that the development of character was the highest form of education. When he left South Africa, a group of Indians who had settled there came along with him. Thus he continued his experiments in education when he established his *ashram* on the banks of Sabarmati.

Closely following the establishment of the *ashram* came the Champaran struggle. In the course of his tours he went to Patna. A ryot from Champaran met him and told him about the sufferings of the Champaran agriculturists from the white indigo-planters in that district. Gandhiji, as usual, first wanted to make sure of facts and accordingly made a personal enquiry. This was resisted by the Government and he dared to court imprisonment for the cause. But later the Government yielded and the enquiry was made. This enquiry revealed that the allegations about the tyranny and oppression of the ryots were only too true. But more than that, his tours in those villages proved very clearly that what the villagers needed was proper education to enable them to lead healthy, courageous lives. For this purpose, he called for volunteers and started many schools in Champaran. The experience of these schools gave him an insight into the condition of our country and the needs of our villages.

After Champaran, Gandhiji was involved in many movements on a nation-wide scale. During the 1920 Non-cooperation Movement he had asked students to come out of schools and colleges. Thousands responded. In order to provide education for them National Schools and Colleges were started in various parts of India under his inspiration and guidance.

After he was released, he undertook a whirlwind tour throughout India for Khadi. In 1930 came the first Salt Satyagraha Movement. In 1935, when the general elections to the Central Legislative Assembly were held the Congress came out successful everywhere. When in 1937 the elections to the provincial legislatures were held, it was a foregone conclusion that in most of the provinces Congress would win by a large majority. After the acceptance of power by the Congress in the States, everybody looked to Gandhiji for guidance in the solution of the problems of education. It became both a challenge and an opportunity for Gandhiji to devise a system of education which would suit the Indian masses and give freedom of expression to our children. Gandhiji summoned a conference of distinguished educationists at Wardha to consider his ideas on the subject. I was one of the invitees to the conference and we still remember how he put forward his ideas. A small committee studied these ideas and though it was not able to accept everything he said, it substantially agreed with the basic ones which he expounded. The Zakir Hussain Committee worked out the details. What came out of it, has



been called the Basic Education System. India's problems were many and if they were to be tackled efficiently on a nationwide scale, Gandhiji came to the conclusion that the education in our schools and colleges must be reorganised on a sounder footing. He wanted our children and our people to be trained for the highest ideals in life, and to that end he desired to found a society based on self-discipline, love and service in which there would be no exploitation of one by another but all would do their allotted work. In such a system, work would have to be respected and the dignity of human labour raised. Love for oneself would have to be expanded into love for one's village, one's country and sympathy for all human beings. At the same time he wanted a method of education in which children could be cheerful and could learn by doing. He loved our children as passionately as he loved our country and out of this love and devotion to the child and country arose Basic Education.

Few in the world would have come in contact with as many men, women and children as it had fallen to the lot of Gandhiji. Wherever he went, millions surrounded him. He taught millions of people the way of a better life, better personal and social hygiene, greater punctuality and above all the way to gain confidence to lead a life of strength and courage. He was perhaps the greatest adult educator of the last many centuries. And so, not only did he evolve a system of education for children but he also achieved a large measure of adult and social education. He had a unique mind, always alert and receptive to all sound ideas and free from prejudice. He examined every idea on its merits. In various fields of life, namely, food, health, education, etc., he constantly experimented so as to discover the best.

In the following pages are found, in brief, accounts of his experiments in education at various stages of his life.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SCHOOL ON THE TOLSTOY FARM

When Gandhiji went to South Africa, he found the Indian community there grossly ill-treated. The Community itself was disorganised and discontented. His sensitive mind reacted very strongly against this. The technique of resistance that he developed came to be called Satyagraha. In the course of this Satyagraha large numbers of men and women courted imprisonment. When the bread-winners were removed, their families had to be maintained. This was indeed a big problem. Gandhiji thought over the situation and found that there was only one solution. He decided that the families should be kept at one place and become members of a co-operative community. Besides, they should be taught to lead simple, self-contained lives. Since at the same time the community would be corporate, it was necessary to instil into its members a sense of social justice and human regard for each other.

A suitable place to house this colony was found in a farm of about 1,100 acres about 20 miles from Johannesburg. It belonged to Mr. Kallenbach, one of the devoted friends of Gandhiji. Mr. Kallenbach gave the use of the farm free to the members of the community. On the land, there were nearly one thousand fruit-bearing trees and a small house which could accommodate about six persons. Water was supplied from two wells as well as from a spring which was about two furlongs from the house. Gandhiji invited the families to settle there. From the very beginning Gandhiji wanted to impress upon them that they should have no servants on the farm for farming operations, building work or household work. No servant of any kind was entertained. The various members of the colony had to share the work amongst them. Everything from cooking to scavenging was done by themselves. Men and women were housed separately in two separate blocks each at some distance from the other. After providing these elementary comforts, Gandhiji decided to erect a school house.

It was Gandhiji's idea, from the outset, that the colony should, as far as possible, be self-supporting. The families were a motley crowd, hailing from Gujarat, Tamilnad, Andhra and North India. There were people belonging to every denomination, namely, Hindu, Musalman, Parsi and Christian. About forty of them were young men, two or three old, five women and nearly thirty children of whom five were girls. It was Gandhiji's personality and the deep reverence which every one of them had for him, that welded this

crowd into a single unit. Gandhiji thought that a school for the education of the children was indispensable in the colony. This, he found to be the most difficult of all other tasks.

Because of the large amount of work involved in running the farm, the school could be held only in the afternoon. Mr. Kallenbach and himself were the teachers. As he had mentioned in his account in SATYAGRAHA IN SOUTH AFRICA, both of them were thoroughly exhausted by their morning labour and so were their pupils. The children spoke three languages—Gujarati, Telugu, and Tamil. Gandhiji was anxious to make these languages the medium of instruction. He had learnt a little Tamil by mixing with the Tamilians in South Africa but he did not know any Telugu. There were not many who could be used to teach. And so the brunt of the teaching fell on Gandhiji and it was often disturbed by his having to go to Johannesburg on other important work. No teacher ever had to teach heterogeneous classes of the kind that fell to his lot, consisting of pupils of all ages and both the sexes, from children of about seven years to young men of 20 and young girls of 12—13.

His experiences as a teacher are better given in his own words.

“As the Farm grew, it was found necessary to make some provision for the education of its boys and girls. There were, among these, Hindu, Musalman, Parsi and Christian boys and some Hindu girls. It was not possible, and I did not think it necessary, to engage special teachers for them. It was not possible, for qualified Indian teachers were scarce, and even when available, none would be ready to go to a place 21 miles distant from Johannesburg on a small salary. Also, we were certainly not overflowing with money. And I did not think it necessary to import teachers from outside the Farm. I did not believe in the existing system of education and I had a mind to find out by experience and experiment the true system. Only this much I know—that, under ideal conditions, true education could be imparted only by the parents, and that, then, there should be the minimum of outside help, that Tolstoy Farm was a family in which I occupied the place of the father, and that I should so far as possible shoulder the responsibility for the training of the young.

“The conception no doubt was not without its flaws. All the young people had not been with me since their childhood, they had been brought up in different conditions and environments, and they did not belong to the same religion. How could I do full justice to the young people, thus circumstanced, even if I assumed the place of pater-familias ?

“What was I to teach this ill-assorted group ? Again in what language should I talk to them ? The Tamil and Telugu children knew their own mother tongue or English or a little Dutch. What

were we to teach pupils who spoke three languages, Gujarati, Tamil and Telugu? I was anxious to make these languages the medium of instruction. I knew a little Tamil, but no Telugu. I divided the class into two sections, the Gujarati section to be taught in Gujarati and the rest in English. As the principal part of teaching, I arranged to tell or read to them some interesting stories. I also proposed to bring them into mutual contact and to lead them to cultivate a spirit of friendship and service. Then there was to be imparted some general knowledge of History and Geography and in some cases Arithmetic. Writing was also taught and so were some *bhajans*, which formed part of our prayers and to which therefore I tried to attract the Tamil children as well.

“But I had always given the first place to the culture of the heart or the building of character, and as I felt confident that moral training could be given to all alike, no matter how different their ages and their upbringing, I decided to live amongst them all the twenty-four hours of the day as their father. I regarded character building as the proper foundation for their education and, if the foundation was firmly laid, I was sure that the children could learn all the other things themselves or with the assistance of friends.

“But as I fully appreciated the necessity of a literary training in addition, I started some classes with the help of Mr. Kallenbach and Sji. Pragji Desai. Nor did I underrate the building up of the body. This they got in the course of their daily routine. For there were no servants on the Farm, and all the work, from cooking down to scavenging, was done by the inmates. There were many fruit trees to be looked after, and enough gardening to be done as well. Mr. Kallenbach was fond of gardening and had gained some experience of this work in one of the Governmental model gardens. It was obligatory on all, young and old, who were not engaged in the kitchen, to give some time to gardening. The children had the lion’s share of this work, which included digging pits, felling timber and lifting loads. This gave them ample exercise. They took *delight* in the work, and so they did not generally need any other exercise or games. Of course some of them, and sometimes all of them, malingered and shirked. Sometimes, I connived at their pranks, but often I was strict with them. I dare say they did not like the strictness, but I do not recollect their having resisted it. Whenever I was strict, I would, by argument, convince them that it was not right to play with one’s work. The conviction would, however, be shortlived, the next moment they would again leave their work and go to play. All the same we got along, and at any rate they built up fine physiques. There was scarcely any illness on the Farm, though it must be said that good air and water and regular hours of food were not a little responsible for this.

"A word about vocational training. It was my intention to teach every one of the youngsters some useful manual vocation. For this purpose Mr. Kallenbach went to a Trappist monastery and returned having learnt shoe-making. I learnt it from him and taught the art to such as were ready to take it up. Mr. Kallenbach had some experience of carpentry, and there was another inmate who knew it; so we had a small class in carpentry. Cooking almost all the youngsters knew.

"All this was new to them. They had never even dreamt that they would have to learn these things some day. For generally the only training that Indian children received in South Africa was in the three R's.

"On Tolstoy Farm we made it a rule that the youngsters should not be asked to do what the teachers did not do, and therefore, when they were asked to do any work, there was always a teacher co-operating and actually working with them. Hence whatever the youngsters learnt, they learnt cheerfully.

"But literary training proved a more difficult matter. I had neither the resources, nor the literary equipment necessary, and I had not the time I would have wished to devote to that subject. The morning had to be devoted to work on the farm and domestic duties, so the school hours had to be kept after the midday meal. We gave three periods at the most to literary training. Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil and Urdu were all taught and tuition was given through the vernaculars of the boys. English was taught as well. It was also necessary to acquaint the Gujarati Hindu with a little Sanskrit and to teach all the children, elementary History, Geography and Arithmetic. I had undertaken to teach Tamil and Urdu. The little Tamil I knew was acquired in villages and jail. I had not gone beyond Pope's excellent Tamil Handbook. My knowledge of the Urdu script was all that I had acquired on a single voyage and was confined to a few words I had learnt from Musalman friends. Of Sanskrit I knew no more than I had learnt at High School. Such was the capital with which I had to carry on. In poverty of literacy equipment, my colleagues went one better than me. But my love for the languages of my country, my confidence in my capacity as a teacher as also the ignorance of my pupils and more than that, their generosity stood me in good stead.

"The Tamil boys were all born in South Africa, and therefore knew very little Tamil, and did not know the script at all. So I had to teach them the script and the rudiments of grammar. That was easy enough. My pupils knew that they could any day beat me in Tamil conversation, and when Tamilians, not knowing English, came to see me, they became my interpreters. I got along merrily because

I never attempted to disguise my ignorance from my pupils. In all respects I showed myself to them exactly as I really was. Therefore in spite of my colossal ignorance of the language I never lost their love and respect. It was comparatively easier to teach the Musalman boys Urdu. They knew the script. I had simply to stimulate in them an interest in reading and to improve their handwriting.

"These youngsters were for the most part unlettered and un-schooled. But I found in the course of my work that I had very little to teach them, beyond weaning them from their laziness, and supervising their studies. As I was content with this, I could pull on with boys of different ages and learning different subjects in one and the same class-room.

"Of text-books, about which we hear so much, I never felt the want. I do not even remember having made much use of the books that were available. I did not find it at all necessary to load the boys with quantities of books. I have always felt that the true text-book for the pupil is his teacher. I remember very little that my teachers taught me from books but I have even now a clear recollection of the things they taught me independently of books.

"Children take in much more and with less labour through their ears than through their eyes. I do not remember having read any book from cover to cover with my boys. But I gave them, in my own language, all that I had digested from my reading of various books, and I dare say they are still carrying a recollection of it in their minds. It was laborious for them to remember what they learnt from books, but what I imparted to them by word of mouth, they could repeat with the greatest ease. Reading was a task for them, but listening to me was a pleasure, when I did not bore them by failure to make my subject interesting. And from the questions that my talks prompted them to put, I had a measure of their power of understanding."\*

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\* Pp. 242-3 GANDHIJ'S SATYAGRAHA IN SOUTH AFRICA—Navajivan, 1950, 303-5 GANDHIJ'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY—Navajivan Publishing House, 1956.

## CHAPTER III

### TRAINING FOR CHARACTER

Gandhiji considered that the essence of education consisted in the training of the spirit and training for character. While physical and intellectual development was necessary, the training of a child's heart and spirit was more important. At the Tolstoy Farm, he gave much thought as to how this training could be given. In his Autobiography he has described in detail as to how he attempted to give this spiritual training.

"The spiritual training of the boys was a much more difficult matter than their physical and mental training. I relied little on religious books for the training of the spirit. Of course I believed that every student should be acquainted with the elements of his own religion and have a general knowledge of his own scriptures, and therefore, I provided for such knowledge as best I could. But that, to my mind, was part of the intellectual training. Long before I undertook the education of the youngsters of the Tolstoy Farm I had realized that the training of the spirit was a thing by itself. To develop the spirit is to build character and to enable one to work towards a knowledge of God and self-realisation. And I held that this was an essential part of the training of the young, and that all training without culture of the spirit was of no use, and might be even harmful.

"How then was this spiritual training to be given? I made the children memorise and recite hymns, and read to them from books on moral training. But that was far from satisfying me. As I came into closer contact with them I saw that it was not through books that one could impart training of the spirit. Just as physical training was to be imparted through physical exercise, and intellectual through intellectual exercise, even so the training of the spirit was possible only through the exercise of the spirit. And the exercise of the spirit entirely depended on the life and character of the teacher. The teacher had always to be mindful of his p's, whether he was in the midst of his boys or not.

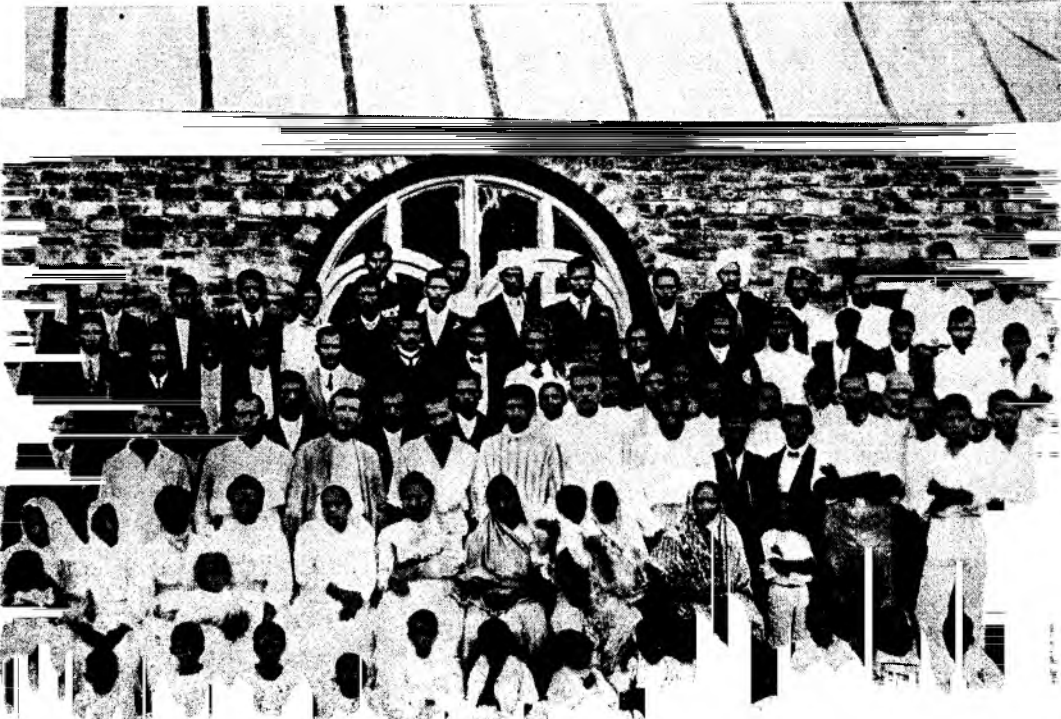
"It is possible for a teacher situated miles away to affect the spirit of the pupils by his way of living. It would be idle for me, if I were a liar, to teach boys to tell the truth. A cowardly teacher would never succeed in making his boys valiant, and a stranger to self-restraint could never teach his pupils the value of self-restraint. I saw, therefore, that I must be an eternal object-lesson to the boys and girls living with me. They thus became my teachers, and I learnt I must be good and live straight, if only for their sakes. I



*Gandhiji with Kallenbach and other settlers at the Tolstoy Farm*



*Gandhiji and Kasturba with fellow settlers at the Phoenix Settlement, Natal, 1906*



may say that the increasing discipline and restraint I imposed on myself at Tolstoy Farm was mostly due to those wards of mine.

“One of them was wild, unruly, given to lying, and quarrelsome. On one occasion he broke out most violently. I was exasperated. I never punished my boys, but this time I was very angry. I tried to reason with him. But he was adamant and even tried to over-reach me. At last I picked up a ruler lying at hand and delivered a blow on his arm. I trembled as I struck him. I dare say he noticed it. This was an entirely novel experience for them all. The boy cried out and begged to be forgiven. He cried not because the beating was painful to him; he could, if he had been so minded, have paid me back in the same coin, being a stoutly built youth of seventeen; but he realised my pain in being driven to this violent resource. Never again after this incident did he disobey me. Cases of misconduct on the part of the boys often occurred after this, but I never resorted to corporal punishment. Thus in my endeavour to impart spiritual training to the boys and girls under me, I came to understand better and better the power of the spirit”.\*

“Day by day it became increasingly clear to me how very difficult it was to bring up and educate boys and girls in the right way. If I was to be their real teacher and guardian, I must touch their hearts. I must share their joys and sorrows, I must help them to solve the problems that faced them, and I must take along the right channel the surging aspirations of their youth.

“In those days I had to move between Johannesburg and Phoenix. Once when I was in Johannesburg I received tidings of the moral fall of two of the inmates of the Ashram. News of an apparent failure or reverse in the Satyagraha struggle would not have shocked me, but this news came upon me like a thunderbolt. The same day I took the train for Phoenix. During the journey my duty seemed clear to me. I felt that the guardian or teacher was responsible, to some extent at least, for lapse of his ward or pupil. So my responsibility regarding the incidents in question became clear to me as daylight. I felt that the only way the guilty parties could be made to realise my distress and the depth of their own fall would be for me to do some penance. So I imposed upon myself a fast for seven days and a vow to have only one meal a day for a period of four months and a half.

“It is not my purpose to make out from these incidents that it is the duty of a teacher to resort to fasting whenever there is a delinquency on the part of his pupils. I hold, however, that some occasions do call for this drastic remedy. But it presupposes clearness of vision and spiritual fitness. Where there is no true love

\* Pp. 338-40 GANDHIJIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY—Navajivan, 1950.

between the teacher and the pupil, where the pupil's delinquency has not touched the very being of the teacher and where the pupil has no respect for the teacher, fasting is out of place and may even be harmful. Though there is thus room for doubting the propriety of fasts in such cases, there is no question about the teacher's responsibility for the errors of his pupil."\*

Gandhiji felt that character-building on the part of every single individual was the only sure foundation for nation-building. To him character meant creation of a pattern of living based on Truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa). By Truth he meant not only truth in speech but in a much wider sense. There should be truth in thought and truth in action. But how does one realise truth? He has given the following reply: "By single minded devotion (abhyasa) and indifference to all other interests in life (vairagya). The quest of Truth involves tapas—self-suffering, sometimes even unto death. There can be no place in it for even a trace of self-interest. It is the path that leads to God. There is no place in it for a coward. In this connection it would be well to ponder over the lives and examples of Harischandra, Prahlad, Ramachandra, Imam Hasan and Imam Hussain and the Christian saints."

Leading a life of the spirit and development of character meant shaping our lives on the basis of these two fundamental and vital principles—Truth and Non-violence. In his own life, in whatever circumstances he might have been placed these were the touchstones by which Gandhiji judged and decided everyone of his actions. And so he proclaimed in the manner of the greatest scriptures of the world, the need to follow a life of the highest purity. "Brahmacharya", as he put it, "is the source of all strength. A depraved man can never have the strength or the confidence to do anything great. This required great watchfulness in our daily thoughts and life, for eternal watchfulness is the price that a striver has to pay for leading a higher life."

He wanted to create a set of men and women, who would uphold these ideals in their daily lives, and at the same time devote themselves to the service of the people and the liberation of the country. The creation of such men and women, who would have the highest character, who would not stray from their path for the satisfaction of small desires and who would follow truth and non-violence at all costs, he regarded as the foundation for all education and for the regeneration of the country. For training such workers, he wanted to found an ashram as soon as he came to India. The story of the founding of the ashram and the way in which he tried to conduct it,

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\* Pp. 342-43 GANDHIJI'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY—Navajivan, 1950.

forms another important and exciting chapter in his experiments in education. That will be the subject of a later chapter.

Gandhiji attached the greatest importance to the character and quality of teachers. To him education was not the various items of knowledge taught in a school room, but the hundred qualities of character and strength which the students imbibed from the life of the teacher. As he mentioned in his letter with regard to the Champaran schools, "the chief thing aimed at is contact of children with men and women of culture and unimpeachable moral character." That to him was the essence of education.

Many times we find people asking the question, why should we look into the character of the teacher? Is it not sufficient if he is good in teaching his subject? This does not show a proper understanding of the function of the teacher and the objective of our schools. Is our objective merely to put in a few disconnected scraps of knowledge in the minds of our children or to shape them into strong men and women who have confidence and character? The strength of a community is measured by the level of character maintained by the ordinary man and woman in that community. If we want to build a strong nation, it is absolutely necessary that our schools should share in this objective and that can only be done by our teachers being men and women with character.

The function of the teacher is not merely to stimulate intellectual faculties in the taught, but also to inculcate high thoughts and ideals. Enduring influences in the moulding of character and strength of the child come from the teacher and therefore, so far as the proper running of our schools is concerned, the character of the teacher is of the utmost importance. This is of greater importance in schools for the young, where children have implicit faith in the teacher.

In the conduct of the schools under his care or in those started under his auspices, Gandhiji strictly enjoined that the young people should not be asked to do anything which the teachers did not do. We often preach in schools and elsewhere about the dignity of labour and that we should learn to do all work ourselves, including that which is considered the most menial. But why is it that in spite of our constant preaching, children do not cultivate this quality? The reason is not far to seek. Children find themselves asked to do things, which their elders and teachers do not do themselves. No permanent improvement in character can be effected except through example. Nothing carries conviction into the minds of people as life actually lived. Any number of speeches, dialogues, articles or other propaganda cannot be as effective as the practice of principles in daily life. This is true in all cases and particularly so in the case of children, who understand us more by our actions, than by our

words. And so Gandhiji always insisted that when children were asked to do any work, there should always be a teacher co-operating and actually working with them.

While the teacher should act towards the child as a parent with understanding and sympathy, it was also necessary that children should develop a proper attitude towards the teacher. Without faith, humility, submission and veneration towards the teacher, there cannot be any growth. It has been said in our scriptures that the Guru must be worshipped as a God. Such a relationship would inspire both the teacher and the taught to lead a higher life.

## CHAPTER IV

### MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

One other feature that emerges from Gandhiji's observations in the previous pages is that from the very beginning he was convinced that the proper medium of instruction for a child was his mother tongue. This is remarkable when we survey the period when he thought so. That was early in the 20th century, when the British hold on India and the world was very strong and English held the gateway to all material progress and advancement. In spite of almost unanimous opposition from the so-called highly educated people, Gandhiji held that it was wrong to use a foreign medium for the instruction of our children.

In later years, when he had the opportunity to explain his ideas in greater detail, he gave cogent reasons as to why he thought so. This attitude of his was born not out of any hatred for English, but out of a rational investigation of the question. He explained :

"The foreign medium has caused brain fag, put an undue strain upon the nerves of our children, made them crammers and imitators, unfitted them for original work and thought, and disabled them from filtrating their learning to the family or the masses. The foreign medium has made our children practically foreigners in their own land. It is the greatest tragedy of the existing system of education. The foreign medium has also prevented the growth of our vernaculars. If I had the powers of a despot, I would today stop the tuition of our boys and girls through a foreign medium, and require all the teachers and professors on pain of dismissal to introduce the change forthwith. I would not wait for the preparation of text-books. They will follow the change. It is an evil that needs a summary remedy.

"I must not be understood to be decrying English or its noble literature. The columns of Harijan are sufficient evidence of my love of English. But the nobility of its literature cannot avail the Indian nation any more than the temperate climate or the scenery of England can avail her. India has to flourish in her own climate, and scenery, and her own literature, even though all the three may be inferior to the English climate, scenery and literature. We and our children must build on our own heritage. If we merely borrow from another we impoverish our own. We can never grow on foreign victuals. I want the nation to have the treasures contained in that language, and for that matter in the other languages of the world, through its own vernaculars. I do not need to learn Bengali in order to know the beauties of Rabindranath's matchless productions. I get

them through good translations. Gujarati boys and girls do not need to learn Russian to appreciate Tolstoy's short stories. They learn them through good translations. It is the boast of Englishmen that the best of the world's literary output is in the hands of that nation in simple English inside of a week of its publication. Why need I learn English to get at the best of what Shakespeare and Milton thought and wrote ?

"It would be good economy to set apart a class of students whose business would be to learn the best of what is to be learnt in the different languages of the world and give the translation in the vernaculars. Our masters chose the wrong way for us, and habit has made the wrong appear as right.

"I find daily proof of the increasing and continuing wrong being done to the millions by our false de-Indianising education. These graduates who are my valued associates themselves flounder when they have to give expression to their innermost thoughts. They are strangers in their own homes. Their vocabulary in the mother tongue is so limited that they cannot always finish their speech without having recourse to English words and even sentences. Nor can they exist without English books. They often write to one another in English. I cite the case of my companions to show how deep the evil has gone.

"It has been argued that the wastage that occurs in our colleges need not worry us if, out of the collegians, one Jagadish Bose can be produced by them. I should freely subscribe to the argument, if the wastage was unavoidable. I hope I have shown that it was and is even now avoidable. Moreover the creation of a Bose does not help the argument. For Bose was not a product of the present education. He rose in spite of the terrible handicaps under which he had to labour. And his knowledge became almost intransmissible to the masses. We seem to have come to think that no one can hope to be like a Bose unless he knows English. I cannot conceive a grosser superstition than this. No Japanese feels so helpless as we seem to do.

"The medium of instruction should be altered at once and at any cost, the provincial languages being given the rightful place. I would prefer even temporary chaos in higher education to the criminal waste that is daily accumulating.

"In order to enhance the status and the market-value of the provincial languages, I would have the language of the law courts to be the language of the province where the court is situated. The proceedings of the provincial legislatures must be in the language, or even in the languages of the province where a province has more than one language within its borders. I suggest to the legislators that they could, by enough application, inside of a month, understand

the languages of their provinces. There is nothing to prevent a Tamilian from easily learning the simple grammar and a few hundred words of Telugu, Malayalam, and Kanarese are allied to Tamil. At the centre Hindustani must rule supreme.

"In my opinion this is not a question to be decided by academicians. They cannot decide through what language the boys and girls of a place are to be educated. That question is already decided for them in every free country. Nor can they decide the subjects to be taught. That depends upon the wants of the country to which they belong. Theirs is a privilege of enforcing the nation's will in the best manner possible. When this country becomes really free, the question of medium will be settled only one way. The academicians will frame the syllabus and prepare text-books accordingly. And the products of the education of a free India will answer the requirements of the country, as today they answer those of the foreign ruler. So long as we the educated classes play with this question, I very much fear we shall not produce the free and healthy India of our dreams. We have to grow by strenuous effort out of our bondage, whether it is educational, economical, social or political. The effort itself is three-fourths of the battle.

"If the medium is changed at once and not gradually, in an incredibly short time we shall find text-books and teachers coming into being to supply the want. And if we mean business, in a year's time we shall find that we need never have been party to the tragic waste of the nation's time and energy in trying to learn the essentials of culture through a foreign medium."

Gandhiji was faced with this problem with reference to the education of his own children even when he was in South Africa. Good friends argued strongly with him about the advantages that his sons would get by adopting English as the medium of instruction. Polak and Gandhiji had often very heated discussions on this subject. Polak contended with all the vigour and love at his command that if the children were to learn a universal language like English from their infancy, they would easily gain considerable advantage over others in the race of life. But this argument failed to convince Gandhiji. To quote Gandhiji's words: "It has always been my conviction, that Indian parents who train their children to think and talk in English from their infancy betray their children and their country. They deprive them of the spiritual and social heritage of the nation and render them to that extent unfit for the service of the country. Having these convictions I made a point of always talking to my children in Gujarati. Polak never liked this, but he failed to convince me. Though my sons have suffered for want of a full literary education, the knowledge of the mother tongue, that they naturally acquired has been all to their and the country's good."\*

\* Pp. 381-82 GANDHIJI'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY—Navajivan.



## CHAPTER V

### EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF WORK

Another aspect that emerged from Gandhiji's experience on the Tolstoy Farm, was the great educational value of work. As he has said, "The weak became stronger in the Tolstoy farm and labour proved a tonic for all".

Even when he was a student in England, Gandhiji experienced the good effects of physical effort. He took rooms sufficiently far from his place of work, so that he could have walks of eight or ten miles a day. He was of opinion that it was his long walks that kept him practically free from illness throughout his stay in England. Throughout his life, he kept up this walking habit and in later years, some of his most famous interviews with the most distinguished persons in the world were given during these morning and evening walks.

Later when he went to South Africa as a Barrister, even before the advent of the Indian struggle, he began to lead a simple life. Polak who was to be his life-long and devoted friend in that country gave him Ruskin's *UNTO THIS LAST*, to occupy him during a train journey from Johannesburg to Durban. This brought about a great transformation in him, which lasted throughout his life. He discovered in it some of his convictions. These were that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all, that a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's or anyone else's; and that a life of labour, *i.e.*, the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is worth living. These ideas impressed him so much, that he immediately determined to reduce them to practice.

He introduced manual work as much as possible in his own household. To say it in his own words :

"Instead of buying baker's bread, we began to prepare unleavened wholemeal bread at home according to Kuhne's recipe. Common mill flour was no good for this, and the use of handground flour, it was thought, would ensure more simplicity, health and economy. So I purchased a hand-mill for £.7. The iron wheel was too heavy to be tackled by one man, but easy for two. Polak and I and the children usually worked it. My wife also occasionally lent a hand, though the grinding hour was her usual time for commencing kitchen work. Mrs. Polak now joined us on her arrival. The grinding proved a very beneficial exercise for the children. Neither this nor any other work was ever imposed on them, but it was a pastime to them to come and lend a hand, and they were at liberty to break

off whenever tired. But the children and others as a rule never failed me. Not that I had no laggards at all, but most did their work cheerfully enough. I can recall few youngsters in those days fighting shy of work or pleading fatigue”.\*

With this background it is not strange that work became an important part of life at the Tolstoy Farm. Everybody worked hard on the farm. All farming and household duties and even building operations were performed by the inmates. The sanitary arrangements were also looked after by them. In spite of the large number of settlers one could not find refuse or dirt anywhere on the farm. All rubbish was buried in trenches dug for that purpose. All wastewater was collected in buckets and used to water trees and plants. Leaving of food and vegetables were utilised as manure. A square pit one foot and half was dug near the house to receive the night-soil. This was fully covered with the excavated earth, with the result there was not the least smell. There were no flies and no one could even imagine that night-soil had been buried there. Thus a source of possible nuisance was converted into very valuable manure. As Gandhiji said in his account of the Tolstoy Farm “if night-soil was properly utilised, we would get manure worth lakhs of rupees and also secure immunity from a large number of diseases. By our bad habits we spoil our river banks and furnish excellent breeding ground for flies, with the result that the very flies which through our criminal negligence settle upon uncovered night-soil, defile our bodies after we have bathed. A small spade is the means of salvation from a great nuisance. Leaving night-soil, cleaning the nose, or spitting on the road is a sin against God as well as humanity and betrays a sad want of consideration for others. The man who does not cover his waste deserves heavy penalty, even if he lives in a forest”.

A workshop for carpentry, shoe-making, etc., was also erected. Having founded a sort of a village, they required all manner of things, large and small, from benches to boxes and all these they made themselves. They learnt to make sandals, which were sold to friends. Gandhiji was convinced about the value of teaching children village handicrafts.

- ✓ “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. I hold that the highest development of the mind and the soul is possible under such a system of education. Only every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically as is done today but scientifically, i.e., the child should know the why and the wherefore of every process. I am not writing this without some

\* Page 379 GANDHIJI’S AUTOBIOGRAPHY—Navajivan.

confidence, because it has the backing of experience. I have myself taught sandal-making and even spinning on these lines with good results.

“Whatever may be true of other countries, in India at any rate where more than eighty per cent of the population is agricultural and another ten per cent industrial, it is a crime to make education merely literary, and to unfit boys and girls for manual work in after-life. Indeed I hold that as the larger part of our time is devoted to labour for earning our bread, our children must from their infancy be taught the dignity of such labour. Our children should not be so taught as to despise labour. There is no reason why a peasant’s son after having gone to a school should become useless, as he does become, as an agricultural labourer. It is a sad thing that our school boys look upon manual labour with disfavour, if not contempt”.

Gandhiji’s experience on the Tolstoy Farm was in 1910. His larger experience in India for nearly half a century did not make him change his opinions about the educational value of work. But on the other hand, his wider knowledge of the country only confirmed him in this opinion. He was of the opinion that true education of the intellect could only come through the proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, namely, the hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words an intelligent use of bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. A proper all-round development of the mind can therefore take place only when it proceeds *pari passu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child.

This idea was developed in greater detail, when he put the ideals of a national system of education called Basic Education before the country in 1937, but we find the embryo of these ideas even as far back as 1910 in his educational experiments in South Africa.

## CHAPTER VI

### EXPERIMENT IN CO-EDUCATION

On the Tolstoy Farm School, boys and girls met freely. Gandhiji has described in his own words, in the passages quoted below, his experiment in co-education at the Tolstoy Farm. He has also expressed his misgivings and failures.

“My Experiment of co-education on Tolstoy Farm was the most fearless of its type. I dare not today allow, or train children to enjoy the liberty which I had granted the Tolstoy Farm class. I have often felt that my mind then used to be more innocent than it is now, and that was due perhaps to my ignorance. Since then I have had bitter experiences, and have sometimes burnt my fingers badly. Persons whom I took to be thoroughly innocent have turned out corrupt. I have observed the roots of evil deep down in my own nature; and timidity has claimed me for its own.

“I do not repent having made the experiment. My conscience bears witness that it did not do any harm. But as a child who has burnt himself with hot milk blows even into whey, my present attitude is one of extra caution.

“This was my experiment. I sent the boys reputed to be mischievous and the innocent young girls to bathe in the same spot at the same time. I had fully explained the duty of self-restraint to the children, who were all familiar with my Satyagraha doctrine. I knew, and so did the children, that I loved them with a mother's love. The spring was at some distance from the kitchen. Was it a folly to let the children meet there for bath and yet to expect them to be innocent? My eyes always followed the girls as a mother's eyes would follow a daughter. The time was fixed when all the boys and all the girls went together for a bath. There was an element of safety in the fact that they went in a body. Solitude was always avoided. Generally I also would be at the spring at the same time.

“All of us slept in an open verandah. The boys and girls would spread themselves around me. There was hardly a distance of three feet between any two beds. Some care was exercised in arranging the order of the beds, but any amount of such care would have been futile in the case of wicked minds. I now see that God alone safeguarded the honour of these boys and girls. I made the experiment from a belief that boys and girls could thus live together without harm, and the parents with their boundless faith in me allowed me to make it.

“One day one of the young men made fun of two girls, and the girls themselves or some child brought me the information. The news made me tremble. I made inquiries and found that the report was true. I remonstrated with the young man, but that was not enough. I wished the two girls to have some sign on their person as a warning to every young man that no evil eye might be cast upon them, and as a lesson to every girl that no one dare assail their purity. The passionate *Ravana* could not so much as touch *Sita* with evil intent while *Rama* was thousands of miles away. What mark should the girls bear so as to give them a sense of security and at the same time to sterilize the sinner’s eye? This question kept me awake, that they might let me cut off their fine long hair. On the farm we shaved and cut the hair of one another, and we therefore kept scissors and clipping machines. At first the girls would not listen to me. I had already explained the situation to the elderly women who could not bear to think of my suggestion but yet quite understood my motive, and they had finally accorded their support to me. They were both of them noble girls. One of them is, alas, now no more. She was very bright and intelligent. The other is living and the mistress of a household of her own. They came round after all, and at once the very hand that is narrating this incident set to cut off their hair. And afterwards I analysed and explained my procedure before my class, with excellent results. I never heard of a joke again. The girls in question did not lose in any case; goodness knows how much they gained. I hope the young men still remember this incident and keep their eyes from sin.”

Gandhiji has categorically and unequivocally warned his readers that such experiments are not intended for imitation. Throughout his life, he advocated co-education; but at the same time he insisted that those who conduct such schools must be themselves completely above board, and should be men and women of the highest character. He had no doubt that without such men and women of high and reputable character, a co-educational institution might easily degenerate. Taking such character for granted, he had no doubt in his mind that co-education was beneficial. In 1927, when Gandhiji went round on an all India tour advocating the cause of Khadi, he came to Tiruppur in South India. I had just then completed my law and was practising at that place, when I had the privilege of serving him and attending on him during the days he stayed there. We had long conversations about Khadi, Village Industries and various aspects of education. Referring to co-education, he said: “In the homes and in the streets, in the fields and in the markets and in all other places of activity, men and women have to work together. Studying and moving together in schools from the early years will train them to move with each other naturally. But, he must be a

bold man who will try it in the present stage of our society for, he must be prepared for difficulties and failures.”

Many years later I had occasion to speak to him again on this very subject. In 1947 the Congress had accepted office in the States. A meeting of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh was held on the 23rd April, 1947 at Patna, where Gandhiji was then staying. The Education Ministers from the various States of India attended the meeting. I also happened to attend it as Minister of Education of Madras State. In the discussions that ensued at the meeting, I ventured to say that co-education among children in Elementary Schools might be allowed as that was the age of innocence. It might be allowed among the grown-ups as they were expected to know their minds and the consequences of their actions but in Training Schools and High Schools and similar institutions where the pupils were adolescents and of an impressionable age and not mature enough to know their minds or the consequences of their actions, co-education might not be desirable. To this Gandhiji replied : “We shall have to rid ourselves of this sex mentality. Even in Training Schools where adolescents are studying, if the teachers are intelligent, pure and filled with the spirit of Nayi Talim, there is no danger. Though I speak boldly I am not unaware of the attendant risks. But you as a responsible minister should think for yourself and act accordingly”.\*

Gandhiji believed in co-education. But he was also emphatically of the opinion that the success of co-education depended on the purity and character of the teachers and organisers in charge of the institutions. If such purity was not forthcoming, he was equally sure that co-education in such institutions was attended with great risk, and should be avoided. As he has said : “Before launching on such experiments, a teacher has to be both father and mother to his pupils and be prepared for all eventualities, and only the hardest penance can fit him to conduct them”.†

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\* Page 452 Tendulkar's MAHATMA, Vol. 7.

† Page 246 GANDHIJI'S SATYAGRAHA IN SOUTH AFRICA

## CHAPTER VII

### CHAMPARAN SCHOOLS

The District of Champaran is situated in the north-western corner of Bihar adjoining the Himalayas. It was one of the most backward tracts in India. The Champaran tenants were bound by law to plant three out of twenty parts of his land with indigo for his landlord. This was called the tinkathra system. In the earlier days the lessees were Indians, but later, European planters took over indigo and sugarcane cultivation. The poor and ignorant ryots were cajoled and coerced to grow indigo on their lands. This caused them no end of misery, but there was none to espouse their cause.

Gandhiji had gone to Calcutta to attend the meeting of the All India Congress Committee, where Sri Rajkumar Shukla, one of the agriculturists from Champaran, met him and importuned him to come there. It was there he first met Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Acharya Kripalani. He discussed the situation with the lawyer-politicians there. After studying the case of the Indigo Cultivators, he told them that recourse to Law Courts in such cases was useless. "We cannot sit still until we have driven this evil system out of Bihar", he said, "I had thought that I should be able to leave from here in two days, but I now realise that the work may take two years. I am prepared to give that time if necessary". Before taking any action, he wanted to go to the spot and gather first-hand information. Wherever he went, he was received with wild enthusiasm. The people began to gather courage and came out in the open to tell their grievances. This offended the European landlords, who moved the foreign administration to restrain Gandhiji, who was going from village to village.

On April 16, 1917, he was issued an order to abstain from remaining in the District of Champaran, which he was required to leave 'by the next available train.' To this Gandhiji sent the following reply: "Out of a sense of public responsibility I feel it to be my duty to say that I am unable to leave the district, but if it pleases the authorities, I shall submit to the order by suffering the penalty of disobedience." He prepared himself for arrest and imprisonment and even made arrangements for the continuance of the movement. Next day in the court he refused to give bail, and even pleaded guilty there in order to give an opportunity for the magistrate to convict him. But as the case was weak and popular resentment was running high, it was postponed and later withdrawn. Gandhiji thereupon made a full enquiry which brought out the high-

handedness and atrocities of many European landlords. This, in short, is the story of the Champaran Satyagraha.

From the beginning Gandhiji felt that the main reason for the sufferings of the tenants in Champaran was ignorance. He was convinced that no outside agency could improve their lot unless their mental and moral condition improved and that no work of a permanent nature was possible without proper education. Therefore he decided that arrangements for the spread of education among them was as necessary as the redress of their grievances. For this purpose, he appealed for volunteers. In that appeal he had described the sort of people he wanted as teachers: "They have to be grown up, reliable, hard-working men, who would not mind taking the spade and repairing and making village roads and cleaning village cess pools and who would in their dealings with their landlords, guide the ryots aright." In response to the appeal some very good volunteers arrived from Bombay. It was decided to open Primary Schools in six villages.

The objects, ideals and methods of education imparted in these village schools were described as follows by Mahatmaji:

"In the schools I am opening, children under the age of 12 only are admitted. The idea is to get hold of as many children as possible and to give them an all round education, i.e., a good knowledge of Hindi or Urdu and, through that medium, of arithmetic and rudiments of history and geography, a knowledge of simple scientific principles and some industrial training. No cut and dried syllabus has yet been prepared because I am going on an unbeaten track. I look upon our present system with horror and distrust. Instead of developing the moral and mental faculties of the little children it dwarfs them. In my experiment whilst I shall draw upon what is good in it, I shall endeavour to avoid the defects of the present system. The chief thing aimed at is contact of children with men and women of culture and unimpeachable moral character. That to me is education. Literary training is to be used merely as a means to that end. The industrial training is to be designed for the boys and the girls who may come to us for an additional means of livelihood. It is not intended that on completing their education they should leave their hereditary occupation but make use of the knowledge acquired in the school to refine agriculture and agricultural life. Our teachers will also touch the lives of grown up people and if at all possible, penetrate the *purdah*. Instruction will be given to grown up people in hygiene and about the advantages of joint action for the promotion of communal welfare, such as, the making of village roads, the sinking of wells, etc. And as no school will be manned by teachers who are not men or women of good training, we propose to give free medical aid so far as is possible."



These village schools were run most economically. The villagers provided the teachers with board and lodging. Medical relief was simple. Castor oil, quinine and sulphur ointment were the drugs provided. A number of persons availed themselves of the medical aid. But sanitation proved more difficult. The people were not prepared to do anything themselves. Even the field labourers were not ready to do their own scavenging. But the volunteers did not lose heart. They swept the roads, cleaned the wells, filled up the pools and persuaded the villagers to raise volunteers from amongst themselves. By their service in schools, sanitation work and medical relief, the volunteers gained the confidence and respect of the village folk and were able to bring good influence to bear on them.

Schools till now had been islands in our society taking no part in community life. Except for the formal teaching of the children in their precincts, the teachers did not move in the community. Neither were they interested nor did they take part in such matters as eradicating disease, arranging for a healthy life, building communications, working for better ways of marketing, in which the people were interested. The teachers, though they lived many years in a village, continued to be strangers in it. Consequently the people also had little interest in their school. The teacher was rarely known outside his very narrow little circle. Though he was about the only man in the village who was educated, his education did not win for him sufficient regard or affection from the people, the main reason being that it was not beneficial to the community.

Gandhiji wanted this state of things to change. He wanted that the teacher should become the enlightened leader for the village, interested in all matters and movements which would uplift the people. Instead of being an island in society, he wanted the school to be a centre of light and learning. Instead of teaching only children, he wanted the school master to be a teacher of adults and their friend, philosopher and guide. By virtue of his education, the teacher, he believed, should be the natural leader of the village community. He wanted every teacher to develop a spirit of initiative, enterprise and public mindedness in order to take his full share in the village life, which would be for the benefit of the children, the community and himself.

Another instruction which he issued in this connection to the teachers in Champaran schools deserves mention. While he wanted them to go out into the villages and work, he was anxious to keep them from the troubles of polemical politics. All of them had express instructions not to concern themselves with grievances against planters or with politics. Anybody who had such complaints to make, was to be referred to Gandhiji. No one was to venture



*In the happy company of a child*



*Looking into a microscope*

out of his own allotted work. At the present time when we want our school teachers to take part in welfare work in villages, these instructions have great significance. Each village, firka, taluk, district or State has its own factions, groups and parties with such dissatisfaction between them. The teacher and the social worker in order to do their work efficiently should not concern themselves with any of these parties or factions. In the long run that will be the measure of his success.

The main message of his experiment at the Champaran schools was that schools, in addition to being places of instruction for the young, should also be community centres for the planning and initiation of all good work for the uplift of villages. He explained to teachers in these schools that along with literary subjects, they should teach cleanliness and good manners. They should also cultivate in the children the quality of working in co-operation with others. He was aware that to accomplish this kind of work successfully teachers of high quality were necessary. Apart from academic qualifications, they should have leadership, conduct themselves with dignity and be imbued with the spirit of service.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EDUCATION AT SABARMATI

The idea of establishing an Ashram where kindred spirits with faith in a spiritual life could come together, was in the mind of Gandhiji for many years, before the establishment of the Satyagraha Ashram near Ahmedabad. Even his house in Johannesburg was a sort of an Ashram in this sense. Millie Graham Polak has described in her book, *GANDHI—THE MAN*, the way of life and the high level of thought and discussion in that house. It was an open house in which friends were always welcome and where Indians of all grades and kind came for advice, whatever the time. As we have mentioned before, Ruskin's *UNTO THIS LAST*, made a great impression on his mind. He wanted to put into practice the ideas contained in that book by betaking himself to a secluded place, remote from the din of life, where he could live side by side with workers. For that purpose, he purchased a hundred acres of land and founded what came to be called the Phoenix Settlement.

The second step was taken in 1906. After much thought and considered judgment, he came to the conclusion that brahmacharya was the *sine qua non* of a life devoted to service. From this time onward he looked upon Phoenix as a religious institution. The same year witnessed the advent of Satyagraha, which was based on a religious outlook on life and implied faith in truth and Ahimsa. Religion here was not to be understood in a narrow sense, but in its broadest meaning, encompassing basic principles common to all religions.

The third step was taken in 1911. Till this year, only those who were working in his printing press and for his paper lived at Phoenix. But now, as a part of the Satyagraha Movement, there was need for an Ashram, where Satyagrahi families could live and lead a higher life. It was as a result of this need that the Tolstoy Farm came into existence. The story of the Tolstoy Farm has already been told in earlier chapters. That name was given as Gandhiji and his co-worker Kallenbach were followers of Tolstoy and endeavoured to practise much of his doctrine. The final Satyagraha Campaign was started in 1913 and the struggle in South Africa ended in 1914. Thereupon, in July of that year Gandhiji left South Africa. It was decided that all settlers who wanted to go to India should be enabled to go there. The idea was to found a new institution in India for those who went there with him and to continue in the mother country the community life commenced at the Tolstoy and Phoenix farms. When he reached

India early in 1915, therefore, he wanted to establish an Ashram for that purpose in some place in India.

He toured all parts of India for a year and visited many institutions. He was invited by several cities to establish the Ashram in their neighbourhood with promises of assistance in various ways. Swami Shradadhanandaji wanted him to settle at Haridwar. Many friends in Ahmedabad pressed him to settle down there and volunteered to find the expenses of the Ashram as well as a building to house the Ashram. Gandhiji finally chose Ahmedabad. Being a Gujarati, he thought that it would be possible for him to render the greatest service to the country through the Gujarati language. Besides as Ahmedabad was a great centre of weaving, he considered that it might be a favourable field for developing hand spinning as a cottage industry.

The Ashram was established in a rented house on May 25, 1915, and later shifted to Sabarmati. At the beginning there were twenty inmates, most of them from South Africa. Of these, the larger majority spoke Tamil or Telugu. The main activity at the Ashram at the time was teaching Sanskrit, Hindi and Tamil to the old as well as young inmates, who also received some general education. Hand-weaving was the principal industry, with some carpentry. Sanitation, fetching water, etc., were accessory activities. In fact everything was attended to by the Ashramites themselves. Caste distinctions were not observed. Untouchability had not only no place in the Ashram, but its eradication from Hindu society was one of the principal objectives. Emancipation of women from bonds of custom was insisted upon from the first. It was also an Ashram rule that persons following a particular faith should have tolerance and friendly feelings towards those who followed a different faith. It will be seen that from the very beginning, the Ashram set out to remedy what it thought were defects in our national life from the spiritual, economic and educational points of view.

To quote Gandhiji's words : "An attempt is made in the Ashram to impart such education as is conducive to national welfare. In order that spiritual, intellectual and physical development may proceed side by side, an atmosphere of industry has been created and letters are not given more than their due importance. Character building is attended to in the smallest detail. 'Untouchable' children are freely admitted. Women are given special attention with a view to improving their status, and they are accorded the same opportunities for self-culture as the men." The daily routine of the Ashram is given below :

4.00	a.m.	Rising from bed
4.15 to 4.45	„	Morning prayer

5.00	to	6.10	a.m.	Bath, Exercise, Study
6.10	to	6.30	„	Breakfast
6.30	to	7.00	„	Women's prayer class
7.00	to	10.30	„	Body labour, Education and Sanitation
10.45	to	11.15	„	Dinner
11.15	a.m. to	12 noon		Rest
12.00	to	4.30	p.m.	Body labour, including classes
4.30	to	5.30	„	Recreation
5.30	to	6.00	„	Supper
6.00	to	7.00	„	Recreation
7.00	to	7.30	„	Common worship
7.30	to	9.00	„	Recreation
9.00			„	Retiring bell

*Note.*—These hours were subject to change whenever necessary.

The women and children in the Ashram had to be taught to read and write and similar facilities had to be provided for other men and women who came to the Ashram.

Gandhiji had definite views on education, some of which he had formulated at the Tolstoy Farm. These he mentioned as follows :

1. Young boys and girls should have co-education till they are eight years of age.
2. Their education should mainly consist of manual training under the supervision of an educationist.
3. The special aptitudes of each child should be recognised in determining the kind of work he or she should do.
4. The reasons for every process should be explained when the process is being carried on.
5. General knowledge should be imparted to each child as he begins to understand things. Learning to read or write should come later.
6. The child should first be taught to draw simple geometrical figures and when he has learnt to draw these with ease, he should be taught to write the alphabet. If this is done, he will write a good hand from the very first.
7. Reading should come before writing. The letters should be treated as pictures to be recognised and later on to be copied.
8. A child taught on these lines will have acquired considerable knowledge according to his capacity by the time he is eight.
9. Nothing should be taught to a child by force.
10. He should be interested in everything taught to him.

11. Education should appear to the child like play. Play is an essential part of education.
12. All education should be imparted through the mother-tongue.
13. The child should be taught Hindi-Urdu as the National Language, before he learns letters.
14. Religious education is indispensable and the child should get it by watching the teacher's conduct and by hearing him talk about it.
15. Nine to sixteen constitutes the second stage in the child's education.
16. It is desirable that boys and girls should have co-education during the second stage also as far as possible.
17. Hindu children should now be taught Sanskrit, and Muslim children Arabic.
18. Manual training should be continued during the second stage. Literary education should be allotted more time as is necessary.
19. The boys during this stage should be taught their parents' vocation in such a way that they will by their own choice obtain their livelihood by practising the hereditary craft. This does not apply to girls.
20. During this stage the child should acquire a general knowledge of world history and geography, botany, astronomy, arithmetic, geometry and algebra.
21. Each child should now be taught to sew and to cook.
22. During the second stage (9-16) education should be self-supporting; that is, the child, while he is learning, is working in some industry, the proceeds of which will meet the expenditure of the school.
23. Sixteen to twenty-five is the third stage, during which every young person should have an education according to his or her wishes and circumstances.
24. Production starts from the very beginning, but during the first stage it does not still catch up with the expenditure.
25. Teachers should be inspired by a spirit of service. It is a despicable thing to take any Tom, Dick or Harry as a teacher in the primary stage. All teachers should be persons with character.
26. Big and expensive buildings will not be necessary for educational institutions.



27. English should be taught only as one of several languages. As Hindi is the national language, English is to be used only in dealing with other nations and international commerce.

"As for women's education I am not sure whether it should be different from men's and when it should begin. But I am strongly of opinion that women should have the same facilities as men and even special facilities where necessary.

"There should be night schools for illiterate adults. But I do not think that they must be taught the three R's; they must be helped to acquire general knowledge through lectures etc., and if they wish, we should arrange to teach them the three R's also.

"Experiments in the Ashram have convinced us of one thing, viz., that industry in general and spinning in particular should have the place of pride in education, which must be largely self-supporting as well as related to and tending to the betterment of rural life.

"In these experiments we have achieved the largest measure of success with the women who have imbibed the spirit of freedom and self-confidence. This success is due to the Ashram atmosphere. Women in the Ashram are not subject to any restraint, which is not imposed on the men as well. They are placed on a footing of absolute equality with the men in all activities. Not a single Ashram task is assigned to the women, to the exclusion of the men. Cooking is attended to by both. Women are of course exempted from work which is beyond their strength; otherwise men and women work together everywhere. There is no such thing as *purdah* in the Ashram. No matter from where she has come, a woman, as soon as she enters the Ashram, breathes the air of freedom and casts out all fear from her mind. And I believe that the Ashram observance of Brahmacharya has made a big contribution to this state of things.

"Not much of what is usually called education will be observed in the Ashram. Still we find that the old as well as the young, women as well as men are eager to acquire knowledge and complain that they have no time to do it sufficiently. This is a good sign. Many who join the Ashram are not educated or even interested in education. Some of them can hardly read or write. They had no desire for progress so long as they had not joined the Ashram. But when they have lived in the Ashram for a little while, they conceive a desire for increasing their knowledge. This is a great thing, as to create a desire for knowledge is very often the first step to be taken. But I do not regret it very much that there are insufficient facilities in the Ashram calculated to satisfy this desire. The observances kept in the Ashram will perhaps prevent a sufficient number of qualified teachers from joining it. We must, therefore, rest satisfied with such

Ashramites as can be trained to teach. The numerous activities of the Ashram may come in the way of their acquiring the requisite qualifications at all or at an early date. But it does not matter much, as the desire for knowledge can be satisfied later as well as sooner, being independent of a time limit. Real education begins after a child has left school. One who has appreciated the value of studies is a student all his life. His knowledge must increase from day to day while he is discharging his duty in a conscientious manner. And this is well understood in the Ashram.

“The superstition that no education is possible without a teacher is an obstacle in the path of educational progress. A man’s real teacher is himself. And nowadays there are numerous aids available for self-education. A diligent person can easily acquire knowledge about many things by himself and obtain the assistance of a teacher when it is needed. Experience is the biggest of all schools. Quite a number of crafts cannot be learnt at school but only in the workshop. Knowledge of these acquired at school is often only parrot-like. Other subjects can be learnt with the help of books. Therefore, what adults need is not so much a school as a thirst for knowledge, diligence and self-confidence.

“The education of children is primarily a duty to be discharged by the parents. Therefore, the creation of a vital educational atmosphere is more important than the foundation of numerous schools. When once this atmosphere has been established on a firm footing, the schools will come in due course”.\*

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\* ASHRAM OBSERVANCES IN ACTION by Mahatma Gandhi—published by Navajivan.

## CHAPTER IX

### ADDRESS TO THE STUDENTS

Gandhiji spoke to millions of people belonging to all classes, communities and avocations. Of these, students were indeed dearer to him than others as they represented the coming generation which would mould the future of the nation. To them he explained his ideals of education—the broad ideals which should form the basis of all educational effort, which he himself followed and which, he thought, should be followed by young men and women in the country. One of such addresses given when he visited Madras soon after the establishment of his Ashram at Sabarmati contains his innermost thoughts regarding the development of the individual and what he considered to be the essentials of good education. He said :—

“To many of the students who came here last year to converse with me, I said I was about to establish an institution—Ashram—somewhere in India, and it is about that place that I am going to talk to you this morning. I feel and I have felt during the whole of my public life that what we need, what a nation needs, what we perhaps of all the nations of the world need just now, is nothing else and nothing less than character-building. And this is the view propounded by that great patriot, Mr. Gokhale. As you know, in many of his speeches he used to say that we would get nothing, we would deserve nothing, unless we had character to back what we wished for. Hence his founding of the great body, the Servants of India Society. And as you know, in the prospectus that has been issued in connection with the Society, Mr. Gokhale has deliberately stated that it is necessary to spiritualize the political life of the country. You know also that he used to say often that our average was less than the average of so many European nations. I do not know whether that statement by him, whom with pride I consider my political Guru, has foundation in fact, but I do believe that there is much to be said to justify it in so far as educated India is concerned; not because we, the educated portion of the community, have blundered, but because we have been creatures of circumstances. Be that as it may, this is the maxim of life which I have accepted, namely, that no work done by any man, no matter how great he is, will really prosper unless he has a religious backing. But what is religion?—the question will be immediately asked. I for one would answer : Not the religion which you will get after reading all the scriptures of the world; it is not really a grasp by the brain, but it is a heart-grasp. It is a thing which is not alien to us, but which has to be

evolved out of us. It is always within us, with some consciously so, with others quite unconsciously. But it is there; and whether we wake up this religious instinct in us through outside assistance or by inward growth, no matter how it is done, it has got to be done if we want to do anything in the right manner and anything that is going to persist.

“Our scriptures have laid down certain rules as maxims of life and as axioms which we have to take for granted, as self-evident truths. The Shastras tell us that without living according to these maxims, we are incapable even of having a reasonable perception of religion. Believing in these implicitly for all these long years and having actually endeavoured to reduce to practice these injunctions of the Shastras, I have deemed it necessary to seek the association of those who think with me in founding this institution. And I shall venture this morning to place before you the rules that have been drawn up and that have to be observed by everyone who seeks to be a member of that Ashram.

Of these, the first and foremost is Truth.

Not truth simply as we ordinarily understand it, that as far as possible we ought not to resort to a lie; that is to say, not truth which merely answers the saying “Honesty is the best policy” implying that if it is not the BEST policy, we may depart from it. But Truth, as it is conceived here, means that we have to rule our life by this law of Truth at any cost. In order to clarify the definition, I have drawn upon the celebrated illustration of the life of Prahlad. For the sake of Truth, he dared to oppose his own father, and he defended himself, not by retaliation, by paying his father back in his own coin, but in defence of Truth as he knew it, he was prepared to die without caring to return the blows that he received from his father or from those who were charged with his father’s instructions. Not only that; he would not even parry the blows. On the contrary, with a smile on his lips, he underwent the innumerable tortures to which he was subjected, with the result that at last Truth rose triumphant. Not that Prahlad suffered the tortures because he knew that some day or other in his very lifetime he would be able to demonstrate the infallibility of the law of Truth. The fact was there; but if he had died in the midst of tortures, he would still have adhered to Truth. That is the Truth which I would like to follow.

“There was an incident I noticed yesterday. It was a trifling incident, but I think these trifling incidents are like straws which show which way the wind is blowing. It happened like this. I was talking to a friend who wanted to talk to me aside, and we were engaged in a private conversation. Another friend dropped in, and he politely asked whether he was intruding. The friend to whom I was talking

said: "Oh, no, there is nothing private here." I felt taken aback a little, because as I was taken aside, I knew that so far as this friend was concerned, the conversation was private. But he immediately out of politeness, I would call it over-politeness, said that there was no private conversation and that he (the other friend) could join. I suggest to you that this is a departure from my definition of Truth. I think that the friend should have, in the gentlest manner possible, but still openly and frankly said: "Yes, just now, as you rightly say, you would be intruding," without giving the slightest offence to the person.

"But I may be told that the incident, after all, proves the gentleness of the nation. I think that it is over-proving the case. If we continue to say these things out of politeness we really become a nation of hypocrites. I recall a conversation I had with an English friend. He was comparatively a stranger. He is Principal of a college and has been in India for several years. He was comparing notes with me, and he asked me whether I would admit that we, unlike most Englishmen, would not dare to say no when it was no that we meant. And I must confess that I immediately said yes; I agreed with that statement. We do hesitate to say no frankly and boldly, when we want to pay undue regard to the sentiment of the person whom we are addressing. In this Ashram we make it a rule that we must say no when we mean no, regardless of consequences. This then is the first rule. Then we come to Ahimsa.

"Literally Ahimsa means non-killing. But to me it has a world of meaning and takes me into realms much higher, infinitely higher, than the realm to which I would go if I merely understood by Ahimsa, non-killing. Ahimsa really means that you may not offend anybody, you may not harbour an uncharitable thought even in connection with one who may consider himself to be your enemy. Pray notice the guarded nature of this thought. I do not say "whom you consider your enemy," but "who may consider himself your enemy." For one who follows the doctrine of Ahimsa there is no room for an enemy; he denies the existence of an enemy. But there are people who consider themselves to be his enemies, and he cannot help it. So it is held that we may not harbour an evil thought even in connection with such persons. If we return blow for blow, we depart from the doctrine of Ahimsa. But I go further. If we resent a friend's action or the so-called enemy's action, we still fall short of this doctrine. But when I say we should not resent, I do not say that we should acquiesce. By resenting I mean wishing that some harm should be done to the enemy, or that he should be put out of the way, not even by any action of ours, but by the action of somebody else, or say by divine agency. If we harbour even this thought, we commit a

breach of Ahimsa. Those who join the Ashram have literally to accept that meaning. That does not mean that we practise this doctrine in its entirety. Far from it. It is an ideal which we have to reach, and it is an ideal to be reached even at this very moment if we were capable of doing so. But it is not a proposition in geometry to be learnt by heart; it is not even like solving difficult problems in higher mathematics; it is infinitely more difficult than that. Many of you have burnt the midnight oil in solving those problems. If you want to follow out this doctrine, you will have to do much more than burn the midnight oil. You will have to pass many a sleepless night, and go through many a mental torture and agony before you can reach, before you can even be within measurable distance of this goal. It is the goal, and nothing less than that, you and I have to reach, if we want to understand what religious life means. I will not say more on this doctrine than this; that a man who believes in the efficacy of this doctrine finds, in the ultimate stage when he is about to reach the goal, the whole world at his feet. Not that he wants the whole world at his feet, but it must be so. If you express your love—Ahimsa—in such a manner that it impresses itself indelibly upon your so-called enemy, he must return that love.

“Then we have control of the palate. A man who wants to control animal passion does so more easily if he controls his palate. I am afraid this is a rather difficult observance. I am just now coming after having inspected the Victoria Hostel. I saw there not to my dismay,—though it should be to my dismay,—but I am used to it now, that there are so many kitchens, not kitchens that are established in order to serve caste restrictions but kitchens that have become necessary in order that people can have the condiments and the exact weight of the condiments to which they are accustomed in the places from which they have come. And therefore we find that for the Brahmans themselves there are different compartments and different kitchens catering for the delicate tastes of all those different groups. I suggest that this is simply slavery to the palate, rather than mastery over it. I may say this. Unless we take our minds off from this habit, unless we shut our eyes to the tea shops and coffee shops and all these kitchens, unless we are satisfied with foods that are necessary for the maintenance of health, and unless we are prepared to rid ourselves of stimulating, heating and exciting condiments that we mix with our food, we shall certainly not be able to control the overabundant and unnecessary stimulation that we may have. If we do not do that, the result naturally is that we abuse ourselves and we abuse even the sacred trust given to us, and we become inferior to animals. Eating, drinking and indulging in passion we share in common with the animals; but have you ever seen a horse or a cow indulging in the abuse of the palate as we do ?

Do you suppose that it is a sign of civilization, a sign of real life that we should multiply our eatables so far that we do not even know where we are and seek dish after dish until at last we have become absolutely mad and run after the newspaper sheets which give us advertisements about these dishes ?

“Then we have non-stealing.

“I suggest that we are thieves in a way. If I take anything that I do not need for my own immediate use and keep it, I steal it from somebody else. I venture to suggest that it is the fundamental law of Nature without exception, that she produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism, there would be no man dying of starvation in this world. But so long as we have got this inequality, so long we are stealing. I am no socialist, and I do not want to dispossess those who have got possessions; but I do say that those of us who want to see light out of darkness have to follow this rule in their own lives. I do not want to dispossess anybody, for I should then be departing from the rule of Ahimsa. If somebody else possesses more than I do, let him. But so far as my own life has to be regulated, I do say that I dare not possess anything which I do not need. In India we have got millions of people living on one meal a day and that meal consisting of a chapati with no fat spread on it and a pinch of salt. You and I have no right to anything more until these millions are clothed and fed better. You and I, who ought to know better, must adjust our wants, and even undergo voluntary starvation, in order that they may be fed and clothed. Then there is Non-possession which follows as a matter of course.

“Next is Swadeshi. Swadeshi is an essential observance. I suggest that we are departing from one of the sacred laws of our being when we leave our neighbour and go out somewhere else in order to satisfy our wants. If a man comes from Bombay here and offers you wares, you are not justified in supporting the Bombay merchant so long as you have got a merchant at your very door, born and bred in Madras. That is my view of Swadeshi. In your village, so long as you have got your village barber, you are bound to support him to the exclusion of the finished barber who may come to you from Madras. If you find it necessary that your village barber should reach the attainments of the barber from Madras, you may train him to that. Send him to Madras by all means, if you wish, in order that he may learn his calling. Until you do that you are not justified in going to another barber. That is Swadeshi. So when we find that there are many things that we cannot get in India, we must try to do without them. We have to do without

many things which we may consider necessary; but believe me, when you are in that frame of mind, you will find a great burden taken off your shoulders, even as the Pilgrim did in the inimitable book, *THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*. There came a time when the mighty burden that the Pilgrim was carrying on his shoulders dropped from him, and he felt a freer man than he was when he started on the journey. So will you feel freer men than you are now, immediately you adopt Swadeshi.

"We then have Fearlessness. I found, throughout my wanderings in India, that India, educated India, is seized with a paralyzing fear. We may not open our lips in public; we may not declare our confirmed opinions in public; we may hold those opinions and may talk about them secretly, but they are not for public consumption. If we had taken a vow of silence, I would have nothing to say. But when we open our lips in public, we say things we do not really believe in. I do not know whether this is not true of almost every public man who speaks in India. I then suggest to you that there is only one Being,—if Being is the proper term to be used,—whom we have to fear, and that is God. When we fear God, we shall fear no man, no matter how highly placed he may be. And if you want to follow the vow of Truth in any shape or form, you must be fearless. And so you find, in the Bhagavad Gita, fearlessness is designated the first essential quality of a good man. We fear consequences, and therefore, we are afraid to tell the truth. A man who fears God will certainly not fear any earthly consequence. Before we can aspire to understand what religion is, and before we can aspire to guide the destinies of India, do you not see that we should adopt this habit of fearlessness? Or shall we overawe our countrymen, even as we are overawed? We thus see how important fearlessness is.

"Untouchability is a blot that Hinduism today carries with it. I decline to believe that it has been handed to us from immemorial times. I think that this miserable, wretched, enslaving spirit of untouchability must have come to us when we were in the cycle of our lives at its lowest ebb, and that evil has still stuck to us and it still remains with us. It is to my mind a curse that has come to us, and as long as that curse remains with us, so long I think we are bound to hold that every affliction that we labour under in this sacred land is a fit and proper punishment for this great crime that we are committing. That any person should be considered untouchable because of his calling passes one's comprehension; and you, the student world who receive all this modern education, if you become a party to this crime, it were better that you receive no education whatsoever.

"In Europe every cultured man learns, not only his language, but also other languages, sometimes three or four. And even as they do



in Europe, in order to solve the problem of language in India, we in this Ashram make it a point to learn as many Indian languages as we can. And I assure you that the trouble of learning these languages is nothing compared with the trouble that we have to take in mastering English. Indeed we never master English; with some exceptions it has not been possible for us to do so; we can never express ourselves as clearly in English as in the mother tongue. How dare we rub out of our memory all the years of our infancy? But that is precisely what we do when we commence our higher education, as we call it, through the medium of a foreign tongue. This creates a breach in our life, for which we shall have to pay dearly and heavily. And you will see now the connection between these two things—education and untouchability—this persistence of the spirit of untouchability even at this time of the day in spite of the spread of education. Education has enabled us to see the horrible crime. But we are seized with fear and, therefore, we cannot take this doctrine to our homes. And we have got a superstitious veneration for our family traditions and for the members of our family. You say, “my parents will die if I tell them that I at least can no longer participate in this crime.” I say that Prahlad never feared that his father would die if he took the holy name of Vishnu. On the contrary, he made the whole house ring from one corner to another, by repeating that name even in the sacred presence of his father. And so you and I may do this thing in the presence of our parents. If, after receiving this rude shock, some of them expire, I think that would be no calamity. It may be that some rude shocks of this kind might have to be delivered. So long as we persist in these things which have been handed down to us for generations, these incidents may happen. But there is a higher law of nature, and in due obedience to that higher law, my parents and myself should make that sacrifice.

“You may ask: “why should we use our hands?” and say, “manual work must be done by those who are illiterate. I can only occupy myself with reading literature and political essays.” But I think we have to realise the dignity of labour. I hold that a barber’s profession is just as good for instance as that of medicine.

“Last of all, when you have observed these rules, think that then, and not till then, you may come to politics and dabble in them to your heart’s content, and certainly you will then never go wrong. Politics, divorced of religion, has absolutely no meaning. If the student world crowd the political platforms of this country, to my mind it is not a healthy sign of national growth. But that does not mean that you, in your student life, ought not to study politics. We

ought to understand our national institutions, and we ought to understand our national growth and to know how the country is vibrating with new emotions, with new aspirations, with a new life. But we want also the steady light, the infallible light of religious faith, not a faith which appeals to the intelligence, but a faith which is indelibly inscribed on the heart. First, we should realise that religious consciousness; and once we have done that, I think all departments of life are open to us, and it should then be a sacred privilege of students as well as others, to participate in the whole of life, so that when they grow to manhood and when they leave their colleges, they may do so as men properly equipped for the battle of life."

## CHAPTER X

### THE GUJARAT VIDYAPITH

Events in India moved fast after the Champaran Satyagraha. The first World War had ended, but the promise made to the Muslims regarding the integrity of Turkey and the Holy places of Islam was not fulfilled. Then came the Rowlatt Act which robbed people of all real freedom. An intensive campaign against these was started in which Gandhiji took a prominent share. He maintained that no government could run without the consent of the people. He advocated a movement of non-violent non-cooperation by which without force or bloodshed the government could be brought to terms.

One of the items in the non-cooperation movement was withdrawal of children from the then Government-recognised schools. Of these Gandhiji said :

"I have never been able to make a fetish of literary training. My experience has proved that literary training by itself adds not an inch to one's moral height and that character training is independent of literary training. I am firmly of opinion that Government schools have unmanned us and rendered us helpless and Godless. They have filled us with discontent, and providing no remedy for the discontent, have made us despondent. They have made us what we were intended to become, clerks and interpreters. The youth of a nation are its hope. I hold that as soon as we discovered that the system of government was wholly or mainly evil it became sinful for us to associate our children with it."\*

Responding to the resolution, thousands of students from all over the country left their colleges and schools. To provide the new type of education contemplated by Gandhiji, National Schools and Colleges were started all over India. The first National School was opened in Calcutta, which was headed by Subhas Chandra Bose, who inspired by Gandhiji had resigned from the Indian Civil Service. Many other National Schools and Colleges were started in various parts of the country, well-known among them being the Behar Vidyapith at Patna, the Kashi Vidyapith at Benares, the Gujarat Vidyapith in Ahmedabad and Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. Amongst these, the Gujarat Vidyapith stands out prominently as it was situated in Ahmedabad and Gandhiji took considerable interest in it. He framed the basis on which the Vidyapith was to be run.

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\* Tendulkar's MAHATMA pp. 60-61.

The following were the significant points relating to this Vidyapith :—

1. The language of the Province shall have the principal place in the Vidyapith and shall be the medium of instruction. (Explanation: Languages other than Gujarati may be taught by the direct method).
2. The teaching of Hindi-Hindustani shall be compulsory in the curricula of the Vidyapith.
3. Manual training shall receive the same importance as intellectual training and only such occupations as are useful for the life of the nation shall be taught.
4. Whereas the growth of the nation depends not on its cities but its villages, the bulk of the funds of the Vidyapith and a majority of the teachers of the Vidyapith shall be employed in the propagation of education conducive to the welfare of the villages.
5. In laying down the curricula, the needs of village dwellers shall have principal consideration.
6. There shall be complete toleration of all established religions in all institutions conducted by and affiliated to the Vidyapith; and for the spiritual development of the pupils, religious instruction shall be imparted in consonance with Truth and Non-violence.
7. For the physical development of the nation, physical exercise and physical training shall be compulsory in all the institutions conducted by and affiliated to the Vidyapith.

While addressing the students of the Gujarat Vidyapith, Gandhiji said: "If you spend your next vacation in some village in the interior, you will find the people cheerless and fear-stricken. You will find houses in ruins. You will look in vain for any sanitary or hygienic conditions. You will find the cattle in a miserable way, and you will see idleness stalking there. The people will tell you of the spinning wheel having been in their homes long ago, but today they will entertain no talk of it or of any other cottage industry. They have no hope left in them. They live, for they cannot die at will. They will spin only if you spin. Even if a hundred out of a population of 300 in a village spin, you assure them of an additional income of Rs. 1,800 a year. You can lay the foundation of solid reform on this income of every village. It is easy to say this, but difficult to do. Faith can make it easy. 'I am alone, how can I reach seven hundred thousand villages?' This is the argument that pride whispers to us. Start with the faith that if you fix yourself up in one single village and succeed, the rest will follow. Progress is then assured. The Vidyapith wants to make you workers of that type."

After some time many of the institutions started during the Non-cooperation Movement began to wane for want of funds. It was a great problem for their organisers to keep them up. Many looked up to Gandhiji for advice. While addressing the workers of one of such institutions, namely, the Prem Vidyalaya, an institution in the U.P. and a child of the Non-cooperation Movement, he said : "I hold that no institution that is worth its salt can be starved for want of funds. More institutions are smothered by opulence than are killed by poverty. Constant dependence on the public for funds teaches an institution the lesson of true humility and keeps it on the alert. On the contrary, an institution that is altogether independent of the public for its support is liable to succumb to inertia and become lax in the performance of its duties. The amount of public support that an institution can command affords a true measure of its utility. I would advise every institution that is faced with financial distress to curtail its activities so as to bring it within the compass of its means rather than to keep up appearances by borrowing funds. In the former case the institution, though reduced in size, will still retain its pristine health, in the latter case its bloated size will only be a sign of its diseased condition. I would, therefore, earnestly beseech you to keep clear of this fatal error."\*

These institutions which sprang during the Non-cooperation Movement served a definite purpose in the national life of the country. Those who joined these schools were dedicated souls who were fired with the mission of service to the country. The difficult work of living and raising the level of life amongst the poor and downtrodden in the country, such as khadi, village industries and removal of untouchability found recruits in a large measure from the products of these schools.

A prominent aspect of the education imparted in these schools was the important place given to service in the villages. Till then, our higher education continued to cater to the needs of the urban population. It does so even now. As the University Education Commission has remarked, even village youths coming in for university education are trained in such a manner that they leave the villages in quest of jobs elsewhere, thus depriving the villages of their best material. The result is continuous depletion of the rural areas of their best leadership. Nobody ever thought about it. For the first time Gandhiji raised his voice against this. In the institutions started by him, the emphasis was on service in the villages, even at the sacrifice of higher emoluments which these youths could get under Government or in other services in the cities. The result was that due to the help in manpower, made available by these

\*Page 486 Tendulkar's MAHATMA, Vol. II.

institutions, millions of people in villages took to the spinning wheel, hand-weaving and other cottage industries and augmented their income, thus leading to better living. A great amount of adult education was achieved and the whole countryside reverberated with a new spirit, a new confidence and strength.

Another very valuable contribution to educational thought made by these schools was the important place they gave to our languages. Till then it was taken for granted that no higher education was possible in any language other than English. These schools attempted, and in many places successfully, to impart higher education in the regional languages. This attempt also focussed the attention of the people on the paucity of books and other material in our languages in the various subjects. With that knowledge came the effort to produce the needed literature in those branches of knowledge. The National Movement created in our people pride in our languages and a climate to work for their advancement. The result was the production of a large amount of literature in our languages in various subjects which did not exist before.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SPINNING WHEEL AS AN INSTRUMENT OF EDUCATION

In the scheme of Education that Gandhiji adumbrated the spinning wheel came to occupy a very important place. In all his educational experiments since the Sabarmati days, spinning was an important activity. Later when Basic Education was propounded, it occupied a central place as one of the most suitable crafts to be used as a means of instruction in schools. To begin with, he was impressed by the economic and social importance of the spinning wheel. To quote his own words, "The women regard it as the protector of their honour, to every widow it is a dear forgotten friend. Its restoration can fill the millions of hungry mouths. No industrial development schemes alone can solve the problem of growing poverty of the peasantry of India covering a vast surface—1,900 miles long and 1,500 miles broad. India is not a small island, it is a big continent which cannot be converted like England into an industrial country. Our only hope must centre upon utilising the wasted hours of the nation, for adding to the wealth of the country, by converting cotton into cloth in our villages." To serve as an example to the poor in the villages, he wanted every one to do spinning at least a few minutes a day as *yagna* (sacrificial spinning).

These ideas of Gandhiji were ridiculed by the so-called educated and highly placed. While the masses followed him with devotion, the intellectuals were frankly sceptic. This scepticism was expressed by many in the press and on the platform. Poet Rabindranath Tagore was one of those who did not relish Gandhiji's exhortation, that every one should spin. In an article in the October issue of the *Modern Review* 1921, he questioned these views of Gandhiji in no uncertain terms. "Is this the gospel of a new creative age?", he asked. "If large machinery constitutes a danger to the West, will not the small machinery constitute a danger for us?" He also doubted the good of unquestioning obedience of the masses to Gandhiji's behests. He said: "A cause as great as India should not depend on the will of a single master. Emotion and enthusiasm are required, but also science and meditation. All the moral forces of the nation must be called upon to contribute. Economists must find practical solutions, educationists must teach, statesmen ponder and workers work. No pressure either open or hidden, must weigh on the intelligence."

The stirring rejoinder that Gandhiji gave to this was epoch-making. The reasons he gave for the adoption of spinning hold good even today. They are given below :—

“The bard of Santiniketan has contributed to the Modern Review a brilliant essay on the present movement. It is a series of word pictures which he alone can paint. It is an eloquent protest against authority and slave mentality of whatever description. It is a welcome and wholesome reminder to all workers, that we must not be impatient, we must not impose authority, no matter how great. The poet tells us summarily to reject anything and everything that does not appeal to our reason or heart. If we would gain *swaraj*, we must stand for truth as we know it at any cost. A reformer who is enraged because his message is not accepted must retire to the forest to learn how to watch, wait and pray. With all this one must heartily agree, and the poet deserves the thanks of his countrymen for standing up for truth and reason. There is no doubt that our last state will be worse than our first, if we surrender our reason into somebody's keeping. And I would feel extremely sorry to discover that the country had unthinkingly and blindly followed all I had said or done. I am quite conscious of the fact that blind surrender to love is often more mischievous than a forced surrender to the lash of the tyrant. There is hope for the slave of the brute, none for that of love. Love is needed to strengthen the weak, love becomes tyrannical when it exacts obedience from an unbeliever. To mutter a *mantra* without knowing its value is unmanly. It is good, therefore, that the poet has invited all who are slavishly mimicking the call of *charkha* boldly to declare their revolt. His essay serves as a warning to us all who in our impatience are betrayed into intolerance or even violence against those who differ from us. I regard the poet as a sentinel warning us against the approach of enemies called bigotry, lethargy, intolerance, ignorance, inertia and the other members of that brood.

“I do indeed ask the poet and the sage to spin the wheel as a sacrament. When there is war, the poet lays down the lyre, the lawyer his law reports, the school-boy his books. The poet will sing the true note after the war is over, the lawyer will have occasion to go to his law books. When a house is on fire, all the inmates go out, and each one takes up a bucket to quench the fire. When all about me are dying for want of food, the only occupation permissible to me is to feed the hungry. It is my conviction that India is a house on fire because its manhood is being daily scorched, it is dying of hunger because it has no work to buy food with. Khulna is starving not because the people cannot work, but because they have no work. The Ceded Districts are passing successively through a fourth



famine, Orissa is a land suffering from chronic famine. Our cities are not India. India lives in her seven lakhs of villages, and the cities live upon the villages. They do not bring their wealth from other countries. The city people are brokers and commission agents for the big houses of Europe, America and Japan. The cities have co-operated with the latter in the bleeding process that has gone on for the past two hundred years. It is my belief based on experience, that India is daily growing poorer. The circulation about her feet and legs has almost stopped. And if we do not take care, she will collapse altogether.

"To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages. God created man to work for his food, and said that those who ate without work were thieves. Eighty per cent of India are compulsorily thieves half the year. Is it any wonder if India has become one vast prison? Hunger is the argument that is driving India to the spinning wheel. The call of the spinning wheel is the noblest of all. Because it is the call of love. And love is *Swaraj*. The spinning wheel will 'curb the mind', when the time spent on necessary physical labour can be said to do so. We must think of millions of our dying countrymen and countrywomen. 'Why should I, who have no need to work for food, spin?' may be the question asked. Because I am eating what does not belong to me. I am living on the spoliation of my countrymen. Trace the course of every pice that finds its way into your pocket, and you will realise the truth of what is right. *Swaraj* has no meaning for the millions, if they do not know how to employ their enforced idleness. The attainment of this *swaraj* is possible within a short time, and it is possible only by the revival of the spinning wheel.

"I do want growth, I do want self-determination, I do want freedom, but I want all these for the soul. I doubt if the steel age is an advance upon the flint age. I am indifferent. It is the evolution of the soul to which the intellect and all our faculties have to be devoted. I have no difficulty in imagining the possibility of a man armoured after the modern style making some lasting and new discovery for mankind, but I have less difficulty in imagining the possibility of a man having nothing but a bit of flint and nail for lighting his path ever singing new hymns of praise and delivering to an aching world a message of peace and goodwill upon earth. A plea for the wheel is a plea for recognising the dignity of labour.\*

"The Poet thinks, that I want everybody to spin the whole of his time to the exclusion of all other activity, that is to say, that I want the poet to forsake his lyre, the farmer his plough, the lawyer his

\* Pp. 84-5 Tendulkar's MAHATMA, Vol. II.

brief and the doctor his lancet. So far is this from truth that I have asked no one to abandon his calling, but on the contrary to adorn it by giving every day only thirty minutes to spinning as sacrifice for the whole nation. I have indeed asked the famishing man or woman who is idle for want of any work whatsoever to spin for a living and the half-starved farmer to spin during his leisure hours to supplement his slender resources. If the poet spun half an hour daily, his poetry would gain in richness. For it would then represent the poor man's wants and woes in a more forcible manner than now.

"He thinks that the *charkha* is calculated to bring about the death-like sameness in the nation and thus imagining he would shun it if he could. The truth is, that the *charkha* is intended to realise the essential and living oneness of interest among India's millions. Behind the magnificent and kaleidoscopic variety one discovers in nature a unity of purpose, and form which is equally unmistakable. No two men are absolutely alike, not even twins, yet there is much that is indispensably common to all mankind. And behind the commonness of form there is the same life pervading all. The idea of sameness or oneness was carried by Shankara to its utmost logical and natural limit and he exclaimed that there was only one Truth, one God—Brahman—and all form, *nama rupa*, was illusion or illusory, evanescent. We need not debate whether what we see is unreal; and whether the real behind the unreality is what we do not see. All I say is there is a sameness, identity or oneness behind the multiplicity and variety. So do I hold that behind a variety of occupations there is an indispensable sameness also of occupation. Is not agriculture common to the vast majority of mankind? Even so was spinning common not long ago to a vast majority of mankind. Just as both prince and peasant must eat and clothe themselves, so must they labour for supplying their common wants. The prince may do so if only by way of symbol and sacrifice, but that much is indispensable for him if he will be true to himself and his people. Europe may not realise this vital necessity at the present moment, because it has made exploitation of non-European races a religion. But it is a false religion bound to perish in the near future. The non-European races will not for ever allow themselves to be exploited. I have endeavoured to show a way out that is peaceful, human and noble.

"Just as, if we are to live, we must breathe not air imported from England, not eat food so imported, so may we not import cloth made in England. I do not hesitate to carry the doctrine to its logical limit and say that Bengal dare not import her cloth even from Bombay. If Bengal will live her natural and free life without exploiting the rest of India or the world outside, she must manufacture

her cloth in her villages as she grows her corn there. Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace the necessary human labour. An imported plough is a good thing. But if by some chance one man could plough up by some mechanical invention the whole of the land of India and control all the agricultural produce and if the millions had no other occupation, they would starve, and being idle, they would become dunces, as many have already become. There is hourly danger of many more being reduced to that unenviable state. I would welcome every improvement in the cottage machine but I know that it is criminal to displace the hand labour by the introduction of power-driven spindles unless one is at the same time ready to give millions of farmers some other occupation in their homes."\*

Wherever Gandhiji went, he preached the gospel of the spinning wheel. He wanted the spinning wheel to be given an important place in the national schools started during the non-cooperation movement. One of the main features of all the national schools started in that era was the great place that was given to spinning and weaving. *Khadi* became the livery of freedom, and *charka* became the symbol of a new awakening of the nation from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas.

With this background, it is not difficult to understand as to why he chose the spinning wheel as an instrument of education in schools. When he propounded Basic Education and pleaded for its acceptance by the country, he wanted to activate our schools by the introduction of a useful craft. Educational philosophers before him had accepted manual training as a means of education. But Gandhiji went one step further. According to him manual training should not merely result in producing articles for a school museum or toys which have no value, but useable articles. He wanted that training should be given through a continuous craft the initial cost of which was such as the villagers could afford and which would not only give education to the child, but produce articles of economic value, which could be easily marketed. Only articles which fulfil a basic need can be easily marketed. The spinning wheel fulfilled all these conditions. Its cost was small. It lent itself effectively for education, and fulfilled the greatest need of man next to food.

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\*Pp. 282-3, Tendulkar's MAHATMA, Vol. II.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE NEW EDUCATION

During the Provincial elections in 1937, the Congress emerged as the biggest elected party in the country. After acceptance of office in the provinces, the Congress had to face many urgent problems, which had baffled solution during the last few decades. The spread of compulsory elementary education was one of the more important of these. The major difficulty was of finance. In the words of Gandhiji, "The cruelest irony of the New Reforms lies in the fact that we are left with nothing but the liquor revenue to fall back upon, in order to give our children education." Again, "That is the educational puzzle, but it should not baffle us. We have to solve it and the solution must not involve a compromise of our ideal of prohibition, cost whatever else it may. It must be shameful and humiliating to think that unless we got the drink revenue, our children would be starved of their education. But if it comes to it, we should prefer it as a lesser evil. If only we will refuse to be obsessed by the figures and by the supposed necessity of giving our children the exact kind of education that they get today, the problem should not baffle us.

"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 a reputation for constructive ability, to suggest that education should be self-supporting. By education I mean the all-round drawing out of the best in the child, body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education. 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 school can be made self-supporting, the condition being that the State takes over the manufactures of these schools.

"I hold that the highest development of the mind and the soul is possible under such a system of education. Only wherever handicraft has to be taught, it should be taught not merely mechanically as is done today, but scientifically, *i.e.*, the child should know the why and wherefore of every process. I am not writing this without some confidence, because it has the backing of experience. This method is being adopted more or less completely wherever spinning is being taught to workers. I have myself taught sandal-making and even.

spinning on these lines with good results. This method does not exclude a knowledge of history and geography. But I find that this is best taught by transmitting such general information by word of mouth. One imparts ten times as much in this manner as by reading and writing. The signs of the alphabet may be taught later when the pupil has learnt to distinguish wheat from chaff and when he has somewhat developed his or her taste. This is a revolutionary proposal but it saves immense labour and enables a student to acquire in one year what he may take much longer to learn. This means all-round economy. Of course, the pupil learns mathematics whilst he is learning his handicrafts.

"I attach great importance to primary education which, according to my conception, should be equal to the present matriculation less English. If all the collegians were of a sudden to forget their knowledge, the loss sustained by the sudden lapse of the memory of, say, a few lakhs of collegians would be as nothing compared to the loss that the nation has sustained through the ocean of darkness that surrounds three hundred millions. The measure of illiteracy is no adequate measure of the prevailing ignorance among the millions of villagers.

"I would revolutionise college education and relate it to national necessities. There would be degree for mechanical and other engineers. They would be attached to the different industries which should pay for the training of the graduates they need. Thus, the Tatas would be expected to run a college for training engineers under the supervision of the State; the (Textile) Mill Associations would run among them a college for training graduates whom they need. Similarly for the other industries that may be named. Commerce will have its college. There remain arts, medicine and agriculture. Several private arts colleges are today self-supporting. The State would, therefore, cease to run its own. Medical colleges would be attached to certified hospitals. As they are popular among monied men, they may be expected, by voluntary contributions, to support medical colleges. And agricultural colleges to be worthy of the name must be self-supporting. I have a painful experience of some agricultural graduates. Their knowledge is superficial. They lack practical experience. But if they had their apprenticeship on farms which are self-sustained and answered the requirements of the country, they would not have to gain experience after getting their degrees and at the expense of their employers."\*

These views were so diametrically opposed to the accepted view on education that they were opposed to most persons who were considered to be experts in education. They believed that it had been

\*Pp. 3-6 EDUCATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION by Gandhiji.

recognized in the course of centuries, as a matter of practical experience in all civilized countries that education was a costly venture, and Mahatmaji's words seemed to belie the experience of the whole world. The opposition to his ideas ranged from caution and scepticism, respectfully expressed out of reverence for his personality to downright denunciation. One professor went to the extent of saying, "Let us not delude ourselves into believing that self-supporting workshop schools manufacturing and marketing goods will impart education. In actual practice, it will be nothing but legalised child labour. A school or a college should be a place where young minds live in a world of values rather than of prices. If at the impressionable period of their lives, manufacture, marketing and money-making be placed as their ideal, their growth will be arrested. To sum up, it is bad economy to adopt a short-sighted policy which will make the school solvent and the nation bankrupt."\*

To such critics Gandhiji replied, "We have up to now concentrated on stuffing children's minds with all kinds of information, without even thinking of stimulating or developing them. Let us now cry a halt to this and concentrate on educating the child properly through manual work, not as a side activity, but as a prime means of intellectual training. We are apt to think lightly of village crafts because we have divorced educational from manual training. It is a gross superstition to think that this sort of vocational exercise will make education dull or cramp the child's mind. Some of my happiest recollections are the bright and joyful faces of children while they were receiving vocational instruction under competent teachers.

"If such an education is given, the direct result will be that it will be self-supporting. But the test of success is not its self-supporting character, but the fact that the whole man has been drawn out through the teaching of the handicraft in a scientific manner. The self-supporting part should be the logical corollary of the fact that the pupil has learnt the use of every one of his faculties."

These views of Gandhiji naturally raised a great deal of controversy throughout the land. Gandhiji tried to meet his critics through his articles in the HARIJAN. Finally, he agreed to attend a conference of educational experts summoned at the Nav Bharat Vidyalaya in Wardha to discuss his plan of education. Debates at this Conference are described in the following chapter. In the meantime, it is worth paying attention to Gandhiji's proposals at this conference.

\* Page 32 UNDERSTANDING BASIC EDUCATION by T. S. Avinashilingam.

"The propositions I shall submit to the conference for consideration will be, so far as they occur to me at present, as follows :—

1. "The present system of education does not meet the requirements of the country in any shape or form. English, having been made the medium of instruction in all the higher branches of learning, has created a permanent bar between the highly educated few and the uneducated many. It has prevented knowledge from percolating to the masses. The excessive importance given to English has cast upon the educated class a burden which has maimed them mentally for life and made them strangers in their own land. Absence of vocational training has made the educated class almost unfit for productive work and harmed them physically. Money spent on primary education is a waste of expenditure inasmuch as what little is taught is soon forgotten and has little or no value in terms of villages or cities. Such advantage as is gained by the existing system of education is not gained by the chief tax-payer, the ordinary man in the village, his children getting the least.
2. "The course of primary education should be extended at least to seven years and should include the general knowledge gained up to the matriculation standard less English and plus a substantial vocation.
3. "For the all-round development of boys and girls all training should, so far as possible, be given through a profit yielding vocation. In other words, vocations should serve a double purpose—to enable the pupil to pay for his tuition through the products of his labour and at the same time to develop the whole man or woman in him or her, through the vocation learnt at school.

"Land, buildings and equipment are not intended to be covered by the proceeds of the pupil's labour.

"All the processes of cotton, wool and silk, commencing from gathering, cleaning, ginning (in the case of cotton), carding, spinning, dyeing, sizing, warp-making, double twisting, designing, and weaving embroidery, tailoring, paper-making, cutting, book-binding, cabinet making, toy-making, Gur-making are undoubted occupations that can easily be learnt and handled without much capital outlay.

"This primary education should equip boys and girls to earn their bread by the State guaranteeing employment in the vocations learnt or by buying their manufactures at prices fixed by the State.

4. "Higher education should be left to private enterprise and for meeting national requirements whether in the various industries, technical arts, belles-letters or fine arts.

"The State Universities should be purely examining bodies self-supporting through the fees charged for examinations.

"Universities will look after the whole of the field of education and will prepare and approve courses of studies in the various departments of education. No private school should run without the previous sanction of the respective Universities. University charters should be given liberally to any body of persons of proved worth and integrity, it being always understood that the Universities will not cost the State anything except that it will bear the cost of running a Central Education Department.

"The foregoing scheme does not absolve the State from running such seminaries as may be required for supplying State needs.

"It is claimed that if the whole scheme is accepted, it will solve the question of the greatest concern to the State—training of its youth, its future-makers."\*



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE WARDHA EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The All India National Educational Conference at Wardha began on the 22nd October, 1937. Sri Jammalal Bajaj, the veteran Congress leader welcomed the delegates. Most of the State Education Ministers attended. Prominent educationists from all over the country also participated in the Conference. I also happened to be one of the invitees to the Conference. Mahatma Gandhi presided over the Conference. In his presidential speech, he explained the salient points of his scheme. At the end, he requested every one to speak out his mind. He earnestly pleaded that none should agree to any of his proposals out of respect for him; but instead, each of the delegates should examine the scheme on its merits and then give out what was considered to be his or her considered opinion.

Gandhiji said: "The ideas that I wish to place before you may be new in their method of presentation, although my experience behind those ideas is very old. The propositions that I wish to put forward refer to both primary and college education, but we shall have to give special consideration to primary education. I have included secondary in primary education; as primary education is the only education so-called that is available to a small fraction of the people in our villages, many of which I have seen during my peregrinations since 1915. I have seen, perhaps more than anybody else, the condition of the Indian villages. I gained good experience of the rural life of South Africa as well. I know fully well the type of education that is given in the Indian villages. And now that I have settled down in Segaoon, I can study the whole problem of national education from closer quarters. I am convinced that if we wish to ameliorate rural conditions, we must combine secondary with primary education. The educational scheme, therefore, that we wish to place before the country must be primarily for the villages. I have no experience of college education, though I have come in contact with hundreds of college boys, have had heart to heart chats and correspondence with them, know their needs, their failings and the diseases they suffer from. But we must restrict ourselves to a consideration of primary education. For, the moment the primary question is solved, the secondary one of College education will be easily settled.

"I am convinced that the present system of primary education is not only wasteful but positively harmful. Most of the boys are lost to their parents and to the occupation to which they are born. They pick up evil habits, affect urban ways and get a smattering

of something which may be anything but education. What then should be the form of primary education? I think the remedy lies in educating them by means of vocational or manual training. I have some experience of them myself, for on the Tolstoy Farm in South Africa, I trained my own sons and other children through some manual work, e.g., carpentry or shoe-making which I learned from Kallenbach who had his training in a Trappist Monastery. I am confident that my sons and all the other children, lost nothing, though as the time at my disposal was limited and my pre-occupations were numerous, I could not give them an education which satisfied either me or them.

"But the scheme that I wish to place before you today is not the teaching of some handicrafts side by side with so-called liberal education. I want the whole process of education to be imparted through some handicrafts or industry. It may be objected that in the middle ages only handicrafts were taught to the students, but the occupational training then was far from serving an educational purpose. The crafts were taught only for the sake of the crafts, without any attempt to develop the intellect as well. Today, traditional craftsmen have either forgotten their crafts or the technique has been neglected and not improved. Many have taken to clerical careers and are lost to the countryside. As a result, it is now impossible to find an efficient carpenter or smith in an average village. Handicrafts were dying out and since the spinning wheel was being neglected, it was taken to Lancashire where thanks to the English genius it was developed to an extent that is seen today. I say this irrespective of my views on industrialism.

"The remedy lies in imparting the whole art and science of a craft through practical training and through it imparting the whole education. While teaching *takli*-spinning, for instance, we must impart knowledge of the various varieties of cotton, the different soils in different provinces of India, the history of the decay of the handicraft, the political reasons for this, including the history of the British rule in India, a knowledge of arithmetic and so on. I am trying the same experiment on my little grandson who scarcely feels that he is being taught, for all the while he plays and laughs and sings. I am especially mentioning the *takli* and emphasising its utility because I have realised its power and its romance; also because the handicraft of making cloth is the only one which can be taught throughout the country, and because the *takli* is very cheap. If you have any other suitable handicraft to suggest, please do so without any hesitation so that we may consider it also. However, I am convinced that the *takli* is the only practical solution of our problem, considering the deplorable economic condition prevailing in the country.

"I have placed the scheme before the ministers; it is for them to accept or reject it. But my advice is that primary education should centre round the *takli*. During the first year every thing should be taught through the *takli*, in the second year other processes also can be taught side by side. It will also be possible to earn quite enough through the *takli* because there will be sufficient demand for the cloth produced by the children. Even the parents of the children will be sufficient to consume the products of their children. I have contemplated a seven years' course which, so far as the *takli* is concerned, would culminate in practical knowledge of weaving, including dyeing, designing, etc. I am very keen on finding the expenses of a teacher through the product of the manual work of his pupils, because I am convinced that there is no other way to carry education to crores of our children.

"I have been accused of being opposed to literacy training. Far from it! I simply want to show the way in which it should be given. The self-supporting aspect has also been attacked. It is said that whereas we ought to expend millions on primary education we are going to exploit the children. It is also feared that there will be enormous waste. This fear is falsified by experience. As for exploiting or burdening the children, I would ask whether we burden the child when we save him from a disaster. The *takli* is a good enough toy to play with. It is no less a toy because it is a productive one. Even today children help their parents to a certain extent. The Segaon children know the details of agriculture better than I, for they have worked with their parents on the fields. Whilst the child will be encouraged to spin and help his parents with agricultural jobs, he will also be made to feel that he belongs not only to his parents but also to the village and to the country and that he must make some return to them. That is the only way. I would tell the ministers that they will make children helpless by doling out education to them. The children will become confident and brave if they pay for their own education by their own labour. This system is to be common to all,—Hindus, Muslims, Parsees, and Christians. Why do I not lay any stress on religious instruction? people ask. Because I am teaching them practical religion, the religion of self-help. I would, therefore, ask you to say whether this idea of imparting education through manual training appeals to you."

Referring to the idea of conscripting young men and women to teach in primary schools, Gandhiji continued :

"If Mussolini can impress the youth of Italy for the service of his country, why should not we? Is it fair that the compulsory enlistment of the service of our youth for a year or longer before

they begin their career should be labelled as slavery? Youth has contributed much to the success of the movement for freedom during the past seventeen years, and I would now call upon them to give a year of their lives freely to the service of the nation. If legislation is necessary in this respect, it will not be compulsion, as it cannot be passed without the consent of the majority of our representatives.

"If we want to eliminate communal strife and international strife, we must start with pure and strong foundations by rearing our younger generation on the education I have adumbrated. That plan springs out of non-violence, to effect complete prohibition, but I may tell you that even if there was to be no loss of revenue and our exchequer was full, this education would be a *sine qua non* if we did not want to urbanise our boys. We have to make them true representatives of our culture, of our civilisation, of the true genius of our nation. We cannot do so unless we give them a course of self-supporting primary education."

After Mahatmaji had spoken, the discussions began in right earnest. Dr. Zakir Hussain, Principal, Jamia Millia Islamia spoke next: "Those who are working in the educational field will not find Mahatmaji's scheme very new. They know that true learning can be imparted only through doing. They also know that children have to be taught various subjects through manual work, no matter whether one believes in urban or rural civilisation, in violence or non-violence. We teachers know, that up to the age of thirteen children want to do and undo, break and mend things. This is how nature educates them. To ask them to sit still in one place with books is to do violence to them. Many educationists have, therefore, been trying to make some manual work the centre of education. In America this method is called the Project Method and in Russia the Complex Method. We can surely impart education to our children through the *takli* and the *charkha* and some other suitable handicrafts.

"But the greatest difficulty in carrying out the scheme will be the scarcity of trained teachers.

"There may be some aspects of a subject which cannot be taught through the *takli*. Shall we leave them out altogether? No. We should keep as our principle the development of the intellect through hand-work; but we should not be tied down to it. We should try to find out some other handicrafts through which all other aspects of the various subjects can be taught to our children.

"I wish to say a few words regarding the self-supporting aspect of education. Wherever the experiment has been tried, it has not

been possible to make education self-supporting. In America Prof. Dewey had a similar plan which was welcomed enthusiastically, but he had to close down his school after a few years. America is a country where there is no scarcity of funds or state help. If the experiment could not succeed there, what hope of success has it in a poor country like ours?

“You will say that we want self-supporting schools because we are poor. Quite. But I should like to utter a note of warning. The greatest evil of the present system of education is examinations. At present all the teachers’ energy is concentrated on examinations. But there is a danger in over-emphasising the self-supporting aspect of education. Teachers may become slave-drivers and exploit the labour of poor boys. If this happens, the *takli* will prove even worse than books. We shall be laying the foundations of hidden slavery in our country. In sponsoring this scheme we should not, therefore, forget this inherent danger.”

There was a free exchange of views on the many aspects of Gandhiji’s proposals. While generally there was acceptance of the view that an education through crafts and activities would provide a better type of education, the self-supporting aspect of it came in for a great deal of critical examination particularly from Prof. K. T. Shah. There was unanimity in such matters as medium of instruction.

Gandhiji answered many of the criticisms made against the scheme. He said: “By means of the scheme which I placed before you this morning we can make our boys self-confident and courageous. *Takli*-spinning will not be the only thing that will be taught during the seven years. I am of the opinion that in the first year, we should teach boys a little carding, even before the *takli*. Then the boys should be taught to collect cotton in the fields. After this, they can be taught spinning, first with the *takli* and then with the *charkha*. After spinning, the making of the *takli* and the *charkha* should also be taught to the students. They can learn carpentry and smithy as well. Thus, if we plan out the whole course during the seven years, the scheme is bound to succeed.

“Prof. Shah thinks that this scheme will create unequal and unjust competition between professional artisans and school boys.... To my mind there is no cause for such fear. When the ministers create a suitable atmosphere in the country, people will like to buy school products even if they have to pay a higher price. Thus, there will be no difficulty in marketing the school products. So far as cloth is concerned, I think the State will have to buy all the necessary cloth from the schools even though the price may be

higher. For example, although the rates of the printing press in Yerawada jail are higher than those of the other local presses, the Government has all its printing done there, and the question of competition does not arise at all. Our work has to be done in the same way.

"In the beginning there is bound to be some waste in the village schools; but a clever and tactful teacher will see that the boys learn most with the least waste.

"Dr. Zakir Hussain has told us of the failure of Prof. Dewey's scheme in America; I think his scheme failed not because it was very expensive but because he could not work it on a large scale. My scheme is absolutely different, because it is a rural one. It is said that my scheme will bring about slavery in the schools. But this can be said about all good things, because in bad hands even good things become bad. Therefore, I do not wish that my scheme should be carried out by those who have neither faith nor confidence in it.

"I wish to make one more point clear. I do not want to teach the village children only handicrafts. I want to teach through hand-work all other subjects such as history, geography, arithmetic, science, language, painting and music. All this teaching will have to be done according to a definite plan. I want only five hours daily because I am sure the boys will also practise for some time at home what they are taught in the schools. I am confident that if we make calculations for the seven years together we shall find that education can be self-supporting. If in the first year each boy is able to earn two pice a day, the next year he will be able to earn an anna. In this way their power of production will continue to increase, and they will be able to earn their living in later life.

"It has been suggested that agriculture should be made the medium of instruction in the village schools, but, the shame of it all is that we have not the necessary means. Agriculture as it is taught at present in the schools and colleges is useless for our villages, because it is not intimately related to rural conditions. However, if you accept my scheme and are able to find suitable teachers, I am sure it will be very useful for the village folk. The students will also go with their teachers to the fields and they will learn many subjects while ploughing, sowing, irrigating, and weeding the fields. They will also have sufficient physical exercise, and artificial exercises will therefore be unnecessary."

There were further discussions after his speech. After a full and frank discussion, the following four resolutions were passed in the conference :—

- (1) "That in the opinion of this Conference free and compulsory education be provided for seven years on a nation-wide scale.
- (2) "That the medium of instruction should be the mother-tongue.
- (3) "That the Conference endorses the proposal made by Mahatma Gandhi that the process of education throughout this period should centre around some form of manual and productive work, and that all the other abilities to be developed or training to be given should, as far as possible, be integrally related to the environment of the child.
- (4) "That the Conference expects that this system of education will be gradually able to cover the remuneration of the teachers."\*

## CHAPTER XIV

### BASIC EDUCATION

The Wardha Educational Conference after passing the resolutions mentioned in the last chapter, appointed a committee with Dr. Zakir Hussain as Chairman and Sri Aryanayakam as Secretary to prepare a detailed syllabus on the lines of the resolutions passed at the conference and submit their report to Gandhiji. The Committee included amongst its members prominent educationists, who had done pioneering work in various parts of India. Amongst these may be mentioned Acharya Vinobaji, a distinguished disciple of Gandhiji, the originator and leader of the *Bhoodan* Movement in India, Professor K. T. Shah, Sri K. G. Saiyidain, now Secretary to the Ministry of Education in the Government of India, Sri Kaka-saheb Kalelkar, Sri Sishorilal Mushiriwalla, Sri J. C. Kumarappa and others. The Committee considered the resolutions in detail, consulted such educationists as they considered experienced on these lines, and prepared a fairly detailed syllabus. They submitted their report to Gandhiji on 2nd December, 1937. In their report they stated :—

“Modern educational thought is practically unanimous in commending the idea of educating children through some suitable form of productive work. This method is considered to be the most effective approach to the problem of providing an integral all-sided education.

“Psychologically, it is desirable, because it relieves the child from the tyranny of a purely academic and theoretical instruction against which its active nature is always making a healthy protest. It balances the intellectual and practical elements of experience, and may be made an instrument of educating the body and mind in co-ordination. The child acquires not the superficial literacy which implies, often without warrant, a capacity to read the printed page, but the far more important capacity of using hand and intelligence for some constructive purpose. This, if we may be permitted to use the expression, is the literacy of the whole personality.

“Socially considered, the introduction of such practical productive work in education, to be participated in by all the children of the nation, will tend to break down the existing barriers of prejudice between manual and intellectual workers, harmful alike for both. It will also cultivate in the only possible way a true sense of the dignity of labour and of human solidarity—an ethical and moral gain of incalculable significance.



"Economically considered, the scheme if carried out intelligently and efficiently, will increase the productive capacity of our workers and will also enable them to utilise their leisure advantageously.

"From the strictly educational point of view, greater concreteness and reality can be given to the knowledge acquired by children by making some significant craft the basis of education. Knowledge will thus become related to life, and its various aspects will be correlated with one another.

"In order to secure these advantages it is essential that two conditions should be carefully observed. First, the craft or productive work chosen should be rich in educative possibilities. It should find natural points of correlation with important human activities and interests, and should extend into the whole content of the school curriculum. Later in the report, in making our recommendations on the choice of basic crafts, we have given special attention to this point, and we would urge all who are in any way concerned with this scheme to bear this important consideration in mind. The object of this new educational scheme is not primarily the production of craftsmen able to practise some craft mechanically, but rather the exploitation for educative purposes of the resources implicit in craft work. This demands that productive work should not only form a part of the school curriculum—its craft side—but should also inspire the method of teaching all other subjects. Stress should be laid on the principles of cooperative activity, planning accuracy, initiative and individual responsibility in learning. By merely adding to the curriculum one other subject—weaving, spinning or carpentry—while other subjects are still taught in the traditional way we shall, we are convinced, encourage passive assimilation and the division of knowledge into unintelligible water-tight compartments, and thus defeat the real purpose and spirit of this scheme.

"Teachers and educationists who undertake this new educational venture should clearly realise the ideal of citizenship inherent in it. In modern India, citizenship is destined to become increasingly democratic in the social, political, economic and cultural life of the country. The new generation must at least have an opportunity of understanding its own problems, rights and obligations. A completely new system is necessary in order to secure the minimum of education for the common man and for the intelligent exercise of their rights and duties as citizens. Secondly, in modern times, the intelligent citizen must be an active member of society, able to repay in the form of some useful service what he owes to it as a member of an organised civilised community. An education which produces drags and parasites—whether rich or poor—stands

condemned. It not only impairs the productive capacity and efficiency of society but also engenders a dangerous and immoral mentality. This scheme is designed to produce workers, who will look upon all kinds of useful work—including manual labour, even scavenging—as honourable and who will be both able and willing to stand on their own feet.”

Referring to the controversy on the self-supporting aspect of the scheme, the Report said, “Even if it is not self-supporting in any sense, it should be accepted as a matter of sound educational policy and as an urgent measure of national reconstruction.” “It is fortunate however,” they continued, “that this good education will incidentally cover a portion of its running expenses.” At the same time, they sounded a note of warning, “There is an obvious danger that in the working of the scheme, the economic aspect may be stressed at the sacrifice of the cultural and educational objectives. Teachers may devote most of their attention and energy to extracting the maximum amount of labour from children, while neglecting the intellectual, social and moral implications and possibilities of craft training.” In their report they also referred to the important need for training teachers in this new ideology of education and the many administrative problems that will have to be faced by the States, and which are incidental to the reform. They also recommended the setting up of an All India Education Board, which the various Provincial Governments could consult in the working out of this programme of National Education.

The Indian National Congress that met in February at Haripura on the banks of the *Tapti* river formally accepted this report and set up an All India Education Board by the following resolution :—

“The Congress has emphasised the importance of National Education from 1920. The Congress attaches the utmost importance to a proper organisation of mass education and holds that all national progress ultimately depends on the method, content and objective of education that is provided for the people. It is essential, therefore, to build up a national education on a new foundation and on a nation-wide scale. It is necessary to lay down the basic principles which should guide such education and take the necessary steps to give effect to them.

“The Congress is of opinion that for the primary and secondary stages, a basic education should be imparted in accordance with the following principles :—

1. “Free and compulsory education should be provided for seven years on a nation-wide scale.
2. “The medium of instruction should be the mother-tongue.

3. "Throughout the period, education should centre round some form of manual and productive work, all other activities to be developed or training to be given should as far as possible be integrally related to the central craft chosen.

"Accordingly the Congress is of opinion that an All-India Education Board to deal with this basic part of education, be established and for this purpose requests and authorises Dr. Zakir Hussain and Sri Aryanayakam, to take immediate steps, under the advice and guidance of Gandhiji, to bring such a board into existence in order to work out in a consolidated manner a programme of Basic Education and to recommend it for acceptance to those who are in control of State or private education."

It was thus that the All-India Basic Education Board, later called the *Hindustani Talimi Sangh* came into existence. I was fortunate enough to be invited to be a member of the first *Hindustani Talimi Sangh* which was constituted some time later in the same year.

I always looked forward to the meetings of the *Hindustani Talimi Sangh*. They were held in Wardha, Sevagram or at any other place convenient to Gandhiji, so that he could participate in the meetings and guide in the techniques of this new ideology. These meetings gave me not only opportunities for close association with him, but also to meet many other eminent men and women from various parts of the country who were themselves leaders in education and established institutions on the new pattern. From that time Sevagram became a centre of educational work to which people came from all over India and many from outside India. Henceforth the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, which I had the honour to found and work in became a centre of Basic Education. The first camp in Basic Education in South India was held there in 1939. The first Basic Training School for training teachers in Basic Education in the Madras State was also started there. Later, the All India Conference on Basic Education was also held there in 1949. It has continued to be one of the pioneering institutions in the Gandhian method of education.

## CHAPTER XV

### WHY BASIC EDUCATION

The educational pattern of any country reflects an attempt to meet its needs. In a country surrounded by enemies, the emphasis in the education of the young is on military training aiming at self-protection. In a country where the people are divided into various communities according to duties, like in ancient India, different types of education according to the tasks performed is provided. And so, educational patterns, that have appeared from time to time in the world, while having a basic element in common, have varied in emphasis according to the needs of the times or the special needs of a society. Even so, Basic Education was the direct outcome of a need in the Indian situation. It was given to Gandhiji to find out the ills of the country and suggest the remedy for these.

Gandhiji found the country poor, disunited and weak. It was in bondage and under foreign domination. Many members of the educated classes and certain vested interests were used by the foreign government to help them in the exploitation of the people and to maintain their hold on the nation.

Indian culture and ideals tended to be relegated to a second place, as the educated received their education through the medium of a foreign language and oblivious of their own culture, lived a life modelled after the pattern of the foreign masters. Consequently there grew a big gulf between the so-called educated and the uneducated.

Others before him saw this, but Gandhiji with his keen insight went into the causes. The advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda before him had given a fillip to our culture and better insight into our spiritual heritage. The way was thus paved for his great work towards the uplift of the Indian people.

Gandhiji was quick to perceive the evils in our society which were responsible for our national weakness and poverty. He found that the Varnashrama Dharma begun thousands of years ago with whatever motives had degenerated. Instead of inculcating respect for labour and work, it placed those who worked in the fields at the lowest rung of the social ladder. The Panchamas were the community which formed the very basis for the creation of our agricultural wealth. But they were regarded as untouchables and outcasts. Above them came the Sudras (who worked, but not in the same

way as the Panchamas. Then came the Vysias, who were a merchant community not doing work with their hands. The Kshatriyas and Brahmans who were the highest castes did not do any manual work at all. The higher castes vied with one another in not doing any manual work, for those who did work with their hands were considered inferior. It is no wonder then, that we deteriorated as a nation. Labour is the source of all wealth. In a society where labour is not held in esteem and where the so-called higher castes live on the exploitation of the lower castes, wealth is inevitably reduced resulting in large-scale poverty. Gandhiji perceived that the first step to be taken in awakening the nation was to propound a philosophy of life upholding the dignity of labour.

This he did constantly from the beginning of his public career. In a vast body like the Congress consisting of millions of members, he introduced the labour franchise. Since spinning was one of the crafts that could be learned easily by all and fulfilled one of the necessities of human life, it became to him the symbol of manual labour. In all Satyagraha Camps, he taught that there was no such thing as menial labour, and all work should be equally respected. To drive this home to our people, he gave great respect to scavenging and himself did it on occasions. At the Gandhi Seva Sangh conferences such hard labour as road laying, digging of ponds, latrine and urinal pits, was done by all the members. He went one step further when he included SARIRASRAMA in the vow to be taken by everybody along with the daily prayers. The vow was as follows :

*Ahimsa satya astaya brahmacharya asangraha  
Sarirasrama asvada sarvathra bhayavarjana  
Sarvadharmi samanathva swadeshi sparsa bhavana  
Him ekadase sevavim namrothna and vratha nischaya*

Translated into English, it read thus :—

Love, truth, non-stealing, purity, non-possession,  
Manual labour, control of the palate, fearlessness,  
Equal reverence for all religions, swadeshi, eradication  
of untouchability

To the service of these eleven virtues, I pledge myself.

It may be seen that SARIRASRAMA, i.e., manual labour is included in the virtues mentioned above.

By his respect for labour, he cut at the root of untouchability. Though the anti-untouchability campaign was begun after his release from imprisonment in 1944, the earliest attacks on it were made as early as 1920. He regarded untouchability not only as a

social evil, but also as a sin against humanity. He had to fight a long and bitter battle against the orthodox Hindu fold for nearly 20 years. In the course of this long struggle, he was misunderstood and abused bitterly as being opposed to the tenets of the Hindu religion. Little did they know the immense purification that he was bringing about in Hindu society by this vital social reform. They even tried to murder him once, when they laid a bomb in his track at Poona. But Gandhiji held fast to his purpose. Owing mainly to his herculean efforts, the vestiges of untouchability are being destroyed and Harijans are now being admitted to all places of worship.

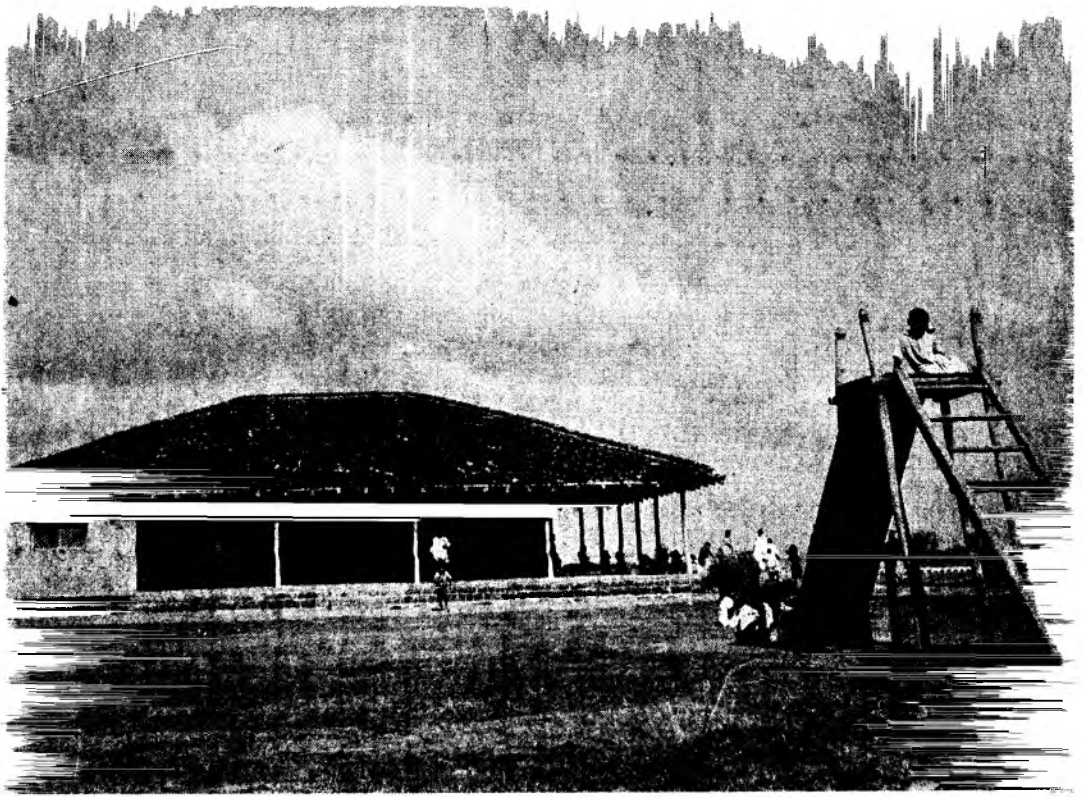
Closely connected with the above evil was the poverty of the Indian masses. Millions of people rarely had even one full meal a day. They had no clothing except rags, and no housing except life under trees and huts. Millions of them did not know the meaning of education, with the result they lived a precarious hand-to-mouth existence. On the other hand, he saw the Indian princes, big merchants and high officials living a life of untrammelled luxury. His heart bled when he saw the contrast between the two. Those who laboured and produced the wealth lived lives of stark poverty, but those who exploited them lived in luxury. He vowed to work for the removal of this exploitation. He found that centralised production and centralised power were the causes of the concentration of wealth among a few and where there was decentralisation of the instruments of production, wealth also tended to be distributed. He knew that only by the development of village industries, could the villages be made richer and the standard of life of the people raised. To spread this philosophy as well as to help in the resuscitation of many of the village industries which were fast disappearing under the competition of large-scale centralised production in India and elsewhere, he started the All-India Village Industries Association. If today the village *ghani*, rice handpounding, gur-making and such other village industries are still surviving, it is thanks to the A.-I.V.I.A.'s working out this directive from Mahatma Gandhi.

Mahatmaji in the course of his various tours had visited thousands of villages all over India. He was pained to see the dirt and squalor in every village. The village waste and night-soil were indiscriminately thrown everywhere. This not only created disease, but also led to a lot of economic waste. The insanitary nature of the water supply led to periodical epidemics of cholera, typhoid and other water-borne diseases, with their toll of suffering and death. The government-maintained hospitals in big towns and villages rarely attracted the attention of the authorities. And even when they did, it was only when the disease had taken an epidemic form,

with a large number of casualties and deaths. The preventive side was not given sufficient importance. Gandhiji found that the real solution to this problem was not in the acceleration of curative measures after the outbreak of the epidemic, but in teaching the villagers preventive measures. And this meant educating the people in the fundamental principles of dietetics, sanitation, healthy living, proper disposal of waste and night soil as well as its profitable utilization for making compost and thus enriching the soil.

He found our people individualistic and lacking in social co-operation. A small number of foreigners—a few thousands—lived, dominated and ruled over millions in India. That was made possible, because the foreigners thought co-ordinatedly and lived together, with one ideology and one objective. Consequently they were strong. But the millions in this country, divided as they were into thousands of castes and sub-castes had no common ideals or understanding. Sometimes they spent their whole lives in wrangling. They not only had no common life, objectives and programme, but were weakening themselves by incessant strife. Gandhiji saw this, and found that unless common interests were developed, India could not rise as a nation. He also realised that like other good habits, co-operation, team work and living together can be developed only when people are young.

The problems he had to face were colossal. In fact, his task was the creation of a classless and casteless society, with a tremendous will and capacity to work, united in its objective and ideology, able to live and work together. He found that the educational system enforced by the foreigners ran contrary to this great principle; in fact, the educated developed a contempt for manual work and their ambition was to get into subordinate posts under government. He wanted to avoid exploitation by creating village industries, but the then educational system created men and women who could not work with their hands and therefore could only live by exploitation of others. It taught principles of sanitation, but not in a practical way so that knowledge was on paper and for examinations and rarely used in life. It taught pupils to be intellectual without developing their sense of oneness with the rest of the people and the result was they became exploiters of the common people jointly with the foreign rulers. And so it was no wonder that Gandhiji wanted to evolve an educational system, which could inspire and train the youth of the nation in habits of constant work with training in social sense and cooperative effort. Basic Education, the system which he adumbrated, tries to put into effect in practical life the great principles he had in view. Thus the creation of a strong, healthy and united nation is the underlying objective of Basic Education.



*The Basic School of the Talimi Sangh, Sevagram*



*At a reception given to Gandhiji and Kasturba by the Poet at Shantiniketan*



## CHAPTER XVI

### EDUCATIONAL METHODS

The various Basic Education Institutions in different parts of the country drew inspiration for their educational methods from Gandhiji's own experiments on education. What were his methods? One was the importance he gave to the story as an instrument of education. He considered stories as of great cultural value. All good teachers have realised the natural desire of children for stories, their power of appeal to the imagination and the consequent quickening of the spiritual life of the child, through the joy he experiences in hearing them. But the stories to be interesting must be full of action and should be told in simple, vivid and natural language. We have such a rich and glorious collection of beautiful stories in all our languages, that we can always draw on them. The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the lives of heroes and saints that the country has produced from immemorial times provide an inexhaustible source for this purpose. Only the teacher must apportion time to select and prepare his stories so that he can tell them in a manner that will capture the imagination of the children.

It is necessary for the teacher to develop by practice the technique of story-telling. He must first study the story carefully, finding out its main message. There should be no moralising, when he tells the story, for, moralising may spoil the beauty of the story and its effect. Stories which will interest the child, and which are at the same time pregnant with noble ideas should be chosen. Gandhiji has related in his Autobiography as to how the story of Harischandra—the king who, though he lost everything, his wealth, his kingdom, his wife and child, could not yet say an untruth—had so deeply impressed his mind, that it inspired him to follow truth at all costs throughout his life. There are numerous such beautiful stories in our literature, which should be used for the purpose of educating children and inspiring them with the highest ideals.

Gandhiji also attached great educational importance to music. In an article in the Harijan dated 11th September, 1937, he said: "The modulation of the voice is as necessary as the training of the hand. Physical drill, handicrafts, drawing and music should go hand in hand in order to draw the best out of the boys and girls and create in them a real interest in their education". The song satisfies an imperative need in the child's nature and it is necessary that we should recognise this natural impulse and take advantage

of it in educating the child. The ethical effect of the message received through the story, talk or a lesson can be enhanced or emphasised through song.

All children, indeed all men and women, love singing and the effect of music on our mind and emotions is well-known. It has been found that even wild animals are susceptible to the charms of music. When Chaitanya Deva crossed the forests doing his *bhajan*, it is said that even wild animals danced to his tunes, lost their wildness and accompanied him. The same has been said about Saint Thyagaraja in South India. We are daily conscious of the refining influence of good songs in the home and at social gatherings and their powerful appeal to the emotions. This potent instrument should therefore be used for serving an educational purpose.

Gandhiji also advocated group singing as an instrument of disciplining our minds. Just as physical drill is necessary to enable physical action in unison with others, voice drill is necessary to modulate our tunes while singing in chorus with others. Chorus-singing is very valuable in integrating our emotional life with the life of the community. He had great faith in *Bhajan*, namely, the repetition of the Lord's name or singing of devotional songs together. In the latter part of his life he had prayer gatherings sometimes of many lakhs of people who would sing together the names of the Lord. Singing together has been found to be one of the effective ways of bringing people together.

With regard to the teaching of writing, Gandhiji considered that children should be taught to draw, before they were taught to write. To quote Kaka Kalelkar's words in his *STRAY GLIMPSES OF BAPU*: "One day we were discussing calligraphy. Bapu disliked his own handwriting, so he attached great importance to the beauty and legibility of script. He was always telling us, that children should be taught drawing before they were taught writing. Once the hand had steadied itself on form, it could not go wrong on the letters of the alphabet."\* He has also referred to this in his *Autobiography* where he has said: "This bad handwriting should be regarded as a sign of imperfect education. I tried later to improve mine, but it was too late. I could never repair the neglect of my youth. Let every young man and woman, be warned by my example and understand that good handwriting is a necessary part of education.

"I am now of opinion that children should first be taught the art of drawing, before learning how to write. Let the child learn his letters by observation, as he does different objects, such as flowers,

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\* Pp. 97-98, *STRAY GLIMPSES OF BAPU* (Navajivan Publications).

buds, etc., and let him learn hand-writing only after he has learned to draw objects. He will then write a beautifully formed hand."

It is interesting to observe that similar views have been expressed by prominent educationists in the West. It has been said: 'Drawing is really the reading and writing of form and colour. In an Infant school, drawing should form a part of practically every subject. It should precede and lead up to the teaching of writing'.\*

Mahatmaji's views on corporal punishment are also worth mentioning here. Millie Graham Polak in her *MR. GANDHI THE MAN* has described them thus: "Considering Mr. Gandhi's character, it was most natural that he not only disbelieved in corporal punishment, but strictly forbade it in dealing with children. However tiresome and naughty a child might be, Mr. Gandhi believed in appealing to the best in him and in endeavouring to arouse in the delinquent a sense of his own wrong-doing. Unfortunately, some children seem to be lacking in a 'best' or moral sense. They create some of those problems that eternally crop up when those who believe in pure ethics are dealing with human nature.

"A boy about fourteen years of age had been put in Mr. Gandhi's charge to educate, during one of his temporary school experiments. The boy was a great source of trouble; he seemed to be naturally and instinctively cruel and deceitful, two of the worst characteristics a child could display in Mr. Gandhi's eyes. The latter tried to shower extra care and affection upon the boy; he reasoned and pleaded with him, but in vain. One act of cruelty against other children or animals led to another, one lie to another. Eventually, my husband remonstrated with Mr. Gandhi for allowing the boy to run wild. Other people, he said, were complaining, quite rightly, about it. Mr. Gandhi sought for excuses, but my husband said that the boy needed a real corrective such as he would understand. Some physical punishment was evidently the only thing the child would respond to. At last, one day, the boy flung a cricket bat at a younger child's head, barely missing him. Mr. Gandhi, who witnessed the act, promptly asked my husband, who too, was present, to thrash the boy. This my husband did, and for a time a distinct improvement was noticeable. The boy put some sort of restraint upon himself, and it was quite clear that he understood physical pain when applied to himself, and did not like it."

Above all Gandhiji believed that handicrafts if introduced in schools and taught properly would help in the development of the

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\* Page 311, Plaisted's *THE EARLY EDUCATION OF CHILDREN*.

children's personality. Research has conclusively proved that the exercise of the hands has a vital part in the development of the human brain. Teachers have found by observation that both with normal and retarded children, work with the hand has resulted in quickening intelligence. Human life is a composite whole, in which the development of the mind and body should go together, and the pre-requisite of good intellectual awareness is the proper exercise of the senses. And so progressive educationists all over the world have used hand work for intellectual development.

This is all the more necessary in the case of children and adolescents. Nature has endowed them with tremendous vitality. They have also a natural curiosity and desire to know things for themselves. This vitality and curiosity is restrained in ordinary schools, by the imposition of bookish education, and the fear of punishment. In doing this we are working against nature. The result is constant outbursts of pent up energy which is called indiscipline. On the other hand the wiser course is to provide an outlet for this bubbling energy with which nature has endowed children and canalise it to better purposes. This is what the provision of handicrafts seeks to do and succeeds in doing.

This principle has been accepted in all progressive countries. The project method proceeds on this basis. The Montessori method follows this principle by providing children with playthings, which they can touch and handle so that their little fingers are trained to use them. The educational system of many of the countries in the West has incorporated this idea and given expression to it in various ways. But the special contribution of Gandhiji has been that these activities should be purposeful and directed towards a social end, such as health, personal and social hygiene. Those who went before him while recognising the use of craft as an instrument of education did not seek any result beyond teaching it to the child. But Gandhiji went further. According to him manual training should not consist of merely producing things for the school museum, but should result in producing articles which will be useful and marketable, leading to economic return. The children should not only be trained to develop their talents and their senses, but they should be taught to work efficiently from the beginning. Working efficiently should inevitably mean, cutting waste to a minimum and producing articles of maximum economic value. This in its turn would mean that the sale proceeds of these articles can go to support the school.

## CHAPTER XVII

### EDUCATION OF THE MASSES

Gandhiji was perhaps the greatest adult educator of the last few centuries. He travelled thousands of miles and came into contact with millions of men and women. He inspired thousands of young people to dedicate themselves to the service of the nation. Numerous earnest workers looked up to him for guidance. He gave them instructions—sometimes individually, in person or through correspondence and many times through YOUNG INDIA or the HARIJAN. The advice which he gave through the HARIJAN in 1935 comes to us with renewed freshness.

“The village worker should be an embodiment of industry. All his hours minus eight hours of sleep and rest should be fully occupied with work. If he will go to the village as a teacher, he will go there no less as a learner. He will enter into every detail of village life; he will discover the village handicrafts and investigate the possibilities of their growth and improvement. He may find the villagers completely apathetic, but he will, by his life, compel interest and attention. Of course, he will not forget his limitations and engage in talks futile for him, such as solving the problems of agricultural indebtedness.

“Sanitation and hygiene will engage a good part of his attention. His home and surroundings will not only be a model of cleanliness, but he will help to promote sanitation in the whole village, by taking the broom and basket round. His duty is to inculcate lessons of hygiene and sanitation in the village folk and to show them the way of preventing illness.

“He will interest himself in the welfare of the village Harijans. His home will ever be open to them. If the village folk will not suffer him to have Harijan friends in his house situated in their midst, he must take up his residence in the Harijan quarters.”\*

Today, more than ever, we are coming to realise that individual progress is inextricably inter-woven with the progress of the community. Our health and well being as well as that of our families depends as much upon cleanliness and sanitation in our homes, as cleanliness and sanitation in our neighbourhood, the purity of goods we purchase in the market and the quality of drinking water that is supplied to us. Our own mental development as well as that of our children is dependent upon the intellectual level prevalent in

\* Pp. 348-50, Tendulkar's MAHATMA, Vol. III.

the community. It is not without reason that children from certain sections have a higher level of attainment. This is mainly due to the higher calibre of the persons they move with. Our social and moral ideas and ideals are largely influenced and regulated by the community of which we form a part. And so if we are to rise as a nation and walk abreast of the progressive countries of the world, the general level of life and thought of our nation should rise. Individuals may be great; India has not been lacking in great men; but what counts more is the raising of the level of the people in general.

In view of the stupendous work that we had to do, Gandhiji laid great emphasis on the creation of a proper attitude of mind in our social workers. When he organised the Harijan movement, he insisted that every worker should consider himself a humble sevak in their service. He wanted us not to stand on a pedestal, feel superior and treat the villagers as of a lower status and ignorant. That was the attitude which made all our social work in the villages a failure in the last many decades. There is an age-long experience in the villages, which we must learn to understand and respect. Above all, we should be grateful for the opportunity to serve. We should work, not with the mere idea of social service, of uplifting others, but with the intention of uplifting and purifying ourselves through this service. As the great Swami Vivekananda said, "Gandhiji proclaimed through his daily life: 'Work is worship'. Here is God, who appears in these manifold forms. Let us worship God through the poor, the sick and the down-trodden." This approach will enable us to get the affection of the villagers and their co-operation.

What India needs today is the emotional integration of the various sections of the country into one community. We have been divided into so many castes and sub-castes, each with its own social status and respectability. It is these divisions that have weakened us and made us slaves. Gandhiji by his tremendous personality inspired and knit us into a whole. But this process of integration is not yet complete. We still think in terms of castes and communities. We should learn to think in terms of being citizens of this great country. How is this emotional integration to be brought about? This can be done only by bringing people together in common work, and above all in creating centres of interest in which all can participate and work together—in short, in creating opportunities for common community life. He encouraged inter-marriages between castes and communities, high and low, so that in course of time India could be welded into a casteless and classless society.

Once I had occasion to talk to Gandhiji at Sevagram on the method and purpose of adult education. To him literacy was not very important. What was of vital importance was the cultivation of character and self-confidence in our villagers. He wanted that the principles of Basic Education, namely, learning by doing should be extended to the adult field also. "Do not go to them with set ideas and tell them what they are to do or what they have to learn", he advised. "But on the other hand, find out what they need. If you can only try to fulfil their needs, they will gather round you. If they are sure that you are at least sincere about your efforts for them, they will do your behests. Bring them together for the fulfilment of their felt needs. This effort will be the effective means for educating them. By this they will achieve their objects, and what is more, confidence in themselves and strength in corporate activity. This will be a more real and lasting adult education than teaching them merely to read and write.

"In my opinion what we have reason to deplore and be ashamed of is not so much illiteracy as ignorance. Therefore, for adult education, I should have an alternative programme of driving out ignorance through carefully selected syllabus according to which they would educate the adult villager's mind. This is not to say that I would not give them knowledge of the alphabet. I value it too much to despise or even belittle its merit as a vehicle of education. Mass illiteracy is India's sin and shame and must be liquidated. But the literacy campaign must not end with a knowledge of the alphabet. It must go hand in hand with the spread of useful knowledge."

With regard to the education to be given to women, while recognising the equality of the sexes he was anxious that their special role in society should be recognised and education given to them accordingly. As he said, "Man and woman are of equal rank but they are not identical. They are a peerless pair being supplementary to one another; each helps the other, so that without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived, and therefore it follows as a necessary corollary from these facts, that anything that will impair the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of both." In framing any scheme of women's education this cardinal truth must be constantly kept in mind. Home life is entirely the sphere of women and therefore in domestic affairs, in the upbringing and education of children, women ought to have more knowledge. Not that knowledge should be divided into watertight compartments but a fuller life for men and women should be developed. He was anxious that a large band of women workers should be



trained who will carry our ideals of purity and simplicity to the women of our village along with scientific knowledge relating to health, hygiene, nutrition and proper upbringing of children.

Gandhiji was aware of the great part that our country had to play in human destiny. While the history of other countries is married by endless wars and massacre of millions of men and women, India has given from time to time the message of peace, through personalities such as Buddha, Asoka and Ramakrishna. Gandhiji proclaimed: "India's destiny lies not along the bloodless way of peace, that comes from a simple and Godly life. I feel India's mission is different from that of others. India is fitted for the religious supremacy of the world. There is no parallel in the world for the process of purification that this country has voluntarily undergone. It is less in need of steel weapons; it has fought with divine weapons; it can still do so. I am humble enough to admit that there is much that we can profitably assimilate from the West. Wisdom is no monopoly of one continent or race. But I do believe that if India has patience enough to go through the fire of suffering and to resist unlawful encroachments upon her own civilization, which imperfect though it undoubtedly is, has hitherto stood the ravages of time, she can make a lasting contribution to the peace and solid progress of the world."

To him religion was not a matter of narrow beliefs or sectarian prejudices. He believed in the basic virtues preached by all religions and regarded all religions as leading to the same goal, namely, God. He considered that faith in one's own religion should include respect for other religions. He explained religion as that "which binds one indissolubly to the Truth within and which ever purifies. True religion and true morality are indissolubly bound up with each other. As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. The various religions are different roads converging to the same point. Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches and leaves, so there is one true and perfect religion, but it becomes many as it passes through the human medium. Imperfect men put it into such language as they command and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Everybody is right from his own point of view. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean indifference to one's own faith, but a more intelligent and purer love for it. Let no one for a moment entertain the fear that a reverent study of other religions is likely to weaken or shake one's faith in one's own."

Gandhiji wanted that India, while firm on her own ways of attaining a higher life should be tolerant and accept the best in the culture of other countries. In the making of a new India, he wanted

us to absorb and cultivate the good elements in the way of life of other people and countries. He said, "The Indian culture of our times is now in the making. No culture can live, if it attempts to be exclusive. There is no such thing as pure Aryan culture in existence today in India. Whether the Aryans were indigenous to India or were unwelcome intruders does not interest me much. What does interest me is the fact, that my remote ancestors blended with one another with the utmost freedom and we of the present generation are a result of that blend.

"I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want that cultures of all lands be blown into my house but I don't want to be blown off my feet by any. I would have our young men and women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world-languages as they like, and then expect them to give benefits of their learning to India and to the world like a Bose, a Roy or the Poet himself. But I would not have a single Indian to forget, neglect or be ashamed of his mother tongue, of his own great cultural back-ground, or to feel that he or she cannot think or express the best thoughts in his own language."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### GANDHIJ'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

To Gandhiji mere literacy was not education. According to him, "that man has had a liberal education, who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that as a mechanism it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold logic engine with all its parts of equal strength, whose mind is stored with a knowledge of fundamental truths of nature, whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience, who has learned to hate all vileness and to respect others as himself; such a one and no other, I conceive, has had a liberal education."

He considered the present system of education in our schools and colleges as intellectual dissipation, rather than intellectual training. "Intellectual training is there looked upon as something altogether unrelated to manual or physical work. But since the body must have some sort of physical exercise to keep it in health, they try to attain that end by means of an artificial and otherwise barren system of physical culture. The young man who emerges from this system can in no way compete in physical endurance with an ordinary labourer. The slightest physical exertion gives him a headache; a mild exposure to the sun is enough to give him giddiness. As for the faculties of the heart, they are simply allowed to run to seed or to grow anyhow in a wild undisciplined manner.

"True education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words, an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of development of his intellect. Unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove a poor lop-sided affair. By spiritual training, I mean, the education of the heart. A proper and all-round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds *pari passu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole. It would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piecemeal or independently of one another."

He advocated education of children through activities involved in a continuous craft. If "the child is set to some useful occupation like spinning, carpentry, agriculture, etc. for his education and in that connection is given a thorough comprehensive knowledge, relating to the theory of the various operations that he is to perform.

and the use and construction of the tools he is weilding, 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 in experience. His intellectual education should include a knowledge of mathematics and the various sciences. If to this is added literature by way of recreation, it would give him a perfect balanced all-round education, in which the intellect, the body and the spirit have all full play and develop together into a natural, harmonious whole. Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all these three is required for the making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education."

In this new ideology of education, work is the pivot on which all instruction revolves. This work may be of various kinds. Activities involving personal and community cleanliness had the foremost place in the Basic schools which he advocated. Education for the young does not consist of stuffing impracticable ideas into the minds of children; it is essentially training them in good habits. Thus cleanliness and sanitation, practically done and scientifically understood, are the beginning of education. The daily experiences that every child has to undergo like regular morning evacuation, cleaning the teeth, nose and eyes, bathing, physical exercises, washing clothes and other daily activities can be exploited for teaching as well as the inculcation of good habits. In the same way social and religious festivals, weddings and other social events, visits to temples and other places can be made useful instruments of instruction. Above all this method of education recognises the fact that useful manual labour, through constructive crafts intelligently performed, is one of the best means of developing a balanced intellect.

The objective of education is not only to turn out good individuals, but also socially useful men and women who understand their place in, and duty to the society in which they live. No education is complete until this important aspect of training is stressed. Gandhiji considered this aspect as an essential part of education. This is to be given not theoretically but by practical observance from the first year at school. And this, in its turn, leads to team work and discipline, the lack of which has been our national weakness. Activities involving social objectives gradually lead children to the cultivation of a social sense. They also learn to put the needs of the community above their own petty pleasures and advantages.

A sharp intellect can be cultivated through other methods but then it may not be socially developed. On the other hand, an intellect

developed through the medium of socially useful manual labour must of necessity become an instrument of service. Mere intellectual training ordinarily makes a man individualistic. But education through work and activities brings the child in contact with other children in cooperation with whom he has to work. This brings out clearly in his own mind the social objective, so important for healthy living, and trains in him not only a sense of cooperation, but also qualities of leadership.

To Gandhiji, character-building was the essence of education and purity of personal life the one indispensable condition for it. He laid great stress on religious education. He was not unaware of the great difficulties of giving religious education in schools in a country like ours, in which many religions are professed and followed. Religion to him meant "Truth and Ahimsa or rather Truth alone, because Truth includes Ahimsa, Ahimsa being the necessary and indispensable means for its discovery. Therefore anything that promotes the practice of these virtues is a means for imparting religious education and the best way to do this, in my opinion, is for the teachers rigorously to practise these virtues in their own person. Their very association with the boys, whether on the playground or in the classroom, will then give the pupils a fine training in these fundamental virtues.

"A curriculum of religious instruction should include a study of the tenets of faiths other than one's own. For this purpose the students should be trained to cultivate the habit of understanding and appreciating the doctrines of the various great religions of the world in a spirit of reverence and broad-minded tolerance. This, if properly done would help to give them a spiritual assurance and a better appreciation of their own religion. There is one rule, however, which should always be kept in mind while studying all the great religions, and that is, that one should study them only through the writings of known votaries of the respective religions. For instance, if one wants to study the BHAGAVATA one should do so not through a translation of it made by a hostile critic but one prepared by a lover of the BHAGAVATA. Similarly to study the Bible one should study it through the commentaries of devoted Christians. This study of other religions besides one's own will give one a grasp of the rock-bottom unity of all religions and afford a glimpse also of that universal and absolute truth which lies beyond the 'dust of creeds and faiths'.

"Let no one even for a moment entertain the fear that a reverent study of other religions is likely to weaken or shake one's faith in one's own. The Hindu system of philosophy regards all religions as containing the elements of truth in them and enjoins an attitude

of respect and reverence towards them all. This of course presupposes regard for one's own religion. Study and appreciation of other religions need not cause a weakening of that regard; it should mean extension of that regard to other religions.

"In this respect religion stands on the same footing as culture. Just as preservation of one's own culture does not mean contempt for that of others, but requires assimilation of the best that there may be in all the other cultures, even so should be the case with religion."

True religion would mean faith in the Divine. "It is faith that steers us through stormy seas, faith that moves mountains and faith that jumps across the ocean. That faith is nothing but a living, wide-awake consciousness of God within. One who has achieved that faith, though physically diseased, is spiritually healthy; though physically poor, he rolls in spiritual riches. Without faith this world will come to naught in a moment. True faith is appropriation of the reasoned experiences of people whom we believe to have lived a life purified by penance and prayer. There are subjects where reason cannot take us far and we have to accept things on faith. Faith then does not contradict reason but transcends it. Faith is a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are without the purview of reason. This faith is not a delicate flower which would wither under the slightest stormy weather. It is like the Himalayas—no storm can possibly remove the Himalayas from its foundations. I want every one of you to cultivate that faith in God and religion.

"Fearlessness is the first requisite of spirituality. Cowards can never be moral. Where there is fear there is no religion. Every reader of the GITA is aware that fearlessness heads the list of the Divine Attributes enumerated in the 16th Chapter. Whether this is due to the exigencies of metre or whether the pride of place has been deliberately yielded to fearlessness is more than I can say. In my opinion, however, fearlessness fully deserves the first rank assigned to it there. Fearlessness is the *sine qua non* for the growth of the other noble qualities. How can one seek Truth or cherish Love without fearlessness? 'The Path of HARI (the Lord) is the path of the brave, not of cowards'. The brave are those armed with fearlessness."

Gandhiji considered prayer as the instrument through which faith, fearlessness and a cultured life can be cultivated. "Prayer has been the saving of my life. Without it I should have been a lunatic long ago. I have had my share of the bitterest public and private experiences. They threw me into despair, but if I was able to get rid of it, it was because of prayer. And the more my faith

in God increased, the more irresistible became the yearning for prayer. I felt that as food was indispensable for the body, so was prayer indispensable for the soul. In fact food for the body is not so indispensable as prayer for the soul. Such worship or prayer is no flight of eloquence, it is no lip-homage. It springs from the heart. Prayer needs no speech. It is an unfailing means of cleansing the heart of passions. But it must be combined with utmost humility.

“Scientists tell us that without the presence of the cohesive force amongst the atoms that comprise this globe of ours, it would crumble to pieces and we would cease to exist. Even so, there must be this cohesive force in all things animate, and the name for that cohesive force among animate beings is Love. We notice it between father and son, between brother and sister, friend and friend. But we have to learn to use that force among all that lives and in the use of it consists our knowledge of God. Where there is love, there is life; hatred leads to destruction. Life persists in the midst of destruction and therefore there must be a higher law than that of destruction. The fact that mankind persists shows that the cohesive force is greater than the disruptive force.

“All the teachers that ever lived have preached that law with more or less vigour. If Love was not the law of life, life would not have persisted in the midst of death. Life is a perpetual triumph over the grave. If there is a fundamental distinction between man and beast, it is the former’s progressive recognition of the law and its application in practice to his own personal life. That the brute in us seems so often to gain an easy triumph is true enough. That however does not disprove the law. It shows the difficulty of practice. When the practice of the law becomes universal, God will reign on earth, as He does in Heaven. I can in truth and in perfect humility, bear witness to the fact, that to the extent I have represented Love in my life, in thought, word and deed, I have realised, the ‘Peace that passeth understanding’.”\*

Thus it will be seen that the New Education, Gandhiji advocated, was not only a new method of education, but also a new philosophy of life for which he lived and gave his life. It stands for the dignity of all aspects of human work. It recognises that all wealth is the creation of human endeavour; and so, it gives the highest place to work in its daily activities. It aims not only at creating balanced and harmonious individuals, but also a balanced and harmonious society—a just social order, based on Truth and Love, in which there is no unnatural dividing line between the haves and the have-nots.

\* EDUCATION by Gandhiji : Compiled by T. S. Avinashilingam and published by the Ministry of Education, Government of India.

## I N D E X

*Roman figures refer to chapters.*

*Indian numerals refer to pages.*

*Entries in Italics are book titles.*

*Entries in “ ” marks represent quotations from Gandhiji’s writings or speeches.*

	PAGE
Adult education .. .. .	76—77
“Advice to village workers” .. .. .	75
“Ahimsa” .. .. .	36—37
All India Education Board .. .. .	65—66
All India National Educational Conference, Wardha .. .. .	XIII 56—62
Proposals before Wardha Conference .. .. .	54—55
Resolutions .. .. .	61—62
All India Village Industries Association .. .. .	69
Aryanayakam .. .. .	63
<i>Autobiography</i> .. .. .	10
Basic Education .. .. .	4, 20, 46, 50, XIV 63—66, XV 67—70, 71
Criticism by Tagore .. .. .	46
Criticism by others .. .. .	53, 59—60
Gandhiji’s replies .. .. .	47—50, 53, 60
Basic Education System .. .. .	See Basic Education
Bihar Vidyapith .. .. .	42
Black Laws .. .. .	2
Bose, Subhash Chandra .. .. .	42
Champanan .. .. .	3, 24, 25
Champanan Satyagraha .. .. .	25, 42
Champanan Schools .. .. .	13, VII 24—27
“Champanan Schools” .. .. .	25
“Character” .. .. .	2, 7, 10, III 10—14
Charkha .. .. .	See spinning wheel
“Co-education” .. .. .	21—22, 22—23, 30
Co-education, experiment in .. .. .	VI 21—23
“College education” .. .. .	52
College education .. .. .	52, 54
Complex method .. .. .	59
Conscription of students .. .. .	58—59
“Control of the palate” .. .. .	37—38
Corporal punishment .. .. .	73
Drawing .. .. .	71, 72—73
“Education”, Gandhiji’s definition .. .. .	51
“Education of children” .. .. .	30—32



	PAGE
Education of women .. .. .	77
Educational methods .. .. .	XVI 71—74
“Experience as teacher” .. .. .	5—9
“Fearlessness” .. .. .	39, 83
<i>Gandhi, the man</i> .. .. .	28, 73
Gokhale .. .. .	34
“Good Education” .. .. .	34—41
Gujarat Vidyapith .. .. .	42—43
Handicrafts .. .. .	19, 51, 54, 57
Higher education .. .. .	See College education
Hindustani Talimi Sangh .. .. .	See All India Education Board
Indian National Congress .. .. .	65
Jamia Millia Islamia .. .. .	42
Kallenbach .. .. .	5, 7, 8, 28, 57
Kashi Vidyapith .. .. .	42
Labour franchise .. .. .	68
Liberal education .. .. .	80
“Literacy” .. .. .	51
“Love” .. .. .	84
Manual training .. .. .	See Manual work
“Manual Work” .. .. .	18—19, 19—20, 30, 40, 50
“Medium of instruction” .. .. .	IV. 15-17, 54, 62
Montessori method .. .. .	74
Music .. .. .	71—72
National Schools & Colleges .. .. .	3, 42
Nav Bharat Vidyalaya, Wardha .. .. .	53
“Non-possession” .. .. .	38
“Non-stealing” .. .. .	38
Philosophy of Education .. .. .	XIII 80—84
Phoenix Settlement .. .. .	28
Polak .. .. .	17, 18
“Politics and students” .. .. .	40—41
Pragji Desai .. .. .	7
Prayer .. .. .	83
Prem Vidyalaya .. .. .	44
“Primary Education” .. .. .	52, 54, 56—59
Project method .. .. .	59
“Religion” .. .. .	34—35, 78, 82—83
Ruskin .. .. .	18
“Sabarmati Ashram” .. .. .	29—33
Sabarmati Ashram .. .. .	3, 29, 34
Sandal-making .. .. .	20, 51
Shah, K.T. .. .. .	60, 63
Shoe-making .. .. .	19

	PAGE
Shradadhanandji .. .. .	29
Shri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya .. .. .	66
Sphinx Park .. .. .	2
"Spinning" .. .. .	46, 46—50, 51, 57
Spinning Wheel .. .. .	XI.46—50
Sri Ramakrishna .. .. .	2
State universities .. .. .	55
Story-telling .. .. .	71
"Swadeshi" .. .. .	38—39
Tagore, Rabindranath .. .. .	46
"Text books" .. .. .	9
Tolstoy Farm .. .. .	2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 18, 19, 20, 21, 28, 30
School on .. .. .	II 5—9
"Truth" .. .. .	35—36
University Education .. .. .	44
Unto This Last .. .. .	18, 28
"Untouchability" .. .. .	39—40
Villages, service .. .. .	See advice to village workers
Vocations .. .. .	54
Work, educational .. .. .	V 18—20
Zakir Husain .. .. .	3, 63
Members .. .. .	63
Reports .. .. .	63—65

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