CHAPTER VII

IDEALS OF EDUCATION

7.1 An education for fulness

Before starting any study on the educational ideals of Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi, one must keep in mind that none of them was an educationist in the strictly academic sense of the term, as they did not write any single work or systematically develop any particular thesis on education in the nature of Rousseau's *Emile* or Spencer's *Education*. On the other hand, both the thinkers in their thought and action were truly dedicated to the noble cause of education. They were great idealists in educational philosophy as well as experimentalists to the core. Rabindranath observed, "To attain full manhood is the ultimate end of education, everything else is subordinate to it". He explained that unity of truth could be attained only when there is no separation of relationship between the intellectual, physical and spiritual aspects of education but a harmony prevails. Gandhi expressed the same truth when he observed, "By education I mean an all round drawing out the best in man - body, mind and spirit". Like Tagore, Gandhi explained that a true well balanced education is that in which the
intellect, the body and spirit" have a full play and
develop together into a natural, harmonious whole.4

To the thinkers, a true education encompasses the
entire vista of man's life and activities on earth. That
was the reason why the thinkers dealt with the problems
of education and experimented with it not merely for the
mural limits of a school but wider fields of human
activities. It was the reason why they did not postulate
or stick to a single aim of education or develop any
definite thesis on its basis as Pestalozzi, Froebel,
Specer or Dewey had done.

7.2 Literacy vs. true education

Both Rabindranath and Gandhi made a clear distinc-
tion between literacy and true education. Rabindranath
explained that the highest education is not which gives one
"information" but makes his life in harmony with all
existence. He added, mere information of facts "belongs
to the outside world" while true education is related
"to the inner soul of things"5.

Gandhi like Rabindranath, pointed out that the
world produced great men long before the schools and
colleges came into existence6. In Hind Swaraj, he
emphatically pointed out that mere literacy is not true
education and a mere knowledge of letters could not do any
real good to the millions of village folks of India. He observed, "Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy itself is not education." In short, both Rabindranath and Gandhi insisted that literacy could never be, as people are apt to believe, the be-all and end-all of education. In their philosophy of education, the personality of the education was of primary importance and not the tools and subjects.

7.3 The aim of education - individual or social?

According to some critics, the aim of education to Rabindranath was purely individualistic while to Gandhi it was mainly social. To accept this view, is to misread the philosophical belief of the thinkers and their conception of the totality of man's life, as pointed out by James Ross that "Philosophy and education are like the two sides of a coin".

To both the thinkers, the aim of education was individual in the sense, as it ensures freedom or salvation of individual soul from all kinds of bondages - superstition, ignorance, egocentric impulses or narrowness of mind.

*The underline has been given to emphasize the words.*
In the words of Rabindranath, "In the typical thought of India it is held that the true deliverance of man is from ignorance."¹⁰ Similarly, Gandhi made sa Vidya va Vimuktaya (education is that which liberates) one of the most important aims of education. It has been the motto of the Gujarat Vidyapith founded by Gandhi in 1920. Again to the thinkers, the process of individual development and social progress are interdependent to such an extent that one is inconceivable apart from the other. As Tagore explained that the aspiration of man for an ever expanding future has two aspects that are interrelated: One is individual fulness and other is social fulness. He clearly pointed out that there is no gap between the two.¹¹ Gandhi similarly, explained that man has risen to his present status "by learning to adjust his individualism to the requirements of social progress."¹² Thus according to the thinkers, the highest aim of education is to provide or create an ideal atmosphere of knowledge and truth so that the essential individuality of each person may bloom fully in conformity with the highest good of the society. In fact, Rabindranath and Gandhi upheld India's age-old wisdom that to be is far more important than to do.

7.4 Freedom and discipline

According to some critics Rabindranath stood for
unlimited freedom in the sphere of education while Gandhi was a great champion of strict disciplines in educational matters. Or in other words, Rabindranath's approach was 'negative' while Gandhi's approach was essentially positive. But a deep study of Rabindranath and Gandhi unquestionably proves that neither of the thinkers preferred any 'unlimited freedom' or any kind of imposed restriction that usually stand against the natural growth of a child's body, mind and spirit.

It is true, as Rabindranath himself pointed out that it was his quest for 'freedom' from the routine school life in early age, which led him to the establishment of a school in Shantiniketan where children could enjoy maximum freedom of learning with minimum restrictions. As he wrote, "And as I know it was to which this school owes its origin. It was not any new theory of education but the memory of my school days". He condemned the traditional way of teaching in the existing schools of his time. According to Rabindranath, "It is a mere method of discipline which refuses to take into account the individual. It is a manufactory specially designed for grinding out uniform results."

But it must be pointed out that Rabindranath did in no case allow or indulge in indisciplined or lawless
vulgar activities among his students in the name of freedom. In his many educational writings like 'the problem of education' (প্রশিক্ষণ), 'Discussion' (পরিচলন) 'Religious teachings' (ধর্মপঞ্জ), and others, Rabindranath indicated the need of formulating some elaborate code of good manners for the students. In his address to the students of Shantiniketan on its foundation day Rabindranath insisted on the need of introducing India's age-old Brahmacharya ideals in his school and advised his students to follow the rules with good spirit and determination of mind. "It is the purpose of Brahmacharya as pointed out by Rabindranath, "to protect in soothing quiet the budding stage of the human personality from the premature stimulation of instincts and the wholesome excitement of luxury".

Similarly, Gandhi insisted on different kinds of training and disciplines that help the students to grow from within. Like Rabindranath, Gandhi upheld old Brahmacharya ideals of self-control to be the key of all kinds of moral upliftments and success. He observed, "Life without Brahmacharya appears to me to be insipid and animal like. The full and proper meaning of Brahmacharya is search of Brahma. The realization is impossible without complete control of thought, word and action. "A man or woman completely practising Brahmacharya is absolutely
free from passion. Such a person lives nigh unto God, is God like explained Gandhi. Again like Rabindranath, Gandhi as he explained, was against any kind of "artificial restraint upon the students' all round growth."

7.5 The role of teacher: The Pivot

In fact, India's ideal of the 'Brahmacharya Ashram' with its unique simplicity, naturalness and richness of spirit, having its roots deep in close and interpersonal contacts between the teacher and pupils had a great appeal to both Rabindranath and Gandhi. Both of them intensely desired to revive those ideals in their true and essential forms in their educational institutions.

The guidance of inner discipline and restraint as the thinkers point out, should come to the students not through the text books but from the teachers, who are the spiritual fathers of those tender minds who come in touch with them. Gandhi explained that a teacher could influence his students from thousand miles away. He observed, "I did not find it all necessary to load the boys with quantities of books. I have always felt that the true text book for the pupil is his teacher." He explained that it is the sacred duty of every teacher to guide his

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pupils to the truest path of life. He observed, "A teacher who ate his bread without performing this *yagna* should be regarded as a thief". In upholding the old *ashram* ideals based on a close teacher-student relationship, Rabindranath wrote, "In India we still cherish in our memory the tradition of the forest colonies of great teachers . . . . . . This ideal of education through sharing a life of high aspiration with one's master took possession of my mind". Rabindranath explained that it was with this ideal in his mind he started his school where as the poet claimed, his students, "were fortunate enough to be able to receive their lessons from a living teacher and not from text books". Similarly, as pointed out by M. S. Patel in his study of *The Educational Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, the old *ashram* ideal of education greatly inspired Gandhi while he started his educational experiments at 'Phonix Settlement', at the 'Tolstoy Farm', at the 'Sabarmati Ashram' and at the 'Sevagram Ashram'. Both, the thinkers insisted that teachers should occupy a pivotal position in India's future educational system. Without systematic efforts to improve their quality, it would be impossible to make India's educational institutions more purposeful.

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