UNIT 8: ALTERNATIVE VISIONS ABOUT EDUCATION: RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND MAHATMA GANDHI

UNIT STRUCTURE

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8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- know the views Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, towards education.
- know the views of Rabindranath Tagore, about education.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

The educational ideas of both Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore differed immensely from the existing formal system of education, that involves rigid schooling hours following a strict curriculum. They envisioned a different pattern of education for the children and the model that they laid down for it can be considered under the alternative education models of today. In this units we will discuss about their views on education in detail.



LET US KNOW:

Alternative schools are methods of schooling where the techniques used for teaching and learning are non traditional and completely different from the formal modes of teaching and learning.

8.3 EDUCATIONAL IDEAS OF GANDHI:

The education system prevailing at that time which was concentrated on a centralized and uniform higher education focused on developing a general attitude amidst boys and girls of viewing education as a social welfare check. The breaking up of the continuity of existence is the greatest defect of education practice in India in the views of Mahatma Gandhi. This has led to the gap between the educated and the uneducated and there is very little commonality left in between the two sections. Gandhi was skeptical of the then prevailing formal education system as it disrupts the old Indian ideals by placing the individual over the community, by loosening social bonds and sense of responsibility. The essence of real education according to him is when one generation is fit enough to take forward its previous generation, thus bridging the gap and continuing the life of the community. Apart from maintaining the old values of Indian tradition and culture, education must also act as an instrument for bringing about a social revolution that would establish a co-operative commonwealth of men.

Since Gandhi as we know, was basically concerned about a country that was being taken control by outsiders, he believed that through attainment of right education one can bring back ones freedom. He was of the view that political freedom would be jeopardized if the Indian people were not first trained and prepared educationally, morally and socially. For democracy to survive, Indian people had to be educated not only politically but socially too.

- **Basic Education model of Gandhi:**

True education for him is one where the individual develops his character, trains his faculties and learns to control his passion in the service of mankind. He questioned the futility of the British education system and put forth his plan, which is known as Basic Education or NaiTalim. It can be said that the first blue print of a job-centric, value-based and mass oriented format of education for modern India was proposed by Mahatma Gandhi. His model of education which as mentioned, known as "Basic Education", provided for manual work along with intellectual exercise. His model is the

first model of "vocalization" of education in India. He advocated a form of basic education that emphasized social consciousness and dignity of every individual. In his opinion, craft was to be the center of education. He was of the view that "the craft-centered" education will bring a new age from which class and communal hatred is eliminated and exploitation eschewed. The craft will not only keep the individuality of every worker intact, but also will develop cooperativeness and team work." He emphasized "learning by doing" method in which students engage in productive work at school.
It would also train the younger generation in the crafts by which their forefathers sustained national and social life once. Thus in this way education would bring about a continuity between the present generation and the previous generations. He was also of the view that through doing the work by themselves the children will also realize that it is patriotic to pay for their training through labour.

Gandhi's response to colonial education was proposed through his wardha scheme in 1937 which involved a national program of NaiTalim or 'basic education'. He proposed a restructuring of school knowledge around local craft: a radical break from brahmanical and colonial systems of education. This model challenged the centralized authority of curriculum and pedagogy by underscoring the capacity of the teacher and the importance of local knowledge. 'basic education' sought to develop the productive capacities of village children in the face of advancing industrialization. Knowledge was to be produced and assimilated through work. In this way, Gandhi's ideas resonated with Dewey's educational theories of a school system that was integrated into social life. His model also drew interest from Italian educationist Maria Montessori, whose training of teachers in India from 1939 to 1947 had strengthened the influence of her child-centered ideas in the country.

In his early years, Gandhi was critical of science but later on he focuses more on the possibilities of a new science and its practice. This view of his is reflected in his writings on Khadi and basic education. He always emphasized in his system of basic education, the significance of

handicraft. According to him each craft should be taught to the child scientifically so that they know involved every process. This technique according to him enhances ones learning more, at the same time saving immense labour. This would also enable the child to learn in one year through his 'schooling' period which otherwise might have taken years. The scientific aspect of craft-centered education was much more important to him than its mechanical aspect.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS- A

1) What are the benefits of a "craft-centric" education according to Gandhi?

2) Gandhi's model of education came as a response to or in opposition to which form of education?

- **Importance of Economic aspect in his educational model :**

Mahatma Gandhi believed that economic activities need to play a basic part in the education system. By economic activities he basically meant making handicrafts.. Everything that is in a child must be drawn out through teaching of this handicraft and the subjects like history, arithmetic and geography should be related to this craft. He emphasized on crafts not only for its economic purpose, but because education requires proper exercise and training of the bodily organs. The training of the mind, body must go along with that of the soul. Gandhi viewed education as a tool for development of human capital and the existing system according to him was detrimental to the productive growth of the masses. It disorganized them and made them easy prey to poverty, unemployment and despair. Hence productive forces were the main focus in his NaiTalim, basic education model. The vital objective of this model was to develop productive and social skills among the masses.

Apart from development of the personality, education should comprise of vocational training to cater to the economic needs of the members of the society. He believed that every men has an equal right to

the necessities of life, but he has also the corresponding duty to do some manual work with his body. In his new scheme of education, to cultivate such new values among the members of society and cater to their economic needs and make them self-supporting, he laid emphasis on education.

- **The basic importance of education:**

The ultimate aim of education must be the realization of self and total development of the human personality. The ultimate aim of education reflects in Gandhi's concept of the ultimate goal in human life- the realization of the ultimate reality, a knowledge of God or truth.

His model of education was highly centralized to incorporate the whole community. It was designed in a way to motivate the entire community and place responsibility and accountability at the community level. He wanted to establish a social-order based on socio-economic justice in which "there will be neither paupers nor beggars, nor high nor low, neither millionaire employers nor half-starved employees." To Gandhi, his scheme of education will be conducive to obtain such a society.

The broader aim of education according to Gandhi is to inculcate the values of truth, non-violence, labour, brahmacharya or chastity, swadeshi, anti-untouchability, fasting and service to mankind. He focuses on the three H's; i.e head, heart and hand, rather than reading, writing or arithmetic. For Gandhi, the true development of head, heart and hand is necessary for a satisfactory system of education. True education is that which draws out and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties. The aim of education should be to build the whole man and develop his integral personality. "Literacy in itself is not education. It is not the end of education, nor even the beginning". Education is simply the process to bring out what is latent in man. Education must be concrete and inter connected, not abstract or given in isolated sections. Concrete education allows the learner to manipulate problems or sets of problems and study their relationships, character and artistic sense. It allows the mind, heart, hand and eyes to work simultaneously in a co-related manner, resulting in a harmonious and well-balanced personality. Education must be imparted in the child's mother-

tongue and organically connected with the child's Social and Cultural environment.

8.4 EDUCATIONAL IDEAS OF TAGORE:

Rabindranath Tagore was one of the greatest pioneers in Indian education. As a child he was influenced by the religious revivalism, the artistic renaissance, and the national movement that was going on throughout the country at that time. He was naturally sympathetic towards what was specifically Indian and these new thought currents helped in the growth of this feeling. He was the first Indian to criticize the existing system of education of its evils. He focused and gave much importance to the use of mother tongue in the life and education of the pupils. He considered that using a foreign language as a medium of teaching will act as an obstacle to one's original expression. Education should spread among the masses through the mother tongue. He recommended English as a supplementary subject to the mother tongue. No educational development will succeed until it works for the development of the common people of the land.

Though he was sensitive to every approach from abroad, his outlook was nonetheless very much grounded in Indian philosophy. He sought to build up an outlook where comprehensiveness and a feeling for the whole would be reconciled with a proper appreciation of the value and dignity of the individual. He was of the view that education in India suffered because it had lost its contact with the environment. He cited the case of Europe as an example and pointed out how its universities had evolved as a living organic part of the European life while gradually moving towards the development of science and culture. India must similarly evolve her institutions in the same manner in accordance with her own traditions and let them grow up gradually.

Tagore drew from the European traditions of modern humanistic education to write of a liberationist pedagogy centering on the concept of childhood but also to be practiced alongside economic activities and modern scientific development. Drawing interest from western educationalists Dewey and Montessori, Tagore's educational theories proposed an activity-

centered curriculum, such "that the primary function of the teacher is to produce an atmosphere for creative activity". His pedagogic vision drew on assumptions about the curiosity, creativity and autonomy of the child.

To understand his educational thought it is important to comprehend his philosophy of life. To Tagore, the whole universe is a manifestation of one all-powerful being which pervades all time and space. This is why he saw the principle of unity in diversity operating in all things- animate or inanimate, organic or inorganic. He recognized that there is a divine spark in each and every thing. This impels Tagore to respect each and every creature of God. This is the real basis of his naturalism, humanism and internationalism. Tagore made not only a serious study of the western culture and civilization but also absorbed all that was sound and healthy in it. Consequently he has led much stress on adopting rational thinking and scientific attitude in relation to the life of the individual and the society.

- **The model school of Tagore:**

The school established by him emphasised on the all-round development of its students. The view of the world, the reality by which India has evolved over the years can be summed up in one compound Sanskrit word, i.eSachidananda according to him. The meaning of the word embodies phases of reality. "Sat" expresses the real as fact that things are and are united to one another through the relationship of common existence. The second phase of reality is "cit" which means that human beings are conscious and are related to all things through relationship of knowledge. The third phase is "ananda", which means that human beings exist as well as enjoy every experience of this existence. The purpose of education is to develop all these sense of unity with nature and life. Education in his view can never be merely abstract and intellectual. To be truly creative, education should be in connection with economic, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual life. He admired the old Tapovana (hermitage) where teachers and pupils live in harmony with each other and nature. In such models of learning students used to imbibe spiritual education along with other physical, emotional and intellectual activities unconsciously. Education must also be inspired by a spirit of freedom and joy.

Tagore's philosophy is reflected in the educational adventure he initiated at Santiniketan by establishing the Brahmacharya ashram in 1901. In this school special provision was made to bring the child close to nature. This institution was an open-air school in the truest sense of the term. Tagore raised a new world of children far from the madding crowd in an atmosphere of freedom and spontaneity. Here children were provided ample opportunities to play their imagination and sense of wonder and for satisfaction of their curiosity. It was repugnant to Tagore to deprive children of their legitimate joy and freedom by subjecting them to the restrictions imposed by civilisations. He believed that the classroom, surrounded as it is by walls and roof, unduly restricts imagination, initiative and resourcefulness of children, and that in nature, in open air there is not only an unlimited scope for children's physical movement and development but also an immense possibility for their mental growth and spiritual progress. Thus they achieved balanced development of their body, intellect and spirit, and their life harmonizes with the entire universe. This is the highest aim of education.

Like Rousseau, Tagore has also underlined that the story of Robinson Crusoe would not only prove interesting to children but be a source of inspiration for them. Tagore admired this story as a representative of the spirit of the west. But this does not mean that he wanted children to remain away from social influences. He had a healthy and responsible attitude towards society.

- **Importance of Economic aspect in his educational model:**

In similar lines with spirituality, Tagore also gave emphasis on economic development. Society since its inception was held together by economic co - operation. Hence educational institutions should be the centers of intellectual as well as economic life. They must work for the betterment of the villagers by improving their economic standard. Education according to them will be fruitful if it incorporates both the values inherited from the past and new values brought by the west. Contact with external influences is a necessary element for preserving and strengthening the vitality of a nation.

- **Importance of creativity:**

One of the important thing that he emphasized on education is that there must be ample opportunities for creative self-expressions. He pleaded for the inclusion of fine arts in curriculum Fine arts according to him fine arts are not only a source of personal gratification to individuals, but they provide an outlet for the manifestation of the hidden power which exists in each and every thing of the universe. He pointed out that along with material prosperity, one must also look for the development of cultural and creative life, so as to express ones feelings and sensitivity well. The spirit of joy, creative and vital energy can be released through the cultivation of free expression of dance, drama, music and poetry.

- **Internationalism:**

The element of internationalism finds an important place in Tagore's philosophy of education. The basis of it is his philosophy of life. He was respectful towards all and did not harbor any hatred or malice towards any nation or community because of political narrowness or religious prejudices. The idea of Viswa-bharti germinated in the minds of Tagore because of deep thinking about his international scene. He conceived this site of learning as an institution where the world makes its home in a single nest. It was founded on a broad concept of internationalism. It provides a unique opportunity to study both the cultures of east and west so that one can have a correct understanding of the contributions made by different peoples to the cultural heritage of mankind in the sphere of art and literature, religion, philosophy and so on.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-B

1) What is the name of the university established by Rabindranath Tagore?

- **Tagore's views vis-à-vis with that of progressive education:**

There are people who hold the view that Tagore's educational experiment is just an echo of that educational movement of Europe and

America which seeks to exalt the child to the central place in the education process and is known as progressive education. Undoubtedly there are certain similarities between Tagore's educational experiment and the progressive education. For instance, Tagore greatly emphasizes child's individuality and regards freedom and happiness as basic to his education, which is similar to what progressive education holds. However his views differs in the sense that he does not want the child to be left on his own or to be indifferent towards social needs. He insists that education must inculcate social sense and community consciousness in children, while it endeavors to develop their individuality. In order to achieve this end he thinks it necessary to organize learning situations in an appropriate and systematic manner.

Tagore insisted that learning and teaching are two aspects of the same process of education. Education is therefore a permanent feature of the adventure of life. Education is a process that should go beyond the present and include the past and present in leading the present. He believed in the unity of all creation. There was no mysticism in his educational philosophy. He was a hard-headed, practical and keen observer of life. Many of his educational ideas were criticized by people of his times, but the modern emphasis on social implications of education incorporates his ideas well. To him, the fountain head of true individuality is self-knowledge. This is the phase where the individuals gives more than he takes to the society. The individual gift turns into a veritable blessing for all.

8.5 A COMPARISON OF THE IDEAS OF TAGORE AND GANDHI

Tagore and Gandhi both were separate in their ideas and outlook. Gandhi was much impressed by Tagore's ideas and experiments and took help from the staff of Santiniketan to form his system of education which he termed as "basic education". But this "basic" draws in a very small part of Tagore's ideas and cannot be said to mirror Tagore's work or ideas. With regard to their views, C.F. Andrews stated that their difference of temperament was very wide and it was not possible for them to come at a

common intellectual understanding, however the bond of friendship remained strong in between the two.

Tagore regarded freedom and play as basic to all learning. He placed so much emphasis on them that even the scheme of basic national education propounded by Gandhi could not escape his criticism.In the curriculum of his own school, handicrafts were accorded an important place besides nature study, art, music, etc. but here the craft was not intended to be a source of income for the school but a medium for self-expression, so that children may produce beautiful articles out of raw materials of various kinds and thus satisfy their creative impulses and realize their aesthetic capacities. Further, Tagore laid great stress on physical labour and social service in the education of the youth, after they had completed the stage of elementary education. He suggested that educational institutions should provide for practical industrial training and cooperative work, and that they should be engaged in such projects to improve the economic, moral, physical and intellectual life of the people.



8.6 LET US SUM UP

- Gandhi was skeptical of the then prevailing formal education system as it disrupts the old Indian ideals by placing the individual over the community.
- He was of the view that political freedom would be jeopardized if the Indian people were not first trained and prepared educationally, morally and socially.
- According to Gandhi for democracy to survive, Indian people needs to be educated not only politically but socially too.
- Rabindranath Tagore was one of the greatest pioneers in Indian education.. As a child he was influenced by the religious revivalism, the artistic renaissance, and the national movement that was going on throughout the country at that time.