APPLICATION OF PRAGMATISM TO BASIC EDUCATION

On the basis of the discussion in the previous chapters, it is quite clear that the American theory of Pragmatism in education is naturalistic and non-dualistic in its approach as against the Indian Basic education which is dualistic and idealistic in its educational approach. Also it is clear that each system originated from different background with distinct flavour. It appears that the application of Pragmatism to Basic education or the vice versa is not possible and that an attempt to do so indicates a lack of insight into the subject. But, in the real sense, it cannot be so if the Pragmatists are keeping an open universe with the 'lids off' and the Gandhian educationists are 'experimenting with truth'. In spite of their distinctive origin they have points of similarities and common problems with common psychological background. An application of the one to the other will certainly be beneficial and curtail the excessiveness of any of the crucial aspects of education. It should be further remembered that the fundamental difference of Pragmatism and Idealism lies only in the approaches and 'attitudes' and not in the total rejection of any one. Though

1. James W., 'The Dilemma in Philosophy' Pragmatism, op. cit., pp. 7-20
Though the two systems have not succeeded in their respective countries, we cannot say they have totally failed either. In more than one way they symbolise the peaks of educational thoughts in modern times.

The world is in the making with its every aspect. No ideological group can remain secluded unaffected by the other groups. If then, we apply the Pragmatic philosophy of education to the Indian Basic education, we can see at once that Basic education, in a way, is not devoid of the Pragmatic or Instrumentalistic trends inspite of its idealistic roots. The activity centred, problem solving, collective living in the actual life situation and other aspects of Basic education go parallel to the Pragmatic tenets and justify the scientific findings of Dewey in his Chicago Experimental School and his educational writings like How We Think, and Democracy and Education. Yet, the fundamental difference between these two systems can be traced to the stock of social ideas, customs, traditions and


in one word 'social culture' which is rooted in the dualistic religious and mythical background. When we say that a child should be nurtured in his own social culture, which is one of the principles of modern education both Pragmatic and Gandhian, it is very clear that this social culture again forms the basis of the society's education and its consequential behavioural pattern in the actual day to day life.

What the Pragmatic education wants to be as social culture is entirely different from that of the idealistic Basic education. The Pragmatists wants to build up a stock of scientific ideas to be the common culture of the society on the basis of which and in such atmosphere the society must receive its education and behavioural pattern. Idealistic education or Basic education on the other hand, wants to preserve the past stock of religio-mythical and cultural ideas to be the common culture of the society in which the future society must be nurtured. This fundamental difference of attitude about the social culture affects the outlook and character of the individual in two different ways - Scientific and Non-Scientific. The Pragmatic outlook is scientific which links thoughts with actions, meanings with operations, theory with practice and which makes experienced consequences the
crucial tests of both truth and value' with its own scientific and moral implications. The idealistic outlook, on the other hand, is non-scientific, or, to say it more correctly, meta-scientific "denying the power of common life to develop its own regulative methods and to furnish from within itself adequate goals, ideals and criteria" and 'claiming a private access to truth'. There is every possibility to say that Basic education is the continuation of Pragmatism and it allows scientific ideas to an extent. To this Dewey answers conclusively that "modern man cannot achieve unity in his intellectual and moral life so long as he remains half-empirical and half-authoritarian", and favoured a reconstruction of ideas entirely on scientific basis to solve the problem of the historical cleavage. Basic education therefore cannot be half-empirical and half-idealistic. Hence its authenticity of belonging to the idealistic group cannot be questioned.

Unless a radical and scientific reconstruction is effected in and through the school agency in the social ideas and culture, the application of Pragmatic educational tenets to the idealistic school of thought

and method is impossible. In the American colonial days, their social ideas and educational methods were completely based on religion and theology. Pragmatic thinking and methods of education wanted to transplant it and in a way partly succeeded in their reconstructural work. Its unpopularity may be traced to the dualistic religious culture still extant in America.

Whether such a reconstruction is possible or desirable in India is a question of great practical and philosophical implication. The present dualistic social conditions and the evils there of in India with its belief in religion, rebirth, caste cycles and eternal truths and its aspiration for an egalitarian and scientific society at the same time sound antinomical. But in practice, the truth of the philosophy of change, as advocated and stressed by William James and Dewey is baffling. not only the American and majority of world society but also in particular the Indian society with its rapid scientific and technological advancement. Indian society therefore stands at the cross roads at present. With the influence of science and technology not only among the 24 percent of the country's literates, but also from other quarters one can see a surging -
ferment towards a scientific, industrialized, egalitarian reforms and renaissance which challenges the old ways and even ready to fight with old religion. The best way to bring equality and liberalism is to combat religion, says one leading article in a popular magazine which in a way portrays clearly the psychological undercurrent of the present society in India. "It may be suggested that the best way to put an end to this war between liberal and fanatical Hinduism is to combat religion. That may indeed be so, but the process is tardy and where is the guarantee that the clever old rogue might not swallow up the anti-religious as one of its numerous sects? Furthermore, the fanatical elements in Hinduism may as well assume the anti-religious garb. The time has come when the Hindu must bathe his mind and cleanse it off the dirt that centuries have accumulated. He must indeed establish an honest and fruitful relationship between the facts of life and his awareness of ultimate reality. Only on this base will he be able to crush for ever the fanatical elements in Hinduism in respect of caste, woman, property, tolerance which have so long vitiated his faith and disintegrated his country's history. In the days of retreat the fanatic
has often sneaked into the liberal in Hinduism. Let that not happen again. The issues are clear and sharply defined. Compromise will once again repeat the errors of the past. This hideous war must now be brought to close. A new endeavour of the Indian mind will then start which shall combine the rational with the emotive, which shall make of unity in diversity not an inert but a vital doctrine which shall accept the clean joy of the sensible world without losing insight into the oneness of all life and things."

The religious and idealistic group in the country are equally of the same ferment with their faith in God, Religion, Values based on them with larger followers in the country.

Basic education, therefore, if it is branded of purely idealistic pattern, cannot receive anything from the pragmatic educational theory. But this is not the end of it. Gandhi stood for scientific education as well, and pronounced that by God, he meant an all embracing principle and incomprehensible Truth and by spiritual training he meant the education of the heart.


9. Ramanathan, Education From Dewey To Gandhi, op. cit., pp. 11, 17. There are other references as well. A few is given under.

For Gandhi, God is an indefinable, mysterious power... Young India, Oct, 11, 1928. To Gomchi Truth is God who is the systematic... whole...The eternal principle that is God—My Experiments, p. 6
It is possible therefore to trace shifts of convictions in Gandhi's life. Gandhi himself emphatically established in his article in the Harijan, September 30, 1939 this idea of his shift of convictions. He says in it, "My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statements... but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result has been that I have grown from truth to truth..." The depth and breadth of his concepts might have been widened in spite of deep rooted sentimental and emotional aspects in his personality. He might have planned out the Basic educational scheme in consideration of the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the Indian people. By providing for the experimental and problem solving methods, Gandhi never closed the door of inquiry and allowed his educational method viz. the Basic education, to take its own course as 'Nityam Nai Talim'. Hence one can see how Gandhi opened the windows of all sides for the free flow of sustaining wind.

If we take up this point of view, then it is possible to trace some pliability in Basic education for the application of Pragmatism in education. But, what specific aspects of Pragmatism can be applied to Basic
education? The major details of the American Pragmatism in education except the dualistic one are also seen in Basic education such as experiments, activities, problem-solving, correlation and crafts. It seems that Gandhi did justice both to the rationalistic and empiricistic temperament anticipating a better day in future. Whether such a day is nearer in a land like India, is uncertain. But Gandhi may say that such approach alone secured unity and perseverance in his life, taking the support of William James and his 'Will To Believe' and so anticipated the same thing in the larger society also through the concept of Basic education. His attempt met with partial success due to the influence of his personality and other circumstances which is similar to the fate of Pragmatism in America.

The question before the student of education is therefore, to see what sort of social change or social order should be anticipated in India and mould the educational pattern accordingly. Prof. M. N. Srinivas mentions two kinds of orientations of change in modern India viz. Indian and Exogeneous or Western. The Indian orientations are towards the past traditional

11. Ramachandran, Education From Dewey To Gandhi, ep. cit. p. 11
Indian society and culture and the Western orientations are towards the contemporary and recent western society. Calling them 'Sanskritization' and 'Westernization' he says that what he means by sanskritization is the "process by which a low Hindu: caste group changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the directions of a high and frequently twice-born caste." And by Westernization he means that which characterises "the change brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule with other changes in different levels of society such as technology, institutions, ideology and values." Having analysed thus, he points out that "Sanskritization and Westernization do not move on parallel roads. At every point they cut each other and the resultant pattern may be neither one nor the other." He stands for a reinterpreted Hinduism in which Sanskrit elements are predominant and which is influenced by the western humanitarianism which subsumes other values such as equalitarianism and secularism. Such a reinterpreted Hinduism received the influence and value of western humanitarianism in all aspects such as legal, political, educational and other institutions and greatly supported
by the Indian elite. It focusses the attention on
the stratificatory systems in the society and ascribes
the social rigidity to the economical and educational
backwardness rather than caste.

We may say that the social order anticipated
by Gandhi was the same as the 're-interpreted Hinduism'
which is not western though influenced by the whole
forces of western civilization and westernization and
though he made Basic education secular, he wanted
religious education 'the affair of parents at home.'
He made such a reinterpreted Hinduism which is the
ideal social order, the goal of Basic education and
not a society which is counter to God, morality, and
values. For this he provided in the educational theory
the more progressive or pragmatic methodology such as
activity and life centred, core-crafted and correlated.
This again goes to prove that Basic education was
conceived originally so as to suit the culture of the
Indian people by Gandhi. Though it may have the
influences of every sort, it is not overflown by any
of them having its roots in deeper ideological and
philosophical concepts peculiar to India. It may see
and smile, wink and nod at the pragmatic educational

16. Ibid.
methods but will not take in and assimilate any of the parallel methods as they are in the Pragmatic mould because it is having in it similar parallels.

These parallel methods cannot be said as borrowed from the American Pragmatic theory or any other European influences. They are already there in the line of Indian education from time immemorial and therefore in Basic education also. We can see in a way almost all the traits of progressive education in the ancient educational traditions of India. They have become in recent days more pronounced, influenced by scientific advancement and the resultant socio-political, ethical, and economical influences and behavioural pattern. If this viewpoint is an acceptable one, then, the application of Pragmatic educational concepts to Basic education again seems improper.

Dewey's 'Civilizational Function' of philosophy reflects that changes is a pervasive aspect of existence. It gives way to his functional theory of mind that reflective thought originates in problematic situations which have their intellectual and moral aspects caused and evaluated by actual empirical consequences in life situations. It further extols the democratic
type of society and demands supreme loyalty to it by
discovery and reconstructions of existing ideas through
the agency of education. Education according to Dewey,
17 is an outstanding human institution indispensable to
the preservation of the common culture which is uni-
versal, scientific and empirical without any allegiance
to external non-empirical factors. He connects the
subject matter and methods of education to the growth
of democracy, sciences and evolutionary ideas in
biological concepts and the resultant industrial reorga-
nization in the society.

But Basic education, though accepts to a certain
extent these civilizational functions of philosophy for
the purpose of education such as the concepts of
change, reflective thought and problems, empirical moral
values, Democratic society and reconstruction of ideas,
it believes in God and Teleology and non-empirical
moral values and the resultant behavioural pattern in
actual life which again point out the non-applicability
of Pragmatic thought into Basic education. The two
systems are like the witch's mirror which shows either
her own face beautiful or the devil.

17. Lawson and Lean, editors, John Dewey and The World View,
op.cit., pp. 6, 7.
By the side of Basic education, Pragmatism in education in the Deweyan sense, will become more pragmatic though with parallel aspects and by the side of Pragmatic education the idealistic Basic education will become more idealistic. It is questionable therefore to accept the view that 'the Indian Basic education is the logical fulfillment of Pragmatism' and 'Gandhi takes off where Dewey left.' Such a view will sustain itself if Basic education is devoid of its idealistic nature. It is in its vein from the ancient past, from the Ashram and Gurukul days where creative activities in actual life-situations form the centre of educational process. Nor it can be said as the 'continuation' of Dewey's Pragmatic educational concept and a later outcome than Pragmatism. Though the concept of Indian Basic education is a later development when compared to the American Pragmatic educational theory in the modern period, it has its origin in and connections with the ancient past. It can be described as the logical development of the long cultural past and educational ideas of India. Hence we cannot say that it is a later development. Just as the Pragmatic educational theory is the natural outcome of the European culture and civilization, Basic education can

18. Ramaswamy C., Education From Dewey To Gandhi, ed. C. P. S., p. 87.
19. Ibid. p. 70.
be said as the natural development of the traditional Indian culture from the long past. The two systems are the two peaks of the two cultures which are counter to each other.

One may point out (the) William James' 'Will to Believe' and his justification for a religion based on expediency. But neither Peirce nor Dewey accepted the view and emphatically denied such validity. Hence we cannot say that the American pragmatic educational theories are of the same natal or pattern of the Indian Basic education. It may be argued that Basic education is secular and hence similar to 'Pragmatic education. But such a view is not tenable for the reason that though Basic education is made secular in the school practices for practical reasons, it is deeply rooted in the idealistic and spiritualistic culture as explained in the previous chapters.

The considerations of social pattern towards which India should move, leaves us in a precarious cross-roads. How far the people of India, in the anti-intellectualistic sense, would be prepared to accept the purely scientific based pragmatic theory of education which had been subjected to vehement criticism from

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20. William James, Will To Believe Pragmatism, op.cit. p.74.
the idealistic point of view, and how far they would accept a purely idealistic and dualistic stand are questions which would ever remain with question marks reflecting the existentialistic outlook.

In such a situation, Gandhi's approach sounds more pragmatic to the Indian people satisfying at once both the contrasting trends viz. the purely empirical, naturalistic pragmatism in educational theories and the purely spiritualistic, cultural based dualistic and idealistic Basic educational theories together with a vast humanitarian and egalitarian outlook in the sense of the American anti-intellectualistic movement in the mid-twentieth century. One can say that it is more pragmatic to the Indians than the ideals of the American Pragmatists with all their subtleties. To the Indian people at present, in their socioeconomic and cultural situations, there cannot be a more pragmatic way of education than the Basic education which would suit their nature, means and temperament without losing touch with the contrasting dualistic and non-dualistic trends. The validity of Basic education therefore, in the reasoned opinions of the Indian educators stands supreme.
But why then the failure of Basic education? As we have already seen in the chapter on Basic education, besides other reasons, it was not given a wholehearted trial in the country with full confidence both by the teachers and the taught. Instead of reusing spontaneous interest and enthusiasm among the public which was already struggling with poverty seeking a way out of it, it was enforced upon them by the government. Allowing the government to interfere in the matter of Basic education, Gandhi said, is the death of it.

And by the side of other patterns of education, the products of Basic education could not null their weight.

There is a mistaken opinion on the part of the public that Basic education was against the march of time and scientific technology. Gandhi was not against them, but against the backwardness of the 700,000 villages. By prescribing Basic education he tried to do the necessary first aid and with the progress of the whole population of the country, it is doubtful to believe that Gandhi would have been against the use of machine tools and scientific technology. Hence, it is wrong to fix a boundary line.

71. Gandhi, Basic Education, op. cit., p. 73.
72. Ramanathan, Education From Dewey To Gandhi, op. cit., p. 73.
for Basic education, but it must be allowed to grow as 'Nityam Nai Talim' or 'New Education' along with the march of time. Failure to march with the time affected Basic education already and if it is to survive the test of time, it must be prepared to march with it without losing its basic ideals.

We cannot say that we should apply the aspects of the American Pragmatism to the Indian Basic education. Except the fundamental difference namely the dualistic or non-dualistic stand, Basic education possesses all the best traits of the American Pragmatic education such as correlations and core craft, productive labour and activity centred education etc., prescribed to the poor economic and present social conditions of the country.

When industrialization and scientific technology increases in the society, the school idea also will change along with it. Already there are signs in the present day Basic education campaign that small industries or cottage industries also should be introduced into the Basic education programme according to the locality and people and trained personnal. It is an open fact that the world's civilization in this space-era is marching towards objectionable limits and
The Gandhian Basic education which is at the same time true to the idealistic trend as well as Pragmatic trend can be said as the balanced one not only to India but also to the world at large. Not only Gandhi, but a long line of thinkers from various fields subscribe to the idea like Ruskin, the author of 'How This Last', Thomas Aquinas, the author of 'Imitation of Christ' and the Russian Tolstoy. And in a way William James from the Pragmatic campaign, who justified religious 'expediency'.

Thus it is evident that Basic education has the potentiality to contribute to the welfare of humanity in general. Besides other causes, the lack of conviction on the principles of Basic education in India can be attributed to the backwardness and poverty of the people on the one hand and the socio-economic stature of the teaching community on the other hand. The sense of duty, discipline, punctuality, equality and other traits of personality and social efficiency will grow only along with the general culture and percentage of literacy level and economic and political welfare of a country. We, the Indians with 21 per cent of literacy must accept our limitations in spite of our long cultural past and take up the spirit of Emerson.

*The literacy level in our country at the present moment has gone up higher than this figure. However, this is the recorded figure (op. cit.) to make authentic mention of it.
who wrote, "Let us honestly state the facts. Our America has a bad name for superficialness. Great men, great nations, have not been boasters and buffoons but perceivers of the terror of life, have manned themselves to face it."

Our striving towards social efficiency and other personality traits through the media of Basic education will greatly enhance its merits in the days to come in the world arena. Student unrest and indiscipline are experienced in our country and in many parts of the world. Basic education with its roots on the traditional Indian culture and the goal on a new social order based on re-interpreted Hinduism or 'sanskritization', can serve as an effective remedy to it. Though the concept of Basic education can be extended to the whole span of life, it is generally accepted as a National Policy only unto the primary level. In the best part of their formative and impressive years, the students would be active, producing, disciplined by the real life situation and amassing a wealth of correlated, real and useful knowledge pulling their own weight in the society.

Gandhi never wanted to stop education with the Basic educational level, that is primary level. He wanted that all who can afford, to study further; and all who cannot afford, to study at least until primary level. With the foundational traits moulded by the Basic educational system, the outgoing students will become more and more useful citizens and students in the society and school respectively with original thinking capacity, curiosity and social efficiency.

It focusses then spontaneously to the state of Basic education now in the country and demands a favourable atmosphere for the nurture of it. Such an atmosphere will be there only if there is no other educational pattern in the primary level which is accepted by Dewey also and if it includes in its programme the demands of the society according to its development and requisites of time such as the introduction of a new suitable industrial orientation together with a common world and national media. The application of Basic education and the attitude inculcated by it as a way of life go a long way to check the negative traits in the world's rapid civilization. Such a day may be nearer or far away. But
But if every citizen of India or at least the intellectual elite of the country realises the fact of it, basic education might be said on its way well nigh to the goal which is at the same time humanitarian and pragmatic, empiricistic and rationalistic without losing touch with either ends.