

The Education System in India During the Colonial Period and the Introduction of Nai-Talim by M.K.Gandhi

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Abstract:

During the colonial period, India's educational system created a gap between the English- educated Indians and the ignorant masses. So, on 22nd and 23rd October, 1937, Gandhi called a conference at Warda on National Education. To overcome educational conflict he proposed Nai Talim (new education) aimed at developing the whole personality through the skills of art, drawing and any handicrafts. Moreover, he considered native languages as medium of instructions.

Keywords: Colonial period, National Education, Nai Talim, Handicrafts

INTRODUCTION

The education system in India during the colonial period perpetuated social inequality. In 1835 Lord Macaulay, the president of General Committee of Public Instruction, implemented the English language as a medium of instruction. This was nothing but an attempt to spread western education in order to create a class of Indians who would be Indian in color and blood, but English in taste. He wrote a minute in which he criticized oriental learning as imperfect and considered English as the best medium of instruction. The aim was to introduce education only for few upper and middle class Indians and through them reaching out it to the masses. Thus, he adopted the downward infiltration method. At this time Lord William Bentinck's government decided to provide education of western science and literature to Indians in English. Although improvements in education policy had been observed since 1854, English education had created a division between English educated and the ignorant masses.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the education system of British-ruled India and discuss the Nai-Talim education introduced by M.K. Gandhi to overcome it.

DISCUSSION

Historically speaking, during British rule in India the first step towards education was the East India Company Act of 1813, also known as the Charter Act of 1813, which sanctioned one lakh rupees for the education of Indians. Under this Act it was not clear that education was for everyone or for some limited people. Moreover, at that time there was disagreement between the two groups as to what kind of education would be introduced for the Indians and which language would be used as a medium of education. The Orientalists were in favour of traditional Indian education and wanted to promote classical languages as the medium of instruction. The Anglicists, on the other hand, had supported

western style of education, were inclined to teach western subjects and favoured English as a medium of instruction. So, because of these issues as the sanctioned one lakh rupees was not allocated until 1823, the Governor-General-in council appointed a General Committee of Public Instruction to grant the one lakh rupees for education. The committee, which was made up of ten European members including the president Lord Macaulay, decided to use of major portions of the funding to improve oriental education. But this committee failed to determine the medium of instruction by voting as five out of ten members were in favour of English as the medium of instruction and the remaining five were in favour of oriental or classical languages. That was the point of controversy between Anglicists and Orientalists. Even the Orientalists were not willing to acknowledge European knowledge and science until they were presented in the classical languages. At that time the Court of Director of the East India Company supported English education. On 2nd February 1835 Lord Macaulay, the president of General Committee of Public Instruction, put an end to the controversy by implementing the English language as a medium of instruction. At this time Lord William Bentinck's government decided to provide education of western science and literature to Indians in English.

In order to transform from traditional school to English medium school in 1844, government emphasized the importance of educating boys excluding girls. During this period the government established many English medium schools not only for strengthening political authority but for trading as well. On 19 July 1854 "Wood's Education Dispatch" known as Magna Carta of the English education was released whose main aim was to systematize education system from primary level to university level. It recommended that Indians be educated in English and their mother tongue. After the successful performance of Wood's Dispatch, in 1882, Lord Ripon established the Indian Education Commission under the leadership of W.W. Hunter. One of the primary objectives of the Commission was to emphasize on female education.

Although some improvement in education policy was noticed in 1854, it was also an undeniable fact that English education created a division between the English literate and the ignorant masses. Thus, on 22nd and 23rd October, 1937, M.K. Gandhi called a conference on National Education at Warda chaired by Zakir Hussain. Since, naturally an educational conflict situation arose, to overcome it Gandhi suggested Nai Talim.

Nai Talim: Gandhi was not in favour of that literacy which could make the children unfit for manual work in after life. Over and above, he considered that it was a crime in India to restrict education to books only, because eighty percent of the livelihood here is based on agriculture and ten percent on industry. He did not consider literacy in itself as an education. In his language: "Literacy is neither 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."¹

Gandhi grasped that real education in India was possible only if handicrafts were included in the curriculum. Thus, in 1937, in the news paper '*Harijan*', Gandhi used the phrase 'Nai Talim' which precisely means 'new education'. "It is called the new method of education, for it is not a foreign importation or imposition, but is consistent with the environment in India which is predominantly made up of villages."²

By Nai Talim Gandhi wanted to introduce self supporting education for all. Actually his aim was to bring radical change in the Indian society which was going through poverty and illiteracy. At that time handicrafts were the means of livelihood of most of the people in the Indian society. Thus, Gandhi gave importance on learning by doing. In addition he felt that work and intellect are inextricably linked.

Gandhi wanted to fulfill the dream of village development as well as rural development through the education which is work centric and self-supporting. The goal of Nai talim was to develop the whole personality, which includes body, mind and spirit, by improving head, heart and hands. In fact, Gandhi believed that personality development is the pre-condition of social development. Moreover, he wanted to build an egalitarian society free from oppression and violence, where there would be no difference between a person doing intellectual work and a person doing manual work. The main purpose of Nai Talim was to improve the skills of art, drawing and any handicrafts like spinning, weaving, lather work, clay and pottery, jute, shell, bamboo and cane, metal etc. Gandhi favoured practical and need-based education. According to him, knowledge through books is not enough to increase intelligence. For development of intelligence work should be integrated with the curriculum learning and this is the true education. In his words: "I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, e.g., 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."³

So, it was decided to introduce a craft integrated curriculum through Nai Talim. Focusing on primary education he said that it should be free and compulsory in India. The objective of basic education must be physical, intellectual and moral development of children through village handicrafts which would create a healthy moral relationship between city and village. In this way a classless society would be formed by eliminating social evil. Moreover, he believed that medium of instruction should be in native languages. He suggested that all education should be imparted through the medium of provincial languages along with the handicraft, which is most useful for the vocational needs of the area. In his own words: "The object of Basic Education is the physical, intellectual and moral development of the children through the medium of a handicraft. But I hold that any scheme which is sound for the educative point of view and is efficiently managed is bound to be sound economically."⁴

It was also said that students should learn common inter-provincial language by considering themselves as the whole of India. Apart from basic education, even in the case of adult education necessity of application of Nai Talim was observed, as Gandhi said that education for adult should be teaching in the art of living. He advised the volunteer teachers to implement Nai Talim in the various literacy centers and to organize skill development programmes, so that the learners would be able to further improve their existing skills and to acquire new skills which will help them improve their socio economic status. In this way, by synthesizing vocational and literary training, Gandhi wanted to build a conflict free egalitarian just society.

COCLUSION

In summing up it can be said that during the colonial period, India's education system created social inequality and educational conflict. To overcome this situation, Gandhi proposed Nai Talim (new education) aimed at developing the whole personality through the skills of art, drawing and any handicrafts. Moreover, he considered native languages as medium of instructions.

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