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# Financing Education in Gandhi's Thought Perspective

**Sudarshan Iyengar**  
**Nimisha Shukla**



**Centre for Multi-Disciplinary Development Research  
(CMDR)**

Yalakkishettar Colony, Dr. Ambedkar Nagar, Lakamanahalli  
Dharwad – 580004, Karnataka, India.  
[www.cmdr.ac.in](http://www.cmdr.ac.in)

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Gandhiji had been thinking about alternative education system from the days he took his family to South Africa in 1897. He set up an Ashram in Phoenix in 1904, where an extended Gandhi family and friends started living. It was 21 miles away from Johannesburg and the teachers would not come to teach for small salaries and the members could not afford to pay the teachers' higher salaries. It was in Phoenix that Gandhi gradually developed a curriculum. His central concerns and approaches from the beginning were the following.

1. In 1897 when he landed with his two sons and a nephew in South Africa, he was not sure where to educate them in a formal school. European schools would have admitted his children under obligation and Mission schools would have taught in incorrect Tamil or Hindi. He decided to become their teacher and hired a governess. Later, his children were also educated in Phoenix settlement and some other children in the Tolstoy farm. For all his experiments he had remarked, "But the ultimate result of my experiments is in the womb of the future".<sup>1</sup> He had added that, "it was far better to remain unlettered and break stones for the sake of liberty than to go for a literary education...<sup>2</sup>"
2. Gandhiji said that he did not believe in the then existing system of education. For him character building was extremely important. He conceded, "But as I fully appreciated the necessity of a literary education in addition, I started some classes with help of Mr. Kallenbach and Sjt. Pragji Desai".<sup>3</sup>
3. Besides character building Gandhiji wanted to train children in some vocation. He said, "It was my intention to teach every one of the youngsters some useful manual vocation".<sup>4</sup> Gardening, scavenging, fruit tree rearing, carpentry and leather footwear making were taught to the students in Phoenix Ashram and Tolstoy farm. Students showed great interest in doing things. Interestingly,

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<sup>1</sup> Gandhiji's *Autobiography or My Experiments with Truth* was first published in 1927 by Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. It was incorporated in *the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG) Volume 39, September 1970 also published by Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad. All references from *Autobiography* are from the CWMG. This quote is on page 163. CWMG can also be accessed at <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/the-collected-works-of-mahatma-gandhi>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid* p 163

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p 267

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p 267

this remained Gandhiji's insistence all through when it came to teaching children.

4. Gandhiji eventually appreciated importance of teaching literary subjects as well. In Phoenix settlement some elders took up the task of teaching languages, geography, history and arithmetic. Gandhiji thought that it was laborious for the children to remember what they learnt from books. His experience in imparting through word of mouth was good as children could repeat with greatest ease.<sup>5</sup>

In whatever model of educating children was set up the issue of financing did crop up. In South Africa until 1914 and later in India the education experiments were always conducted with farming and with non-farming vocations leading to production. Productive work by students and teachers was an essential feature of all educational experiments and it also became the source for financing education. This approach became the hallmark in Gandhiji's idea of financing education. In this paper Gandhiji's concerns and thoughts about financing education are discussed in some details. In section one Gandhiji's major initiative in founding nationalist educational institution Gujarat Vidyapith in 1920 is discussed and its finances are discussed. In section 2 Gandhiji's ideas on education, finance mobilisation and his participation in the National Education Conference in 1937 in Wardha are discussed. In section three development of education system in the country is reviewed in the light of the Gandhiji's criticism of the British system of education. In this section privatisation of education and relevance of Gandhiji's ideas on education and financing it are also discussed.

## I

Gandhiji founded Gujarat Vidyapith in October 1920, a National University, as an alternative to the British education system to educate children and youth in creating a force for nation building. Gandhiji had called the youth to join the national movement for independence. *Sangharash* and *Rachana* were two sides of nationalist education. Gandhiji firmly believed that in order to reconstruct the society with the vision he had given in *Hind Swaraj* establishing an appropriate education system was essential. Education determined the type of the society that could be built. The British education system was brought to suit the society that had been formed and was being shaped further. Gandhiji in a very long speech made at the Second Gujarat Educational Congress on October 20, 1917 in Bharuch Gandhiji concluded in the following manner.

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<sup>5</sup> Gandhiji's grand-nephew who grew up in Phoenix Ashram has rendered a good narrative on how the children like him were schooled. Interested readers knowing Gujarati should refer Prabhudas Gandhi, 1948. *Jeevannu Parodh*. Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad. January 2000 Reprint.

In education lies the key to swaraj... It does not matter if politics is out of bounds for this Conference. But the fact remains that all efforts are futile without the right kind of education, which is the special concern of this Conference. If we succeed in this, we succeed in all other things as well.<sup>6</sup>

Even before Gandhiji returned to India, Education was on the agenda of the political activists. Gokhale had introduced an Elementary Education Bill in 1911. He was a non-official member of the Imperial Legislative Council. The proposed Bill sought to make elementary education compulsory in certain selected areas. It was realised that poor parents would not be able to pay any fees. Hence, there was a provision in the Bill that school fees were not to be charged to parents whose income was less than ten rupees a month. Gokhale was in favour of free and compulsory primary education for all. And he regarded his proposal as only a first step towards making elementary education free and compulsory throughout India.

Gandhiji believed in desirability of elementary education being generally available and suggested that it could be 'free but optional'. But more importantly, he differed on the content and quality. Three R's were his last priority and he wanted the schools to be self-supporting. He continued with his stance till the end, although he had realised that the State would have to provide financial support to significant extent.<sup>7</sup>

From the time he returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and Independence, Gandhiji was not able to run his own school because of other pre occupations. He had clearly outlined his thoughts on education in the Second Gujarat Educational Conference in 1917. The Fourth Gujarat Political Conference held toward the end of August 1920 resolved that the politics of British education policy was unbecoming to India's culture and the prevailing status. Hence nationalist education was the need of the hour to make students patriots, self-reliant and of sound character. In order to achieve the above objective elementary schools, high schools, vocational and skill schools, Urdu schools, and Ayurvedic schools should be set up. A university namely Gujarat Vidyapith should also be founded to coordinate the various schools and places of higher learning. In present day terminology Gujarat Vidyapith was to be founded as an affiliating and examination conducting body for the nationalist educational institutions in Gujarat. Initially about 226 schools with 29,000 students sought affiliation. With the founding of Gujarat Vidyapith Gandhiji directed his colleagues to run school education as well. Thus, Vidyapith was from the beginning a 'K.G. to P.G.' educational institution.

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<sup>6</sup> CWMG Volume 14, p 36. Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad March 1965.

<sup>7</sup> Ajit K. Dasgupta, *Gandhi's Economic Thought*, Routledge, London, 1996

In his first address after the foundation of Gujarat Vidyapith, Gandhiji stated that no amount of money was less and no extent of honest effort was less in making the nationalist education initiatives successful. In his address to the National Education Congress in 1924 Gandhiji emphasised on focusing on primary education. He also gave an idea as to how primary school should get its finances. In the preceding fifty years or more the British administration had introduced the system of incurring public expenditure on education. Gandhiji reminded the country that prior to English rule in almost all the villages in India had primary schools and were financially supported by the village community. He said,

It is the primary schools to which I attach importance. I want the Vidyapith to pay more attention to them and assume more responsibility for them. We should think how these schools should be run. I give my own idea. It is folly to imitate Government schools. Two years ago I had published some figures in *Young India* I had shown with their help that there were fewer schools in the Punjab now than 50 years ago...That condition does not obtain today, because the Government closed down what it considered to be primitive schools and started its own. How can it reach all the seven lakhs of villages? There are no schools in three lakhs out of those seven lakhs. In this sorry state of affairs, what is the point of starting schools on the Government pattern? We should manage without school buildings; we need only teachers of character. The teachers of old days were such men. They used to teach children and lived by begging. They would beg for flour, and would accept ghee if they got it. Where these teachers were not good, the education was not good; and where they were good, the education was good. All that is no more today. Education cannot be imparted by means of imposing buildings. If we are ready to go to the villages and live a simple life, doing the work of spinning, etc., then we may reach our goal. We may ask the Vidyapith to think about this, but it is not a body distinct from you or me. If some men draw up a scheme and place it before the Vidyapith and if a few self-sacrificing men are ready to live in the villages, subsisting on what little they get, then only will this be possible.<sup>8</sup>

Vidyapith and other nationalist educational institutions were indeed supported by people at large. Donations were raised and most importantly spinning by students and teachers helped in raising some funds, too. An interesting account is available on how funds were mobilised and spent for the educational activities between 1920 and 1949.<sup>9</sup> Vidyapith managed and supported Gujarat Mahavidyalaya and Mahadeve Desai Samaj Seva Vidyalaya (higher education unit); Library, School of Archaeology, Teachers Training College, own schools: Vallabh Vidyalay, Bochasan in the then Kheda district and the Vidyapith recognised schools. A total of Rs

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<sup>8</sup> CWMG Vol. 24, Pp 496-7, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, March 1967.

<sup>9</sup> Interested readers may refer Kothari V.M. 1950. *Kelavani vade Kranti*. Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad. Pp 74-75 and 194-8.

13.92 lakh were expended. The expenditure included purchase of land admeasuring a little above 25 acres (where the present campus is located) for about Rs 96 thousand (6.89%) and construction of buildings worth Rs 1.75 lakh (12.57 %). The amount was fully raised by way of donations and help. Gandhiji's close and most long standing friend Dr. Pranjivan Mehta had contributed Rs 2.5 lakh (17.96). It should be noted that a nominal fee was also charged to the students for revenue raising.

It was in the ninth Convocation of Gujarat Vidyapith held on 11 April, 1931 of which he was lifetime Chancellor, in which he dealt with the issue of spending public money for a cause. He referred to the appeal for funds and donations made by Kaka Saheb Kalelkar who was the Vice Chancellor then, and that led him to the question of economy in national expenditure and the duty of those who would have to run the swaraj Government in future.

I want you to study the Vidyapith accounts. You will see that strict economy has been maintained. I do not think anyone can beat me in my passion for guarding and expending public money like a miser. The reason is obvious. Public money belongs to the poor public of India than whom there is none poorer on earth...And if God wills that there should be no peace, you may be sure that the next struggle will be fiercer than the last and will engulf us all. And it may have to be fought without any resources. Gujarat may be always ready to contribute funds, but even the resources of Gujarat are not inexhaustible. Let us therefore think twice before we expend a pie and curtail our expenditure in all directions. I have often wondered where we get all our cars from, and whether we need them really. I know I often use motor-car but let no one follow my bad example. Let the *snataka* and the *dikshit* of the Vidyapith make a point of going out to the villages on foot whenever possible. Let us be worthy of swaraj when it comes...Let us keep that ideal in mind and cut our coat according to our cloth. The Government of today collects taxes by force and recovers revenue at the point of the bayonet. In swaraj we shall not be able to do so...Let us therefore order our affairs in the terms of the poor of the land. ..We have to be more wakeful, more cautious, more careful and let us be ready to account for every pie that we receive from the public.<sup>10</sup>

For the purpose of record it may be noted that within short period Gujarat Vidyapith had ceased to be an affiliating apex body. The enthusiasm for nationalist recognition was waning. From 226 schools and 29,000 students in 1921-22, the number of schools came down to 9 and the students' number dropped to 296 by 1929-30. The centres for higher education continued to attract students. In all, Vidyapith continued with about 1000 students in all sections. A high level Assessment Committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Prof. Anandshankar Dhruv. The

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<sup>10</sup> CWMG Vol. 45, Pp 408-9, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, July 1971.

Committee recommended that the focus should be on a centre for excellence for higher education with a base of primary and high school, all under the same management. The Goals of nationalist education should be pursued and education should have a strong component of vocation. It was implied that finances should come from people and the institutions should generate its own resources including through production.

Gujarat Vidyapith was thus brought under a regular management with a separate management committee that came to known as Gujarat Vidyapith Mandal. It was financed all through with donations and public support. Serious efforts were undertaken to become self-supporting also. Vocations pursued were agriculture, animal husbandry, spinning and weaving, carpentry, black smithy and other skills.<sup>11</sup> Even after Independence Vidyapith continued to follow education through vocation and made efforts to be self-supporting. In 1963 the University Grants Commission (UGC) gave recognition and began to give seed grant. It was the beginning of the end of Gandhiji's experiment in education through vocation and being self-supporting. At the turn of the Century Vidyapith had become almost completely state dependent to meet all its education related expenditure. The craft training was reduced to symbolic *Charakha* spinning. From 2004 onward new leadership emerged and by 2007 Vidyapith was making sincere efforts to go back to basics. By 2011, Vidyapith's main campus and the rural campuses revived production of agriculture produce and a few items of Gramodyog including Khadi. However, teachers and other staff salaries cannot be mobilised through craft training and production.

## II

Gandhiji continued to advocate his ideas on education through vocation and making education a self-supporting venture. It is often argued that for Gandhiji the setting and running educational institutions was in villages, it is not possible to generate revenue from agriculture and allied activities in urban areas. However, Gandhiji had also thought about the urban issue. The central point to his argument was participation of students and teachers at all levels in production activity to both learn and to meet the expenditure.

In an article in *Harijan* of 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1937 Gandhiji reproduced part of a letter by Dr. A. Lakshmi pathi reporting revenue generation of a missionary school. The letter said,

I have seen some institutions conducted by missionaries, where the schools are worked only in the mornings, the evenings being spent either

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account refer Kothari V.M. 1950. *Kelavani vade Kranti* . Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad.

in agricultural operations or in some handicraft work for which the students are paid some wages according to the quality and quantity of work done by them. In this way, the institution is made more or less self-supporting, and the students do not feel like fish out of water when they leave the school, as they have learnt to do some work enabling them to earn at least their livelihood. I have noticed that the atmosphere in which such schools are conducted is quite different from the dull routine of the stereotyped schools of the Education Department. The boys look more healthy and happy in the idea that they have turned out some useful work, and are physically of a better build. These schools are closed for a short period in the agricultural seasons when all their energy is required for field work. Even in cities, such of the boys as have an aptitude may be employed in trades and professions, thereby enabling them to find a diversion. One meal may also be provided at school for those boys who are in need, or for all who wish to partake of the same in an interval of half an hour during the morning classes. Poor boys may thus be persuaded to run to the school with pleasure and their parents may also encourage them to go to school regularly.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhiji endorsed the idea expressed and also quoted a point made by a Jewish scholar of putting productive efforts while learning being a sure way of patriotism as well. Gandhiji added that physical labour or working by hand was good for intellectual development. He wrote,

Given the right kind of teachers, our children will be taught the dignity of labour and learn to regard it as an integral part and a means of their intellectual growth, and to realize that it is patriotic to pay for their training through their labour. The core of my suggestion is that handicrafts are to be taught, not merely for productive work, but for developing the intellect of the pupils. Surely, if the State takes charge of the children between seven and fourteen, and trains their bodies and minds through productive labour, the public schools must be frauds and teachers idiots if they cannot become self-supporting.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, Gandhiji tried to argue on economic grounds. However, ethical values were central to Gandhi's economic thought.<sup>14</sup> He wrote,

Supposing that every boy and girl works, not as a machine but as an intelligent unit, taking interest in the corporate work done under expert guidance, the corporate labour should be, say, after the first year of the

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<sup>12</sup> CWMG Volume 66, p 123. Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, October 1976

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* page 124

<sup>14</sup> For a useful and relevant elaboration on this point refer Iyengar Sudarshan, 2014. "Rethinking Human Behavior in Modern Economics: A Gandhian Perspective", in Amitabh Kundu and Arash Fazli (Eds) 2014, Paradoxes of Rationality and Norms of Human Behaviour, Manak Publications, New Delhi.

course, worth one anna per hour. Thus for twenty-six working days of four hours per day, each child will have earned Rs. 6-8-0 per month. The only question is whether millions of children can be so profitably employed. We should be intellectual bankrupts if we cannot direct the energy of our children so as to get from them, after a year's training, one anna worth of marketable labour per hour. I know that nowhere in India do villagers earn so much as one anna per hour in the villages. That is because we have reconciled ourselves to the intense disparity between the haves and the have-nots, and because the city people have, perhaps unwittingly, joined in the British exploitation of the village.<sup>15</sup>

The political situation during these times warrants attention in the context. The British Government was financing primary education from the resources generated by tax on liquor. Gandhiji had argued for complete prohibition in the country. Women had been picketing before the liquor shops. Hence, it was argued that Gandhiji did not support making primary education compulsory as he was not for such financing through liquor money. The next issue of *Harijan* published an article titled 'Discussion with an Educationist'. The educationist's belief that education could not be made self-supporting led him to disagree with Gandhiji's argument for self-supporting education as a necessary condition for total prohibition. For Gandhiji, prohibition and education were independent issues, total prohibition being non-negotiable. He believed manual work to be used as a prime means of learning. He said,

We have up to now concentrated on stuffing children's minds with all kinds of information, without ever thinking of stimulating and developing them. Let us now cry a halt and concentrate on educating the child properly through manual work, not as a side activity, but as the prime means of intellectual training.<sup>16</sup>

The educationist conceded the point, but could not back the case for self-supporting education. He argued on two counts. One, was Khadi making sufficient to occupy the student's skill for seven years? Second, Gandhiji was seemingly limiting the skill building to only one craft of cloth making. Gandhiji replied,

The child at the age of 14 that is after finishing a seven years' course should be discharged as an earning unit... Even so the State takes charge of the child at seven and returns it to the family as an earning unit. You impart education and simultaneously cut at the root of unemployment... Then we will teach him some other craft... and have each of these schools specializing in a separate craft-carpentry, smithy, tanning or shoe-making. Only you must bear in mind the fact that you develop the child's mind

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<sup>15</sup> CWMG Volume 66, p 125. Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, October 1976

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* page 140-3

through each of these crafts...That is why you cannot think of subjects like brickmaking. If they must be civil and mechanical engineers, they will after the seven years' course go to the special colleges meant for these higher and specialized courses. And let me emphasize one more fact. We are apt to think lightly of the village crafts because we have divorced educational from manual training. Manual work has been regarded as something inferior, and owing to the wretched distortion of the varna we came to regard spinners and weavers and carpenters and shoe-makers as belonging to the inferior castes and the proletariat. We have had no Cromptons and Hargreaves because of this vicious system of considering the crafts as something inferior divorced from the skilled. If they had been regarded as callings having an independent status of their own equal to the status that learning enjoyed, we should have had great inventors from among our craftsmen.<sup>17</sup>

Continuing the debate, the *Harijan* published another piece where parts of a letter by a Professor were reproduced with Gandhiji's response. The issue was of child-labour that is popular even today; perhaps with more political overtones. Producing a welfare economics argument in neo-classical economics framework, the Professor had argued,

The main cause of India's economic decay is that her workers begin life too early... The immature mind put to industrial apprenticeship gets dwarfed and fossilized; and there is no grasp of the economic significance of work. Anybody can exploit such a worker...When I visited the Ceylon plantations what harrowed me most was the existence of child-labour... Even in a country like Ceylon where the population is inadequate to exploit natural resources, child-labour is indefensible; much more so is it in India where the employment of children may mean the unemployment of adults.

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 legalized child-labour...I cannot agree with the editor of the *Harijan* that mathematics can be studied by calculating how much yarn would be needed for a piece, and science and geography by observing the growth and improvement of strains of cotton... A careful study of Sjt. Parikh's figures in the current issue of the *Harijan* shows that even when a school has specialized in one occupation and has trained grown-up children, waste is considerable...Let us not demand that schools should produce not only men but also goods...To sum up, it is bad economy to adopt a short-sighted policy which will make the schools solvent and the nation bankrupt.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>18</sup> *Harijan*, 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1937

Gandhiji considered the argument as a preconceived notion blurring one's vision. The writer had failed to understand Gandhiji's plan as he would never advocate semi-slavery taking place in Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka). In Gandhi's school, boys and girls were admitted as students. Rather than complete rejection, it would have been better had the Professor had cautioned against the expectation through such an experiment. He further argued,

I admit that my proposal is novel. But novelty is no crime. I admit that it has not much experience behind it. But what experience my associates and I have encourages me to think that the plan, if worked faithfully, will succeed. The nation can lose nothing by trying the experiment even if it fails. And the gain will be immense if the experiment succeeds even partially. In no other way can primary education be made free, compulsory and effective...Shri Narahari Parikh's figures have been written in order to support the plan to the extent they can. They are not conclusive. They are encouraging. They supply good data to an enthusiast...The integral parts of the scheme are:

- (1) As vocations are the best medium for the all-round development of a boy or a girl, the syllabus should be woven round such training.
- (2) Primary education thus conceived is bound to be self-supporting, may be partially for the first or even the second year.

On the issue of teaching arithmetical and other subjects through vocations, Gandhiji had modestly stated his experience based advantage than the Professor! He reiterated the experience at Tolstoy farm where literary education was provided to children between six and sixteen through vocation.

The discussion so far clearly indicates Gandhiji's determination for the pedagogy of educating the child and the reason for self-supporting school. His thoughts on education were given expression at an All India Conference on Education where Gandhiji's proposal was accepted almost entirely and named as *Nai or Buniyadi Taleem*. In English it became Basic Education. A brief history would not be out of context.

In 1937 the Marwadi Shikha Mandal wanted to celebrate its Silver Jubilee. The school Principal Aryanayakam and Managing Secretary Shrimannarayan invited Gandhiji to preside over. Gandhiji made a conditional commitment with setting the agenda. About sixty prominent educationists and scholars were invited, so also the education ministers from the provincial governments. In the opening speech of about 85 minutes Gandhiji elaborated the pedagogy to be imparted to school children. Mahadev Desai had taken notes of Gandhiji's speech. Following were the highlights.

- The focus of the nationalist educationists should be on primary education. The moment that primary question was solved the secondary one of college education would also be solved.
- The emphasis was not the occupations but education through manual training.
- The remedy lay in imparting the art and science of a craft through practical training, thereby imparting education. Teaching of *takli-spinning*, for instance, presupposed imparting of knowledge of various varieties of cotton, different soils in different provinces of India, the history of the ruin of the handicraft, its political reasons which would include the history of the British rule in India, knowledge of arithmetic, and so on.
- Funding the expenses of the teacher through the product of the manual work of his pupils was very important, as the only way to carry education to crores of children. Self-supporting school would be a test of its efficiency. The children ought to, at the end of seven years, be able to pay for their instruction and be earning units.
- Gandhiji's education plan was for building non-violence society. It is in that connection he had resolved for complete prohibition.

Many responded to Gandhiji's address. Apart from general agreement, there were reservations about teachers being paid from the output by the students. Shri Nanabhai Bhatt, a scholar in education and an excellent experimenter was in agreement about education through craft and production programme, but opined that economic output to be an expected outcome, not aim of educating the child. With emphasising production and output, teachers might become extractive and end up exploiting children.

The Conference unanimously resolved the following.

- There should be compulsory and free education to all the children for seven years.
- Education was to be imparted in mother tongue.
- Support for Gandhiji's suggestion regarding focusing on productive vocation and craft; all the other components of education should be imparted by keeping the craft in centre. The choice of vocation or craft should be based on the environment and circumstances.
- Adoption of the above pedagogy would gradually become possible to meet the expenses of teachers.

From 1937 onwards, Gandhi spoke about *Nai Taleem* on numerous occasions, insisting on the central theme of educating children through a craft or vocation. In a speech that was later published in *Khadi Jagat*<sup>19</sup>, he elaborated the idea on education through craft. He said, *Nai Talim* means

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<sup>19</sup> CWMG: Vol. 82, Pp.142-6. Navajivan Trust , Ahmedabad September 1980.

teaching through craft. That basic craft has to be selected in the light of the conditions and produce of the region. For instance, it would not be proper to have khadi as a means of teaching in a region where cotton does not grow, but has to be imported for the purpose.

The important point is of identifying the suitable economic activity or craft of the region. This was the specific context on which Gandhi insisted of education being self-supporting. Educational training had to be related with production of goods.

Addressing the Ministers he suggested the same pedagogy for university education. The organic relation between primary and university education required the university education to be an extension and continuation of the basic education course. Had the Ministers not been able to see his point; he was sceptical about his advice of any use. On the other hand, unanimity regarding university education being inappropriate for independence; would lead to scrapping of the prevalent system. A system on new lines consonant with the national requirement was needed to be framed.

Gandhi continued with what is relevant even today. The run for government employment or unrest of unemployed educated youth had worried Gandhiji. Such youth was devoid of shame to beg or sponge upon others. Gandhiji's belief for university education was to produce true servants of the people, who would live and die for the country's freedom. He was therefore of the opinion that university education should be co-ordinated and brought into line with basic education, by taking in teachers from the Talimi Sangh.<sup>20</sup> Even after gaining independence, higher education in this country has not been able to provide productive work for most of the educated youth.

### III

The Wardha Conference resolutions mostly remained on paper. After Independence the Centre and the States continued with British education system. The Gandhian decentralised model of schooling and educating next generation ensured adequate freedom and autonomy to the local communities. The Government was supposed to be in a supportive role. This was not an original idea of Gandhiji. He only claimed novelty in presenting a fresh design. He was fully aware about the universal feature of the education system in India before the advent of the British. Dharampal<sup>21</sup> in *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*, quotes Gandhi on the education system in India,

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<sup>20</sup> CWMG: Vol. 85, Pp.84-8 Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, February 1982,

<sup>21</sup> A well-known scholar on Gandhiji and his work who has spent years in studying the knowledge, practices and traditions in India before British. He, has written a separate

That does not finish the picture. We have the education of this future State. I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, **and the beautiful tree perished.** The village schools were not good enough for the British administrator, so he came out with his programme. Every school must have so much paraphernalia, building, and so forth. Well, there were no such schools at all. There are statistics left by a British administrator which show that, in places where they have carried out a survey, ancient schools have gone by the board, because there was no recognition for these schools, and the schools established after the European pattern were too expensive for the people, and therefore they could not possibly overtake the thing. I defy anybody to fulfil a programme of compulsory primary education of these masses inside of a century. This very poor country of mine is ill able to sustain such an expensive method of education. Our State would revive the old village schoolmaster and dot every village with a school both for boys and girls.<sup>22</sup>

Two points need to be made here. One, Gandhiji was not being romantic in describing the past glory of India to the British citizens to win over sympathy. He had based his statements based on the research by the British officers who had tried to understand the systems in the colony.<sup>23</sup> Dharampal seems to have taken up from that point and conducted further research and produced the document<sup>24</sup>.

The second point, directly relevant to the present discussion, is about the autonomy, freedom and way of running elementary schools for entire India. Gandhiji was arguing that before the British took charge, there existed a system of education in the country which had evolved in a time tested way and was indeed universal, evidence of which was provided by

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volume on the education system that prevailed in India just before the British assumed full political power in India in 1860, *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*; named from a speech by Gandhiji in Chatham House, London while participating in the Second Round Table Conference

<sup>22</sup> Bold is ours to highlight the words. CWMG Volume 48, Pp 199-200. Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad. November 1971.

<sup>23</sup> In the session a retired senior British Officer and a scholar Sir Philip Hartog had questioned Gandhiji on the issue of literacy and education system in India. Gandhiji had provided the reference to him which was an article by an Indian scholar whom he had published in *Young India* in its 8 December 1920 issue.

<sup>24</sup> Gandhiji had based in his argument on the evidence that was narrated by the author who had contributed to *Young India* in 1920,<sup>24</sup> but Dharampal dug out documents that were prepared by the British officers and scholars and has given account of the whole country.

Dharampal. A well-run education system obtained in the country and resources were mobilised for it locally. Gandhiji had developed two basic criticisms on the British system of education. One was about infrastructure and second was on the content and the pedagogy. European pattern of setting up elementary schooling infrastructure was highly expensive. The British model was highly resource intensive and undesirable for India with different traditions evolved out of climate and geophysical features. Gandhiji had challenged during the Chatham House speech in 1931 that no government would be able to fulfil a programme of compulsory primary education in one hundred years.<sup>25</sup>

Gandhiji's substantive criticism of the British system of education was about the content and pedagogy that focussed on literary education. The system of primary education was besides being wasteful, also harmful. The children were lost to the parents and to the occupation to which they were born. It is in response to then prevalent system, content and pedagogy, Gandhiji had suggested education through a vocation or craft and decentralised community controlled elementary education.

Gandhiji was prophetic in his 1931 Chatham House speech. In 2011, that is after 80 years the Twelfth Five Year Plan Document of the Government of India (after 63 years of Independence) conceded that it had failed in creating basic infrastructure in every village in India. Gandhiji's *Nai Taleem* was ignored and the socialist and welfare government ruled India for decades. The State committed and tried to provide resources to universalise the elementary education in the country. The governments on average spent 75 per cent of the total outlay in education sector (Centre plus states) year in and year out, but could not cover all villages and habitations even with a single room primary school let alone 'British paraphernalia' as mentioned by Gandhiji in the Speech! The welfare state indeed had been committing more and more resources to the education sector since the

First Five Year Plan. Allocation to Education sector during the First Five Year Plan was 0.64 per cent of the GDP and by the Twelfth Plan period it had gone up to 4.11 per cent in 2001 and later declined.<sup>26</sup> It always remained less than the recommended 6 per cent by the Kothari Commission in 1966 and later reiterated by the Central Advisory Board for Education (CABE).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Refer to foot note 21

<sup>26</sup> Refer <http://infochangeindia.org/education/statistics/expenditure-on-education-in-india.html>

<sup>27</sup> Members' Reference Service, Reference Note No. 21/RN/Ref./2014 <http://164.100.47.134/intranet/BUDGET.pdf> Accessed June 1, 2017.

The government had also become more ambitious and had planned to provide a primary school with one kilometre distance to all children above six years of age. In December 2002, following the 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution; Right to Education (RTE) Act with the provision to provide free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years was passed. Primary education has become a fundamental right after the directive by the Supreme Court of India. It was clearly established that the country had failed to provide access to each child in elementary school imparting literary education. It should be noted that it took another seven years after the Amendment to pass RTE in August 2009.

The Government of India did introduce a special programme to universalise primary education in the country. In 2002, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was introduced as flagship programme of Government of India to achieve Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time bound manner, as mandated by 86<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution.<sup>28</sup> It was estimated that the country had 1.1 million habitations and in 2001 there was significant gap in the availability of a primary school at the distance of one kilometre. SSA aimed opening schools in habitations lacking schooling facilities and strengthen existing school infrastructure through provision of additional class rooms, teachers, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grants.<sup>29</sup> SSA sought to provide quality elementary education including life skills. SSA has special focus on girl's education and children with special needs. SSA also seeks to provide computer education to bridge the digital divide. The achievements under the SSA after decade of implementation were as follows.

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<sup>28</sup> For details refer <http://www.ssa.nic.in/> Accessed May 2017

<sup>29</sup> The situation with respect to the 'paraphernalia' was poor in after ten years of SSA. Those interested in knowing more about the paraphernalia situation in Gujarat and in India may refer to Iyengar Sudarshan, "Education in Gujarat: A Review", in Indira Hirway, Amita Shah, Ghanshyam Shah (Eds), 2014. Growth or Development, Which Way is Gujarat Going. Oxford University Press India, New Delhi.

### Cumulative Progress under SSA up to 2011-12

Sr. No.	Item	Sanctions (Number)
1.	Opening of New Schools	2,09,914
2.	Opening of New Upper Primary Schools	1,73,969
3.	Construction of Primary Schools	1,92,392
4.	Construction of Upper Primary Schools	1,05,582
5.	Construction of Additional Classrooms	16,03,789
6.	Toilets	5,83,529
7.	Drinking Water Facility	2,23,086
8.	Teachers	19,85,207

Source: Planning Commission, Government of India, 2013. Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) Volume III Social Sectors Table 21.1 p 54. Sage Publications, New Delhi. Also accessible at

[http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/12thplan/pdf/12fyp\\_vol3.pdf](http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/12thplan/pdf/12fyp_vol3.pdf)

On an optimistic note we may perhaps meet Gandhiji's challenge of providing physical infrastructure, teachers and other necessary paraphernalia by 2031! But additional problems have cropped up that take us to new challenges.

The British system of education which the Independent India continued, ignoring Gandhiji's experienced wisdom expressed in *Nai Taleem*, with providing only literary education. An attempt to ape the Western model of industrialisation led to establishment of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), Polytechnics, Technical Institutes and of fully sponsored and pampered technical institutions such as the Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs). ITIs became pushed refuge for the school drop outs in urban India that too with inadequate coverage and IITs did become centres of excellence, but with brain drain. A significant number of children in seven decades after Independence continue to receive literary education. Gandhiji once again proved prophetic especially about the children in rural India. They were lost to parents and moved to urban areas in search of white collar jobs. A distilled wisdom of an old rustic in a Gujarat village expressed it by saying *thodu bhane e kaam chhode, jaajhu bhane e gaam chhode* (one who goes through literary education a little, leaves the work and one who studies more, leaves the village). India became country of 'literate babus' who had contempt for working with hand. Constitutional provisions for affirmative actions for socially and economically disadvantaged sections of population gave rise to aspirations that have scaled new heights and fan the politics of the day.

India could have perhaps surmounted the problem and given a fitting reply to the old rustic. The composition of the economy is changing with

information and communication technology revolution expanding the services sector. But it was realised with a shock that the country was increasing failing in providing 'good literary education'. The corporate sector declared that even the human resource educated and trained in technical institutions was UNEMPLOYABLE, let alone poor arts, science and commerce graduates from schools and colleges. The country was brought to senses with the reports prepared after careful and meticulous all India surveys on status of schooling and learning outcomes<sup>30</sup> conducted by PRATHAM, a voluntary initiative. Under its project of Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER) evaluates the status of literary education only in terms of three R's. Children in rural schools and also in urban schools are unable to read, write and perform simple arithmetic.<sup>31</sup> The driving force for undertaking the evaluation work was assessing the accountability of the government to people because for funding SSA, the government of India had imposed 2 per cent education Cess. The realisation today is the comprehensive failure of the State in providing quality literary education to the children. Gandhiji had clearly argued about inability of the state to achieve universalization of primary education.

The alternative model that Gandhiji had suggested could be labelled as privatisation of education and this expression would be quite fashionable in the present times. However, there is going to be significant difference in Gandhiji's model for leaving education to communities' initiatives and parents' active participation, marketization of education as a service providing commodity and hence almost a private good. Before amplifying Gandhiji's model, Indian government's response to opening up of educations sector to the world and to the private entrepreneurs needs to be reviewed.

It has been shown that the government could not allocate desired or recommended six per cent of the GDP to education. In 1990, when Indian economy was opened up education appeared in service goods category and was freed for international trade. Further, liberalisation within the economy allowed private sector participation as independent enterprises and as partners with the public sector. The Public Private Partnership (PPP) model gained currency. One more important feature is related to the loss of credibility of the State sponsored social sector services among people at every level. People no longer trusted the government health facilities and the village level functionaries. Similarly, the government, panchayat and municipal schools lost credibility over time. The loss had begun perhaps from 1970 onward. Irregularity, absenteeism, manipulation,

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<sup>30</sup> The reports are published in acronymic ASER – Annual Status of Education Report.

<sup>31</sup> For reports and findings reader may visit <http://www.pratham.org/programmes/aser> and <http://www.pratham.org/programmes/aser>

corruption, high handed and arrogant behaviour of service providers and crass neglect were some of important reasons for the public sector social services losing credibility and confidence. Private Doctors and private tuitions rapidly became order of the day. Those who could pay paid for 'quality' services even cutting consumption of other vital necessities. Only the poor would avail the poor quality services. Even poor families tend to borrow and pay for private services especially in case of illness.

Overall and regional data on household level private expenditure on education is collected by National Sample Survey Organisation. Detailed data should also be available by income deciles and by social groups. Over time, household private expenditure on education seems to be increasing.<sup>32</sup> In 1995-96 (the 52<sup>nd</sup> Round), per student private expenditure for primary education was Rs 297 in rural areas and Rs 1149 in urban areas. In rural areas 10.5 per cent was for tuition fee, 34.3 per cent was for books and stationery and 27.6 per cent was for uniform. Similar private expenditure data is available for secondary, higher secondary and higher education. Data for urban areas is also available. Higher the educational category, higher is the expenditure. In urban areas the expenditure in each category is higher than the rural for similar category. For 2007-08 per student private expenditure for primary education was Rs 987 in rural areas and Rs 3626 for urban areas.<sup>33</sup> The component share of expenditure is not available by education levels and categories. But the share of Tuition fee, Books and Stationery and Uniform were respectively 25, 25 and 12 per cent to total expenditure in rural areas. Although the data from both rounds are not strictly comparable, the common feature is that tuition fee, books and uniform form the major bulk of private expenditure per student. Even when the right to free and compulsory primary education to every child in 6-14 years age group is granted by the Right to Education Act 2009, the NSS data suggest that parents have to incur expenditure on the child even if she/he is with fully funded government school.

In the Twelfth Plan it was made amply clear that private sector would have a very important place. It is said,

The role of the private sector in secondary schooling can be further strengthened through right policies, proper regulation, innovative public-private partnerships and a variety of demand-side financing measures that

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<sup>32</sup> NSS 52<sup>nd</sup> Round data is presented by Rao Purnachandra 2014. "Analysis of Household Expenditure on Education", in International Journal of Education and Information Studies, Volume 4, No. 1 pp. 35-39.

[https://www.ripublication.com/ijeisv1n1/ijeisv4n1\\_08.pdf](https://www.ripublication.com/ijeisv1n1/ijeisv4n1_08.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> NSSO, 2010. Education in India: 2007-08 Participation and Expenditure, NSS 64<sup>th</sup> Round (July 2007 to June 2008), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, GoI, New Delhi. P 9.

[http://www.mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/publication\\_reports/532\\_final.pdf](http://www.mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/532_final.pdf)

improve accountability and enhance parental choice, thereby achieving all three objectives of access, quality and equity in secondary education.<sup>34</sup>

Privatisation of education in general and school education in particular has limited potential for nation building notwithstanding the clarity in goals specified in the Twelfth FYP document.<sup>35</sup> The first reason is privatisation really becoming marketization of education, a traded good. Entry of non-state sector for profit has rapidly gone up. There had been a tradition; Mahajan used to participate actively in education based on philanthropic consideration with high credibility.<sup>36</sup> With changing time, many of the present generation management of these schools have turned into for profit institutions. Privatisation has led to commodification, education becoming tradable good. The preference and demand for a commodity is obviously for its features and the utility it has. The approach becomes utilitarian.<sup>37</sup>

The present situation in education sector in India is paradoxical. Hitherto investment and expenditure was made by the state with not for profit organisations having an insignificant share. The public sector with all commitment could not ensure access, quality and equity. The opening up of the sector was with the presumption that education to continue as a public or merit good with private institutions keep on working as not for profit organisations. Along with substantial private sector participation the state will be able to ensure access, quality and equity. But this hope is belied. Once education is treated as a tradable commodity, profit becomes the chief motive. For profit, responding to market demand becomes a priority. People at large prefer employability with literary education and quality inputs in English and Computer skills, Maths and Science. Most private for profit schools advertise precisely these features to attract customers. Of course a niche segment has arisen for high end customers where rich and very rich parents send their children and ensure 'an all-round development', whatever it means. Education responds and caters to the society needs. It no longer influences society for reconstruction with values.

It is in this context that Gandhiji had thought through and experimented with form, content and pedagogy of education mainly for children between 6-14 years. State was not the agency to invest and run the sector. Universalization to Gandhiji was not centralisation. Also

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<sup>34</sup> Twelfth FYP *op. cit.* p 73

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid* p 72

<sup>36</sup> Iyengar Sudarshan *op. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> For an interesting discussion refer, Barbara Daviet, 2016, "Revisiting the Principle of Education as a Public Good". Education Research and Foresight Working Papers, UNESCO.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002453/245306E.pdf> Accessed 17 May 2017

education meant training of heart, hand and head. Building character was non-negotiable main goal. Education through a vocation of craft was the content and pedagogy. Decentralised local resource based educational institutions run by local panchayats, municipalities and private institutions was privatisation of education for him. He strongly considered that elementary education was a public good and should be available to all as a right. Parents had to share part of the cost. Teachers had to work through a vocation where some production for self-consumption and/or market was most essential feature. Production skills had to be cultivated among the next generation from childhood. State and philanthropy had to play a facilitating role in this nationwide effort.

The International Commission set up by UNESCO to deliberate and recommend on education for Twenty First Century came out with a Report *Learning: The Treasure within*. It echoes Gandhiji's thought on education.<sup>38</sup> The Chairperson of the Commission has called the Report as 'The Necessary Utopia'. It has recommended that education in the Twenty First Century should be based on following four pillars.

- Learning to Know
- Learning to Do
- Learning to Live Together, Learning to Live with Others
- Learning to Be

The Chairperson in Preface writes about the title of the Report. In one of La Fontaine's fables, *The Ploughman and his Children*, the poet said in the context of hard work

*Be sure (the ploughman said) not to sell the inheritance  
Our forebears left to us:  
A treasure lies concealed therein*

The Commission adapted it for education and hypothetically made the poet to say

*But the old man was wise  
To show them before he died  
That learning is the treasure.*

Could Gandhiji be that old man for us?

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<sup>38</sup> UNESCO, 1996. *Learning: The Treasure within: Report to UNESCO of the International Commission of Education for Twenty First Century*. Paris. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001095/109590eo.pdf> Accessed in 2012.