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Gandhi's Thoughts on Education in the Context of Religion*

"*sā vidyā yā vimuktaye:*
—education is that which liberates".

In developing a framework that links Mahatma Gandhi's views on education in its most salient features with his overall thoughts on morality, culture and religion, I have admittedly encountered some difficulties, which I would like to mention at the very outset.

One basic difficulty is presented by the ambivalence one finds in Gandhi's thought on this subject-matter, which is evident in the apparent gap between the *ideal*, in terms of which his views are couched, and the *actual*, in terms of which the ideal is to be realized in real life. This makes it difficult to determine how exactly one should approach the problematic.

To take a pointed instance, Gandhi pronounces that the end of education is liberation (*sā vidyā yā vimuktaye*); but one wonders, liberation from what, to what, and how? Does Gandhi mean liberation in the sense of transcending the world and all empirical life? or does he mean, transcending in *attitude* while being still involved in the work-a-day concrete situation that life presents itself with? One might expect in light of the millenium old *māyāvāda* ('the world-as-illusion') doctrine within Hinduism that Gandhi would opt for the latter nuance.

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But then with equal force and fervour Gandhi would emphasize vocation, as part of his activist scheme based on *karmayoga*, which he purportedly derived from the *Bhagavadgītā*. Perhaps he intended a syncretism between the *mukti*-related transcendence and *karmayoga* or 'skill-in-action' orientation. There is though a problem here also.

If vocational training is part of a process of concretization and initiation into the life-world of the community, then what sort of education does Gandhi have in mind that at once combines *transcendence* and *concretization* (the two poles as it were of the duality in a compromised mystical world-view)? What are the presuppositions of such a po'arized schema?

Now, at the purely conceptual level I find a certain tension between the two seemingly distinct proposals that Gandhi appears to be putting forth. However, if we look at the issue in terms of the schema of *Purusārthas*, or the four de-ontological goals in Hinduism —viz., *kāma* (pleasurable joys), *artha* (means of livelihood), *dharma* (the right way of conduct), and *mokṣa* (enlightened liberation)—it may be possible to say that Gandhi merely re-interpreted *artha* and *dharma* in terms of the *concrete*, and *mokṣa* in terms of the *transcendental*, namely as the goal of spiritual liber tion that education should in his view prepare a pupil towards. Would that do though? Is this sufficient to give us a blueprint for an adequate and self-fulfilling educational program without the residual tension alluded to earlier? These remarks are intended to caution one against thinking that the task set in this project is a simple one or one simply achieved. The present paper has a more modest aim of addressing only a few issues that enquire into the formative influences on Gandhi's thoughts on this challenging subject. I pretend to no more presently.

I. The Problem

M.K. Gandhi has made wise pronouncements on just about every department of life, and education has been one such area. The problem, however, is not whether Gandhi did say anything on education, in this instance, but just what he had to say and how his outlook on this matter relates to his views on other area of life, especially *religion*. Again whether what he said has any definite significance, and indeed bears any relevance to the latter part of the twentieth century, especially to the concerns with moral and religious education. Another problem is, how we might go about assessing the worth of Gandhi's

pronouncements and so-called 'experiments' in light of the sorts of issues that confront the modern day educationists, in a cultural *milieu* somewhat removed, one might argue, from Gandhi's India, and in the context of a preoccupation, be they moral or ideological, somewhat different to what may have been the prime concern during a civil rights struggle in South Africa and the nationalist struggle in India.

As with most of his writings, no one single text or book is a conclusive statement on the major issues he addressed.[1] For a proper understanding on Gandhian educational philosophy one has to, I believe, get a clear picture of the concept of *culture* he wanted evolved in which moral and *religious* concerns would go together with education. I take 'culture' here to be a pattern of total shared meaning, value, ideas, attitudes, behaviour, beliefs and feelings, in short a 'way of life' of a people, that has its own means of preservation and continuity *via* transmission of the essentials and its core self-understanding. Secondly, Gandhi's thoughts on this have to be looked at the level of *principles* as much as in the context of their application. Each principle is interrelated with the other, and at a deep level share a common source. Thirdly, we need to look at *lived* culture in which the ideas were translated or from which the ideas are derived for their relevance elsewhere. Without appreciation of and an adequate appraisal of this broader context of the thought on the problem at hand, particularly in one as complex as Gandhi, we are not likely to do justice to Gandhi's views on the matter.

II. Background

It was clear in Gandhi's mind that the education system, of which he was himself a product, was as "diseased" as the civilization that had introduced it in India. Before the British arrived, India did have a system of education based on the village *pathsala* (school system), which imparted traditional modes of *laukic* (worldly) and *sastric*

1. Kalidas Bhattacharyya makes this point, in his 'Towards A Systematic Study of Gandhian Thoughts', Calcutta: *The Vishva Bharati Quarterly* Vol. 44 Nos. 122, 1983 pp. 47-100. *passim.* Another recent attempt to present systematically the thoughts of Gandhi is Glynn Richards: *The Philosophy of Gandhi: a study of his basic ideas,* London: Curzon Books; USA: Barnes & Noble Books; 1982.

(scriptural) learning that fostered traditional values.[2] Of what use, however, could the products of this seemingly antiquated system be for the tasks and skills required in the offices of the judiciary and the East India Company? Thus in 1782, Warren Hastings took an interest in the training of indigenous scholars and students; but Hastings was an admirer at the same time of Indian culture and literature, and thought it well also to promote learning in Sanskrit and Arabic.[3] This optimism was not to last long however, for in 1834 Lord William Bentinck decided that only Western knowledge should be disseminated, and that too by means of the English language, since the need of the moment was to provide the East India Company with efficient administrative clerks. Some Indian leaders, like Ram Mohan Roy, also had faith in the introduction of Western learning, particularly English, for facilitating social and religious reforms in India.[4] American missionaries, who arrived to set up their missions, were also persuaded by this argument. A few orthodox leaders remained opposed to this. They would rather have encouragement given to ancient learning and classics. There thus precipitated a long-standing bitter dispute between the so-called Orientalists (in favour of Indian classical learning) and the Anglicists, who favoured western secular and scientific learning through the English medium.

The arrival of Thomas Babington Macaulay greatly strengthened the Anglicists' cause. In a famous Minutes of 1835, Macaulay 'at-

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2. See C. Kunhan Raja: *Some Aspects of Education in Ancient India.* Adyar: The Adyar Library, 1950. Of course from *Rg Veda* onwards (especially where the frog-like repetition of words is denounced, Rv. VII. 103. 5), through the *Upanisads* (the Forest-dialogues) to the *sutras,* like the *Dharma sastra,* and *Gryha-sutras* (cf. 1.22.4), with details on the *Upanaya* rite, the problem of education is discussed quite extensively, and illustrations are given of how traditional education was carried on.

3. Frank C. Stuart: *The British Nation and India 1906-1914,* Ph.D dissertation, 1964, The University of New Mexico; London: University Microfilms International. pp. 204ff. See also Joseph Chailley, *Administrative Problems of British India,* trans. Sir William Meyer (MacMillan and Company, London, 1910). pp. 478-527.

4. 'The Erasmus of India' or 'The Bengali Luther', as Ram Mohan Roy is sometimes called, was a prophet of the reformation of Hinduism. See J. K. Majumdar *Rammohan Roy and the World,* Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1975. Also, *Impact of Raja Rammohan Roy on Education in India,* Reena Chatterjee; New Delhi, S. Ch and Co. 1982.

tacked the whole body of oriental learning and philosophy. 'It was,' he wrote, 'morally, ethically and politically wrong for the Government of India to encourage false history, false astronomy, and false medicine simply because they were found in company with false religion'.[5] Macaulay believed the vernaculars, as much else in India, to be poor and crude, and of uncertain value. They were like the arcane institutions of orthodoxy that perpetrated pseudo-science and superstition, and unmeritorious achievements of a people in dire need of a civilization worth its name. Macaulay was even more outrageous, and went on to suggest that the effect of English learning was proving to be "prodigious". He remarked turgidly:

> "No Hindoo who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. Some continue to profess it as a matter of policy; but many profess themselves pure deists, and some embrace Christianity. It is my firm belief, that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolator among the respectable classes of Bengal thirty years hence. And this will be effected without any efforts to proselytize, without the smallest interference with religious liberty; merely by the natural operations of knowledge and reflection. I heartily rejoice in the prospect."[6]

Gandhi was to quote Macaulay (from a letter sent to him in 1928), expressing doubt that Macaulay's dream had been realized—admitting, though, that there was no dearth of educated clerks and *babus* ever after.[7] On the other hand, Arvind Sharma has argued that the dream was realized to an extent, although it had a 'boomerang' effect on the 'ideological' underpinning of Macaulay's rejoice, in that the knowledge of English gave Indians a common medium for communication and a wider access to literature and thoughts of their fellowmen in different parts of the subcontinent.[8] English learning, therefore, served to unite the Hindus in appreciation of the glory of their culture.

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5. Frank C. Stuart, *op. cit.* p. 206.
6. Gandhi quotes this from a letter sent to him with his response in *Young India*, 29-3-1928. (reprinted in *The Problem of Education*, M. K. Gandhi, Ahmedabad Navajivan Publishing House, 1962. Itself a useful compendium).
7. *Ibid.*
8. Arvind Sharma 'Hinduism: The Macaulay Effect' in *Hinduism*, Journal of The Bharat Sevashram Sangha, (London), No. 95/1, 1982 pp. 10-12.

What is pertinent in these comments, however, is the motivation—viz. of desiring to usurp the dominance of the Hindu Cultural system—involved in the grandiose proposals of Macaulay and his likes, who remained illiterate with respect to the Indian languages or dialects. They were more indifferent to the growing resentment amongst the Orientalists—a resentment and anguish echoed since in the acrid voice of the reformers and orthodox spokespersons, from Dayanand Saraswati to Tilak, and, less tepidly, Vinoba Bhave, closer to our times.

In 1854, Sir Charles Wood, later Lord Halifax, in a Charter of Indian Education, reinforced the importance of encouraging the study of the vernaculars as the media for the education of the masses,[9] and he recommended the founding of universities in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. But the East India Company made the knowledge of English compulsory for public services and consequently the Orientalists lost the bitter battle—and Gandhi therefore subsequently received an English education. By 1914 the situation was such that even if a British consultant were to recommend turning India back to traditional languages and learning, there would be an outcry from educated Indians—particularly those with high honours from Harrow and Cambridge or other British universities—because they were trained especially to believe that English-based education eradicates ignorance, bigotry and superstition.[10] Nehru, in some ways, would echo something of this outcry in his own handling of the problem during his term of office.

Since, however, the East India Company and the Government did not need the entire literate population to be conversant in English

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9. Shriman Narayan *Towards Better Education*, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1969. Discusses the issue of the 'English Medium' from its early history, p. 32-36.

10. *Ibid.* p. 33. This actually happened when Sir Theodore Morrison read a paper in London in 1914 pleading the cause of Indian languages. Gandhi thought the discussion on the pros and cons of the English medium to be a waste of energy, it simply was a question to him of when English would be taken out of the schools. He considered thinking on the 'training of the soul' to be more pertinent. cf. *The Problem of Education*, 'English Learning', p. 31-32; also his inaugural address to the Silver Jubilee Convocation of the Benaras Hindu University, in *Harijan*, 1-2-42, for his insistence on this issue.

and western learning, a selective process of education ensured the desired supply of clerks, and teachers. It appears that the existing village schools, teaching in their respective vernaculars, were closed down (or converted into state schools) and the human resources diverted to rural labour. The literate population did not exceed 1.25 to 1.5 percent in the early part of this century. And since the skills of the educated class were successfully deployed and exhausted in urban developments, the villages remained neglected and outside the purview of their concern. When Gandhi returned to India,[11] he complained bitterly how education was not percolating down to the masses, that the masses were being alienated from the urban "elite" in whom was invested much of the centralized power and bureaucratic machinery. Colleges were being put under the control of universities, schools were advised on the curricula to be adopted, and funds were streamlined with the specific needs of the administration in mind. Eighty-five percent of the population were engaged in agriculture. Their needs were scarcely known to the snobbish educated class, and so their faith in the system of education was undermined. But how true was the picture that Gandhi had painted in his mind? Was he afterall not, like a few others, a product of the Raj system of education? Would he have come thus far if he had remained a shy boy from a *modh Bania* household in Kathiawad, surreptitiously breaking a few Hindu codes of ethic without knowing much more than that? Gandhi felt though that, after paying deserving tribute to the Raj, one has to question the motive underscoring the selective process of higher education initiated by the British administration.

III. Some Issues for the Nationalists

Gandhi was not alone in his criticism of the education system. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpatrai, Shri Shastriji and Dadabhai Naoroji the prominent leaders in India were also quite outspoken, though each had his own way of going about the shared grievances. They were aware of certain common problems facing them. It was clear, first of all, that a foreign civilization was depriving the people of India the rightful access to the learning of their own culture, history, languages, religion and moral value system. Secondly, the system of education established was better geared toward the training

11. *The Problem of Education* p. 7 (from a speech in 1916)

of pathetic public servants, especially those bent on making a career for themselves. Thirdly, the selective grooming of the people into educated and uneducated created a wide gulf between the small percentage of the privileged and the vast majority of the unprivileged, the latter unable to make out a living being forced into idleness for want of jobs.[12]

Gandhi had seen some of these problems at first hand, so to say, in his days in South Africa, where a similar restrictive system operated. Admittedly, he had tackled the issue of education in South Africa, and had tried out his own experiments, particularly in Tolstoy and Phoenix Settlements, where he took upon himself the role of the educator. Even so, the environment and circumstances were not the same in the India he had so anxiously returned to experiment further with his ideals. Again, since poverty here was on a massive scale the atmosphere was vitiated by internal bickerings and differences among the diverse communities in India, there prevailed uncontrollable contradictions, and tension amongst its members. He was faced with the mammoth task of finding a way to solve the Indian problem. He had to reformulate the issues that had troubled him, and look for their resolution in the context of the environment and situation prevailing at the time in India. He had to think not only of a system that would flush out the flaws of the imported British system, but would put something better in its place, which at once would be authentically Indian, and available to the masses. Not only that; education, for him, had necessarily to constitute part of the scheme that should first help win for India its *swarāj* ('self-rule'), and then lead her to *Rāmarājya*, the spiritual kingdom as envisaged in the *Mahābhārata*.[13] Gandhi did not, however, retreat to the comforts of an academic environment to formulate his thoughts and plans, but entered the arena, as it were, barefooted, allowing actual situations to suggest their needs and resolutions, to which he then gave effective expression. While disclaiming originality for his views, he did not want to betray the impression that he had conceived them in abstraction, or purely from insights he had

12. He made some of these points in various places, particularly in Ahmedabad, on 28 and 29 September 1920, pointing, on 6 October, to the deception of the government: *maya-mriga*, the golden deer which deceived Rama. *ibid.* p. 7-15.

13. *Vide* Chandra D. S. Devanesan *The Making of the Mahatma*, New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1969. p.l (This invaluable book is out of print).

gained through his vast reading, and acute observations; they were based on 'practical idealism'.

What was the thrust of his 'school of experience' here? First, he argued, 'the education that children naturally pick up in a well-ordered household is impossible in hostels'.[14] He therefore instructed his children at home, in the natural setting of a shared life, since he insisted on constant contact with the parents. He admitted to the inadequacies of his experiments, but did not feel that they were irrelevant. He was adamant however about the inadequacy of the available public education system, and so took the opportunity to find out 'by experience and experiment the true system'. He was certain that 'true education could be imparted only by the parents', and that even then 'there should be the minimum of outside help'. It was becoming evident to the city lawyer turned rural teacher that the first principle of education was 'the culture of the heart or the building of character'. Speaking of the constant contact he kept with the swelling number of students on the Farm, he remarked: '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' (*ibid*). This questionable confidence was to show up again when some years later he encouraged students to join the non-cooperative movement, even if that meant expulsion from school and reliance on their own resources. But Gandhi's rather tiresome and orthodox attitude towards the education of his own children has called to question his dispassionate wisdom on this matter.[15]

Gandhi did not totally overlook the necessity of literary training although his eldest son later made comments in grief of having been

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14. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of Experiments with Truth* trans. from Gujarati by Mahadev Desai, Navajivan Trust, 1927, 1928; re-issue, U.K. : Penguin Books, 1982, 1983. p. 189-190. And as he grew disillusioned with western religions, he became more conscious of *dharma* as a fundamental concept in Hinduism-*viz.*, as 'the divine government of the universe'.

    He confessed, therefore, that his nodding acquaintance with Hinduism and other religions of the world, would not be enough to save him from the trials later in his days, *ibid* p. 79.

15. *Ibid.*, Pt. IV, Chp. XXXII. 'As school master' pp. 304-305. See 'Wardha Educational Conference', *Harijan.* 2.10.'37.

denied an adequate literary training under his father's tutelage.[16] What was clearly not sufficient in Gandhi's view was the system of 3 Rs prescribed in South Africa, as in most conventional western education systems.

In addition to physical training, Gandhi expressed the importance of *religious education.* But the religious education, like physical education, he had in mind was not to be some abstract, Sunday morning instruction, but a form of participatory learning of religious values and virtues in the context of its practice. One implication was that the teachers must be capable of teaching by the example of their own lives, and by the moral stature they inculcate in this way in the children. A rule was made, accordingly, on Tolstoy Farm that the young persons should not be asked to do what the teachers did not do. He argued, 'every student should be acquainted with the elements of his own religion and have a general knowledge of his own scriptures'.[17] Some acquaintance with other religions was also essential. But one wonders whether Gandhi was not being patronizing. Be as it may, he called this system the 'culture of the spirit', which depended entirely upon the life and character of the conscientious teacher. At this point Gandhi seemed not to be concerned by the questions of vocational or technical training to earn one's living. He seemed more concerned with the 'liberal' or cultural aspects of education. Clearly, he was invoking the traditional pattern of the family as the centre of learning both cultural and family skills. The child is, as it were, an apprentice to his parents. This role of the family, and the community, an

16. *Ibid.*, Pt. IV, Chp. XXIII, p. 285.

17. *Ibid.*, IV. XXXIC p. 309. For the spiritual training that will prepare a child fully for the fourth stage of life, *sannyāsa,* wherein self-realization is the crowning experience, the child needs to memorize and recite hymns, and prepare for the actualization of 'soul-force'.

Religion was no longer sectarian Hinduism for Gandhi but a more transcendent form of religion with its eternal varieties, though the basic values he clinged to were derivative of his understanding of *dharma* as the cosmic and social norms that uphold and support the person in his present state of evolution and which, if the individual holds on to them, carry him foward in his future development and ultimate liberation *(moksa).* Five principles make up this collective *dharma, viz.* 1) *satya* (truthfuless), 2) *ahiṁsā* (non-injury), 3) *aparigraha* (non-covetousness). 4) *asteya* (non-stealing), and 5) *brahmācārya* (self-control). This righteous culture is incumbent upon all, regardless of age, sex, caste or creed.

inkling he had picked up in his youthful days in Kathiawad, was to persist in Gandhi's mind more acutely on his return to India. In the meantime, *satyagraha* was born.

The educated lawyer had been influenced by the Jain ideal of asceticism and total non-violence. For him a self-disciplined search for one's *dharma* or 'right duty' takes priority over learning from scriptures. But most importantly, he felt that social and political actions cannot be separated from moral and ethical considerations. Inwardly a person may be a stoic, but outwardly he is of no use unless he diverts his attention and energies to the righteous needs of the suffering masses of the world. Here was born a prototype of the twentieth century *das*, or 'servant of God' through service to mankind (*sarvodaya*), whose actions combine both the mundane and the moral, the ascetic and the mystic, and the this-worldly critic and the other-worldly visionary. Here indeed was born a righteous revolutionary. But did Gandhi develop the ramifications of this strategy to the fullest? We know too well the problems that haunted him and how he had struggled to reconcile these.

South Africa had prepared and matured the teacher, and out of his experiences there he had disciplined himself for the diverse roles he would play in India[18]—*viz.*, as a rational critic of western civilization, reformer and consolidator of Hindu society, friend of Christians and opponent of Christian missions, amateur physician, dietician and economist, and last but not least an educator, or better still, an educationist.

IV. Return to India

The primary goal of Gandhi upon his return was clearly the accomplishment of *swaraj* as he had stated in his revolutionary manifesto: *Hind Swaraj*. Neither anger or violence, nor a quiet retreat to an *asrama*—as did Aurobindo—was the drawcard for Gandhi-method. Was it possible to live the full ascetic life of *karma-yoga* and still inter-

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18. Devanesen, *passim*, And as Raghavan Iyer points out, between 1903 and 1914 in South Africa, Gandhi had done his essential thinking on morals and politics. All his important concepts - *satya, ahiṁsā, satyagraha, sarvodaya*, even *swarāj* and *swadeshi*, had been formulated in his thoughts before he embarked upon political activities. *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, N. Y.: O. U. P. 1973, p. 9-10. An excellent study.

pret one's duties in terms of political and social needs? Furthermore, could this form of life enable one to step out to resist the challenge of a foreign civilization on the Indian soil?[19] If it could, then this life-style was good enough for Gandhi; and it if was good enough for the teacher, it ought to be good enough for the students. His sentiments are expressed succinctly in this cryptic metaphor he used:

> "I want the culture of all kinds to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar, or a slave."[20]

As matters stood, the house of Indian culture appeared to have been packed with 'slaves', created by English learning and culture. There must be a "return to India", and an effort to "drive out western civilization. All else will follow."[21] The indictment of modern civilization was over; but what should follow? And how? i) There should be a permeation of the secularized society by traditional spirituality, whose symbols would be renunciation and *satya* ('truth'). ii) To transform, or "return", India to a "spiritual" nation capable of transcending religious and cultural differences. iii) To uplift the masses and allow equal participation on the part of the Harijans ("untouchables") in the Indian polity. iv) To inculcate the traditional ideals of *dharma* ('right order'), *karma* ('*via activa*'), and authentic *artha* ('rightful earning') and *kāma* ('sanctioned pleasures') through

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19. And so he was to say that whilst the culture of India undoubtedly will be predominantly Hindu culture, it can never be exclusively Hindu. The reason he gave for the qualification was that those seeking to revive the ancient culture are Hindus, but that Hindu culture must submit to Buddhistic culture for the reason that Buddha himself was an Indian, and also to the Christian culture since Jesus himself was an Asiatic; or not the least because 'all that is permanent in ancient Hindu culture is also to be found in the teachings of Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and Zoroaster. So I have come to this workable arrangement myself'. *With Gandhi in Ceylon*, pp. 131-33 reproduced in M.K. Gandhi, *To Students*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1953. (Edited by Bharatan Kumarappa). The school must be able to do justice to these sentiments, therefore And religion should not be divorced from morality, or the basic values that inform a life of *dharma*.

20. *Nehru on Gandhi*, New York: The John Day Co. 1948, p. 23. Quoted in various places, and in Devanesan, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

21. Cf. *Hind Swaraj*, p. 67; Cf p. 72 on the superiority of the Hindu civilization.

a process of self-culture, particularly in the younger generation of the nation. To this end, Gandhi rejected the 'machine' as a symbol of excessive bureaucracy and technological slavery that suppresses the actualization of basic human values. He replaced this with the symbols of the 'ancient and sacred' handloom, the *charkha* and *takli*.[22] They symbols—though not meant to be traded in for the realities portrayed—represented the two poles of the Gandhian *credo*, both of which he utilized skillfully as the circumstance necessitated—*viz.*, one pole for his rejection of western industrial civilization, and the other for his affirmation of the superiority of Indian culture and the development of his concept of *satyagraha*. *Education* was then to be as much a process of unlearning with respect to one, and a process of learning, or re-learning, with respect to the other, as exemplified to some extent in his own life. *Religion* would be the spring from which education derived its content and moral teachings. For, 'religion proper is with him', as Kalidas Bhattacharyya points out, 'what we now-a-days call spiritual life, a life conscious throughout, of basic human values, i.e. of all fundamental positive values, the positive embodiment of which is what is often called God'[23] or in Gandhi's other term 'Truth', by which he meant 'what is *truly human*, what in other words, is the Truth of human life'.[24] Vain ritualism and irrational mysticism associated with some Indian cults were not his idea of religion. One might say that his mysticism was a cross between *karma* and *bhakti* yoga, on the one hand, and Advaita and Vaisnavism, on the other. There is no doubt that Gandhi took strongly to *visistadvaita* (the Indian doctrine of qualified non-dualism), since he professed belief in the "essential unity of God and man and for that matter of all that lives."[25]

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22. Defending his choice of the spinning wheel against the critics who charged that he wanted India to regress to the medieval times, Gandhi remarked: 'The spinning wheel is undoubtedly medieval, but seems to have come to stay. Though the article is the same it had become a symbol of freedom and unity at one time, after the advent of the East India Company, it had become the symbol of slavery. Modern India has found in it a deeper and truer meaning than our forefathers had dreamt of'. He went on to suggest that, if the handicrafts were once symbols of factory labour, may they now be symbols and vehicles of education in the fullest and truest sense of the term'. *Harijan*. 16.10.37 (in P.E. p. 280).

23. *op. cit.*, p. 62.

24. *loc. cit.*

25. *Young India* July 1924, expresses his *advaitism* clearly.

V. Usurp or Resist the West?

But at the back of all this seemed to lurk Gandhi's apparent revolt against modern civilization and his uncritical adoption of traditional values. To be sure, though, Gandhi did not regard traditional culture to be exempt from defects; nor did he, in practice, shun every aspect and product of modern civilization.[26] In one sense he was too pragmatic; in another, he was too idealistic, or even transcendentalist. His ideals failed to be linked concretely to the prevailing structures of the society. But then he also wanted education to be a force that liberates one from the tyranny of socially coercive structures. His programme was caught between the tension of the two polarities. Education would no longer be seen as a process of imparting instruction in an institution *distanced* from the affairs of the community, but rather as a process of initiation of the young persons into the cultural form and ethical norm of the society in a concrete, real-life context. That is to say, since value needs concretization, each value-system also needs a process of concretization, wherein it manifests its various meaning and lived forms. Certain kinds of structures and institutions become incumbent upon the process, which evolve and sometimes assume massive proportions that annul the purposes for which they were created in the first instance. Gandhi not by any standard a theorist, had the good sense to perceive this dangerous trend in the education system then prevalent in India. Besides, he felt, education cannot fulfil its functions in isolation from the real concerns of the community, be they related to morality, politics or religion. In other words, if the focus of education was towards the total way of life, i.e. culture of the community, education must therefore serve the community by being integrated as closely as possible into the fabric of community; and the community in turn has to take the responsibility to make education as effective as possible. The model nevertheless, as his experience in South Africa showed, for an educational environment was the family, or the extended family, as in an *aśrama*. He set up *aśrama*-schools, inspired by the work on *gurukul* by Swami Shraddhananda, the '*Mahātma*' of *Ārya Samāj*.[27] The role of the teacher here was more like that of a

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26. He confesses: 'I have assimilated many things from the West but not this' (referring to perpetual widowhood). *Young India*. 15-9-1927 (TS p. 171).

27. Gandhi has acknowledged and spoken warmly of the Mahatmahood of Swami Shraddhananda and of his Gurukul in Karigri. *cf. Autobiography* p. 3 Part V. Ch. 1, Ch. 8. And then he talks, as though nostalgically, of the *rishis* of old as *gurus*, and of their hermitage *aśramas* with their sacred atmosphere. *Young India*. 29-1-'25.

father, or a tutor, whose own life and activities serve as models to facilitate the child's learning. In this way the child develops a moral character, and acquires the means to earn a living as well, just as an apprentice is expected to after spending long years in training under an expert. But context and structures change—what happens then? Would that not tend to create confusion in the younger minds? But Gandhi was uncompromising in his response. The alternative to this did not consist for him in the establishment of a rival political power structure that would usurp the dominant administration and spiritual outlook within which politics, *via* the process of education, played this role in the life of society. Decentralization and the liberation of the complex power structure that the state assumes, all too often in a democratic and a socialist system alike, ensures that the individual does not become a 'cog in the wheel', the symptom of modern "soullessness".[28] But it is the task of education to train individuals to resist the tendency of collective tyranny and to help find their self-fulfilment within the limits of their own creative and spiritual powers. This is *swarāj* in the true sense in which Gandhi would interpret the ideal, as distinguished from the rather heavy nationalistic overtones it had acquired in another side of Gandhi and in the minds of the other sons of India, such as Gokhale, Tilak, Subhas Bose, and others. And this may have been his weakest point too.

Interestingly enough, various experiments were pursued by him to prove the efficacy of the principle of productive work as a means of education. One of the major involvements of Gandhi was with the Gujarat Vidyapith, the so-called National University. In December 1927, a new set of resolutions were adapted to define the charter of the university. The 'principles' enunciated therein constituted a significant expression of Gandhi's latest thoughts on education. One of the most interesting resolutions from our point of view, read thus :[29]

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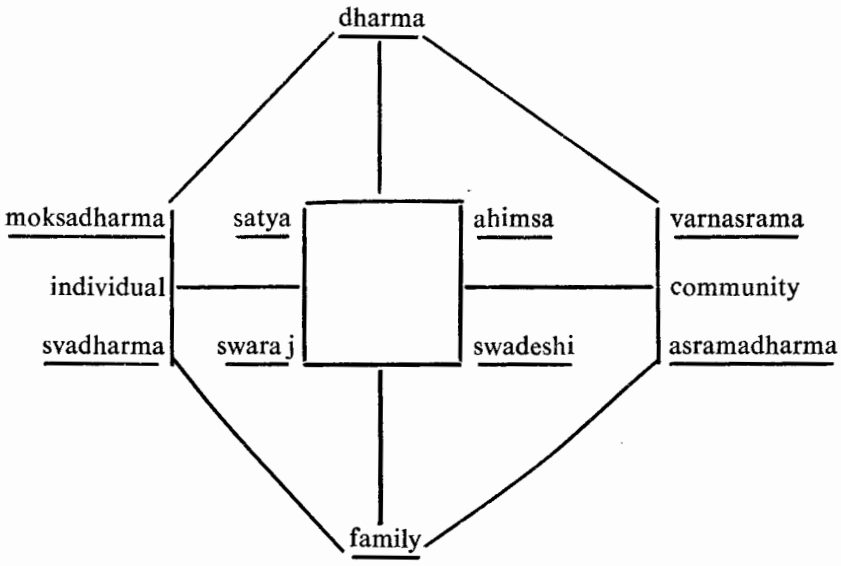
28. 'By education I mean an all-rounded drawing out of the best in child and man-body and mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. . .' *Harijan* 31.7.'37 (P. E. p. 263).

29. Young India 2-2-1982. He added elsewhere: 'I attach far more importance to the cultural aspect of education than to the literary. Culture is the foundation, the primary thing which the girls ought to get from here '(addressing obviously a girls' school). 'It should show in the smallest detail of your conduct and personal behaviour, how you sit, how you walk, how you dress, etc. . .Inner culture must be reflected in your speech, the way in which you treat visitors and guests, and behave towards one another and your teachers and elders' *Harijan* 5.5.'46 (TS 161) Gandhi is talking, like the *Gītā*, of the values of *sthitaprajñā* and *bhāvana* inculcated through proper education.

> 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.

These ideas are graphically represented in the following diagram of the interaction of education with elements of the community and the spirit.



VI. The Trial

But there was opposition to Gandhi's schemes and noble efforts particularly when non-cooperation and *satyagraha* commitments involved students more and more in activities that took them away from the college environment. The urban students were being encouraged to turn their attention to rural problems. While he expected teachers to be 'men of the highest character' ('even if all teachers do not qualify to be *gurus*,) fit for *guru-bhakti*' (cf. the 'highest qualification' in our times) 'students should be men who will work for the stabilization and revitalization of our rural civilization'. The village school, he suggested, could be out in the open, and if buildings are needed, they should be simple and functional. The idea of 'small is beautiful' is echoed here. Rural education was undoubtedly a top priority in

Gandhi's scheme, an ideal that fell far short of realization, though.[30] His detractors, however, argued that he had taken India back to the medieval times, since training in arts and crafts and religion do not offer any scope for the development of the intellect. Schools were being turned either into an industrial clatter of spinning wheels, or training camps for non-cooperation activities, religious fanaticism and *satyagraha.* His hope to see 'Kabir, Bhoja, Bhagat, Akha and Guru Gobind springing up from the ranks of the weavers, cobblers, goldsmith and peasants studying at the Mahavidyalaya', appeared somewhat romantic to some.

Most disconcerting, perhaps, was the indifferent attitude of the city dwellers, especially the urban middle class, who were either very satisfied with their lot, or were unwillingly empathize with the needs of their rural counterparts. Then there was the objection that an inconsistency was apparent in Gandhi's predilection towards the welfare of the untouchables, in glaring contrast to his retention of the *varna* ('caste-class') conception. This issue raises some interesting points for a more lengthy discussion elsewhere, the basic question being whether Gandhi compromised the *varna* system by denying that in the eyes of education the different *varnas* should not receive differential education.[31] Furthermore, the hard-headed atheists and agnostics were not convinced that religious teaching was anything more than a formalized means of indoctrination. Gandhi was not given to making subtle distinctions between training, drilling, indoctrination and so forth. He argued, on the contrary, that religious education awakens the heart, that it promotes non-violence, and creates a response to tolerance, love and charity towards people of other religions. Some criticized Gandhi for neglecting the arts. But this was unfair, since he attached considerable importance to the learning of music and singing, albeit devotional singing.[32] Besides, in his grand scheme for Basic Education, which he submitted in 1937, the child was not to learn the alphabet first, but to be allowed a free-hand in drawing, sketching and tracing. The

30. *Navajivan* 20-5-1928 (PE 150) To go hand in hand with learning to think and discriminate, and training of the heart.

31. *Navajivan* 3-6-1928—1-7-1929 (PE 160).

32. *Ibid.*, (167). His own favourites were Ramnam, and a Gujarati composition by Narsimh Mehta. Music has a recognizably healing effect, provided it is inspired and has a divine dimension. The listener should also be unsullied Music itself implies a spiritual discipline.

pedagogical significance of this educational strategy is obvious: a child has to be initiated into the lived values, the myths and symbols by which a community understands and preserves its identity and distinctiveness—and this calls for creativity.

VII. The Final Phase: Wardha Scheme

In 1937 Gandhi's attention was drawn to Armstrong's *Education for Life*, especially the chapter on 'Education of the Hand'. Thus began the germination of ideas that culminated in what came to be known as Basic Education, to which Gandhi gave concrete shape in a conference at Wardha. It promised to become the national scheme of education. In this scheme Gandhi comes out even more vehemently against theoretical, academic education, or "bookish learning", including religious texts and the many Scriptures, divorced from life, and emphasizes the development of intellectual and spiritual capacities through labour and productive work. His idea of education through productive work got crystallised here, and made integral to the needs of life and living at every stage, be it elementary, secondary or higher education. The selective rearing of those supposed to be more intelligent, or from the top social bracket, would not do for Gandhi. His firm belief was that every child has the capacity to learn, to be educated, and therefore to be perfected. This could be done by maintaining the correlation between craft, the social environment and the physical environment. Besides, those entrusted with the task were expected to have a living faith in education as an integral part of national development.[33] But notice how the emphasis has changed from the spiritual to the overtly material concerns.

The outcome of the conference was the establishment of a committee, headed by Zakir Hussein, who was later to become President of India, that would make recommendations to the government. Its chief thrust was to suggest 'some craft' and 'productive work' as the *medium* of *education*, not as an additional subject. This medium was expected to serve as the nucleus of all other instruction provided in

33. Wardha Scheme [Dr Zakir Hussein Committee Report; First submitted to Gandhi on Dec. of 1937] p. 14, No.2 Reproduced as Appendix II in *Towards New Educational Pattern*, K. G. Mashruwala; Ahmedabad; Navajivan, 1971 (pp. 77-83) cf. Shriman Narayan, *op. cit.*, p. 55ff, for an excellent discussion of the Wardha Scheme, in its aftermath.

school. The Report pleaded that 'greater concreteness and reality be given to the knowledge acquired by children by making some craft the basis of education.'[34] A common course for seven years, in which time no English was taught, would form the scheme of universal and compulsory basic education, for all children. In due course higher education would be given to those who were qualified to receive it.[35] There is evident here a turn of emphasis in Gandhi's programme: concretization is subordinated to realism, and an education of values is rated secondary to training in vocational skills, as distinct also from *karmayoga*. But he did put stress on 'character building and attitude towards life' regarding these as the most essential and integral part of education in the Indian context. The idea that education should become self-supporting, and serve as a foundation for all progress and culture and spirit of the country, leading on to the conception of Sarvodaya, were also part of the scheme visualized by Gandhi.

But war had broken out and the implementation of the scheme suggested in the Wardha recommendation was postponed. In the mid-fourties, the prospect for its implementation again brightened up, only to be overshadowed by the intensity of the nationalist struggle, now at its peak. In 1948, an assassin's bullet silenced Gandhi's voice and so he did not live to see the effect of his scheme. But in the 1950s some efforts were made to implement a revised scheme resulting from the Sargeant Committee Report on National Education (1947). Enthusiasm however dampened subsequently, and those Gandhians, inspired sufficiently by Gandhi's ideal, the chief among them, Vinoba Bhave, endeavoured to create the right environment for introducing Basic Education programme in thier own regions. A report compiled in 1981 under the auspices of the National Council of Education Research and Training indicates that Basic Education in all its ramifications is taken seriously in all but certain circles and has been successfully implemented by only a very few centres or institutions investigated for making the report.[36]

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34. Wardha Scheme, *loc. cit.*, p. 10, Mushruwala, p. 78.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 57 M. p. 74; 80].

36. *Study of Basic Education Institutions* — Search for relevance. B. R. Gopal and P. Dasgupta. National Council of Educational Research and Training New Delhi : 1981. (by courtesy of Mrs Rita Roy, Gandhi Peace Foundation).

VIII. Conclusion

Gandhi saw that the existing education system in India, of which he himself paradoxically, was a product, was not adequate to meet the needs of India. He complained that the education system was 'soulless', and that it functioned 'listlessly in isolation, cut off from real currents of life, unable to adapt itself to the changed circumstance'. His experiences in England and especially in South Africa made this point abundantly clear to him. The British system of education had become an ideological tool to promote the imperialistic tendencies, and the English language almost literally a medium of oppression and instrument of subjugation that severe the spiritual roots of the Indian peoples. To restore India to its former glory, prestige and pristine heritage, a more spiritually enlightened form of education was necessary. Mere literacy would not be sufficient without the realization of spiritual values and integration of productive work and capacity in the context of real life situation.

Again, he felt that 'there is nothing in life, however small, which is not the concern of education'. In his view, therefore, 'the dichotomies between the educational processes and the processes of work should be broken to generate harmony between the school and the community'. He thus conceived of education as 'education both for and through life'. Gradual education should have the esteemed task of meeting people's common needs, both in the realms of ideas and practice and of creating perfected individuals to function in a freer social order. Apart from developing the basic skills of life, students were to cultivate an understanding of the processes of day-to-day living, learn about the physical, natural and social environments, find their purpose and satisfaction in these, and thereby improve the quality of their life. But the detailed programme to achieve this was never quite worked out by Gandhi except in a broad experimental way. The education of character and training in self-culture were particularly important for Gandhi, since herein lay the foundations for the responsible citizen in a community of which he is to be a contributing member. Man is essentially an individual, but he is also a social being. Ultimately, it is the fulfilment of *dharma* that leads to *moksa*, liberation, as the Hindu conception of *purusartha* tells us. Gandhi had his own way of giving expression to this hallowed idea. But too often he stopped short at that. However, his genius, as it has been remarked, 'lay in his ability to reinterpret and transform old solutions and

methods drawn from the past, as the Indian people, assailed by the human quandaries and perplexities of the twentieth century, sought to preserve their cultural identity and their sense of continuing history'.[37] And an adequate educational philosophy would be needed for this task indeed. And so in 1946, he eulogized, almost as though writing the epilogue to his life's thoughts on education:[38]

The ancient aphorism, —

> "*sa vidya ya vimuktaye*" "Education is that which liberates", is as true today as it was before. Education here does not mean mere spiritual knowledge, nor does liberation signify only spiritual liberation after death. Knowledge includes all training that is useful for the service of mankind and liberation means freedom from all manner of servitude even in the present life. Servitude is of two kinds: slaves to domination from outside and to one's own artificial needs. The knowledge acquired in the pursuit of this ideal alone constitutes true study.

37. Devanesan. *op. cit.*, p. 403.

38. *Harijan.* 10-3-1946.