

CHAPTER-5

CONCLUSION

As has been mentioned in the introduction, the concept of Ashram schools for the educational development of our society is derived from the idea of '*Gurukuls*', in which the teacher and the student live together and have close interaction with each other. The idea was not only to educate the child but also to enhance their skills and achieve an all-around development of their personality. Hence, an Ashram school emerged as a combination of school and home. This placed a larger responsibility on the Ashram school than the ordinary schools. Ideally, an Ashram school has to provide a congenial atmosphere inculcating the spirit of harmony, cooperation, and teamwork. Mahatma Gandhi was the greatest propounder of this modern of education. He fully expected self-reliance amongst all of his *ashram* inmates. He believed in co-education as both boys and girls could co-exist with practicing restraint. Gandhiji was someone who always practiced what he preached and that reflected even in his own Ashram at Sabarmati. He inculcated the spirit of unity and oneness amongst the students. The children were taught various vocational skills such as farming and handloom weaving apart from the traditional system of education, where most of the subjects were taught. Not much attention was paid to English as a language. Interestingly, the answer sought to the question of unemployment was self-reliance. This has in fact has become the mantra of New Education Policy (NEP) today. Mahatma Gandhi associated self-reliance with independence both implicit as well as explicit.

Mahatma Gandhi's *ashram* system of education closely resembled the *ashram* system of ancient times. The students were not allowed to meet their parents or return to the main social order till the time they finished their education. Social homogeneity and harmony were maintained in the

unique lifestyle cultivated in the Ashram. Factors such as uniforms, dietary controls, hygiene, and equal distribution of the work were closely observed. Once the students finished their education they were given the option of taking the vows of the *ashram* and continue to live there or retire from the *ashram*. The retirement plan was also chalked out as the student exactly was supposed to know what they wanted to achieve in life and were trained for it. However, theory and reality did not really match. The interviews taken of the various stakeholders studying in the Ashram system of education in Gujarat and more specifically Saurashtra region clearly indicate that the students were still struggling to find jobs and even at times wider social acceptability.

There is no denying that the Basic Education scheme of Mahatma Gandhi found acceptance in the rural areas and increased the literacy rates especially among the tribal communities, however, it did not achieve the target of self-reliance either of the institute or the individual. There were various reasons for it: firstly, there was an absence of dedicated teachers (as was the case in the pre-independent times) who would give up their wealth and future to train the future generation; secondly, so far as the students were concerned, they although were trained thoroughly in terms of dealing with their surroundings and environment, however, they lacked exponentially in terms of exposure when it came to competing with their urban English speaking peers. The insistence of vernacular in the *Buniyadishiksha* platform gave them a set back despite the fact that they were far more and better trained to compete; thirdly, since most of the *ashramites* came from rural or poor backgrounds, the state as well as social support was in a sense lacking.

This does not mean that the Ashram system of Education is a failure. In fact, the recent government policy of education integrated in form of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) draws in a large manner from this system.

Although the *Ashram* mode was theorized by Gandhi the experiments were conducted by his followers known as Gandhians. Nanabhai Bhatt is one tall name in the field. Mahatma Gandhi had followed the policy of working at grassroots levels during the non-struggle phase. As a result, most of his activities whether working in the field of education or for the Dalits were carried out when the country was not involved in a freedom movement. Especially in the year 1922 i.e. after the end of the Non-Cooperation Movement, experiments were carried out in schools on the basis of the Ashram system. This was introduced for the first time in the Panchmahal district which was directly administered by the British. He introduced Gandhiji's 'Buniyadi Shiksha' model which was skill-based and hence included vocational training.

In the above context, the thesis also has looked at the ground realities in the urban-rural setting of Gujarat. A survey was carried out in different schools, especially in the Saurashtra region. The researcher visited many working schools in the villages. The Principal and the teacher/s available were interviewed and a telephonic and online questionnaire (See Appendix No. 1) was also administered. Discussions were also held with other stakeholders which threw light on various aspects of the Ashram system of education. Since Ashram Schools played an important role in the lives of young children an assessment was made with regards to curriculum and the end result of this unique method of education.

There are a large number of Ashram schools that are present in Gujarat. According to a study carried out in around eight districts of Gujarat in the 1980s, there were a large number of students that had enrolled and the ratio between girls and boys was 2:1 much better than the ratio found in other states of India. The results in the report clearly indicated that the daily program of work was more or less strictly followed in schools. However, there were certain issues that also were highlighted in the report. For instance, the students were found to be particularly weak in

language and general knowledge. The vocational training for which Mahatma Gandhi had so vociferously propagated somehow found weak appeal in miscellaneous vocations except farming or agriculture training. The number of teachers employed in the schools had remained a challenge as only a few schools had 100% teachers' strength and even those were not qualified enough. There are many issues with the *ashram* schools that can be mentioned here. For instance, the responses of various stakeholders such as parents, state, and civil society in general, indicate constraints coming in the way of education. The level of ambition of the parents for the education of their children studying at ashram schools was not high or as dynamic as was and is visible in mainstream schools of urban areas. The other thing that mattered was the social and economic conditions of the children belonging to all castes and religious groups. Many children faced language problems and hence found it difficult to communicate with their peers and later faced issues of communication.

After completing the education up to standard twelfth from Buniyadi School, about 80% of the students went to different universities for graduation. Around 10% of students join some professional courses such as ITI, PTC, etc. And the most important thing is that 20 to 25% of students join the Indian Armed forces with feelings of instance nationalism.

Due to the Buniyadi educational institutions, the level of education in the surrounding villages has increased a lot, such as the neighboring village of LokshalaManar, Bhavnagar the village name Sosiya, which is 96% educated today.

After studying in Lokshala, when a student joins any business or job, he has earned an average of over Rs 1.5 to 4 lakhs in a year.

As per the responses from the parents, the data revealed that the biggest reason for educating children in Buniyadi Ashram School was that they thought that in today's modern age; the young generation was slowly forgetting the sacraments and following bad habits. Since most of the students in this Buniyadi school were imparting moral, cultural and social life lessons, the parents preferred to send their children to *buniyadi* schools.

The environment of Buniyadi ashram school was like a family, following the *gurukul* system of the ancient times. The teachers were like parents; this led to establishment of familial bonds with the students and that played a very important role in the development of a student.

After attending Buniyadi School, 90% of the students were able to find work for themselves. They were mostly self-sufficient adults (be it a man or a woman) where they learnt to cook and clean on their own without any help. They were also trained in many crafts which could be developed as a main occupation or even as a hobby.

The Buniyadi Ashram Schools trained the students to inculcate a sense of discipline in their lives. 80-90% adhered to the spiritual element and that prevented them from undergoing the problems of depression or such mental health problems. They were also made conscious of the social issues and were trained to resolve these issues. For instance, in many of the interviews, the respondents mentioned that during the night camp (*Ratripravrutio*) in the *ashram* schools, the students participated in plays related to social reform. They also involved villagers by telling them stories of inspiration and morality. They also went from door to door explaining to the people about the importance of education and the issues of superstition. This of course, helped the society in general but more importantly, it helped the students themselves as it developed

self-confidence and responsibility towards their society. After completing Buniyadi education around 70 to 80 % of students showed interest in the upliftment of their villages.

The surveys carried out for the purposes of this thesis indicate that after taking basic education, a student develops the ability to do the best work using limited resources. Many people stated that ‘when a child completed his/her education from Buniyadi Ashram School they became capable of living any hard situation or condition with limited resources. During the pandemic of 2019, the students carried out agriculture work and craftwork at their home and they lived without negativity or depression.

At the Buniyadi schools the students were trained to live frugally whether in terms of monetary gains or even food items. The data collected revealed that 90-96% of the students were healthy and maintained good food habits. They continue to eat what is identified as the *sattvic* (plain and simple) food.

The students were inoculated with the spirit of *VasudhaivaKutumbakam*’, i.e. the concept of ‘world is your family’. About 60-70% of the respondents (former students) who lived in hostels today co-exists with other members of the community in the form of a joint family.

Basic Ashram Schools mostly teach agricultural work and craft making as part of vocational training. Because of this or its effect, the farmers of the surrounding villages started cultivating in a scientific manner. In it, they started using new improved seeds, modern technology, and new methods of cultivation. This improved their economic life.

After receiving Buniyadi schooling, 90-95% of people stopped believing in superstitions and 70% stopped believing in post-mortem rituals. 100% of people became inclined towards all

religions. In Buniyadi School, students were treated in the same way without discrimination between girls and boys. After completing Buniyadi education around 90 % of people did not discriminate on the basis of gender. They believed in giving equal importance to their daughters. And around 90% of people believed that girls must take higher education.

Criticism on Buniyadi Ashram Education

Need to update in vocational training: Emphasis on vocational training in Buniyadi education has been given from its beginning but over the last decade it has undergone a major overhaul. One of the reasons behind the gradual decline in interest in traditional vocational training among students was the urgent need to modernize or change the type of *Udhyog*. Because a large section of the youth of the country did not consider farming or agrarian and animal husbandry as a good business or work. It is generally believed that 80 to 85 % of the farmer's children do not want to continue with their parent's profession. (Therefore many scholars said in the future India will face the crisis of well-trained farmers). There were many reasons behind it but primarily it is the western education system. In today's modern world where technology and the internet are a rage, our agrarian system has not been updated as much as it should be. So when the Buniyadi school imparted vocational training in the field of agriculture they so far have failed to update the pattern or introduction of new measures.

The agriculturalists often faced the problem of Child Labour, where children below fourteen years of age were working in the fields alongside their parents. The Buniyadi education should take concerted measures to resolve that. New forms of Buniyadi education should be introduced such as stenography and computer applications, advertising and marketing and salesmanship, automobile technology, fitness, and para clinical-based, auxiliary nursing & midwifery,

fitness and splendor studies, style design & apparel construction, music technical production, poultry farming, horticulture, dairying technological know-how and technology, hospitality and tourism-based vocation.

Politics is part of our democratic structure, but when political interference increases in education, then it harms the main goal of imparting education. All pioneers in Buniyadi education were willing to reform the society through a new type of system of education, but the later generation started taking interest in political activities. And from where the Buniyadi education or school became a kind of factory in which they involved many political activities. The blend of education and corruption made it a deadly combo. Where the education system should just have the *motto* of providing education and knowledge, they are providing more; they are providing money to the corrupt politicians and businessmen and students get influence on a large scale. Due to this, Buniyadi Ashram's education has been hit hard in which no economic or social cooperation is available because the school-supported party lost the election and cannot form the government.

Teachers are a crucial and integral part of the education system. A great teacher is crucial to a student's development and growth. There were many efforts made by the government at present to facilitate the training of teachers. But there is no special arrangement for teachers working in the Ashram institution. Now the government provides training to all teachers in general instead of arranging separate training for Buniyadi teachers.

New Education Policy and Ashram system of Education

India enters the implementation phase of its new National Education Policy NEP 2020, which envisions "an education system rooted in Indian ethos that could transform India, that is Bharat, into an equitable, sustainable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality

education to all and thereby making India a global superpower.” It is, indeed, a tall order but a critical necessity to let the benefits of education reach the “last man in the line,” waiting for generations to get the basic human amenities, human dignity and opportunity to make his contribution to the process of national growth and development. The launch of the much acclaimed National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has yet again given us a brilliant opportunity to find traces of Gandhi in the everyday realities of education in India.

Finalized after over four years and an extensive and intensive nation-wide consultation process, the policy expects the curricula and pedagogy to be radically transformed to instill a “deep sense of respect towards the fundamental duties and constitutional values, bonding with one’s country and conscious awareness of one’s roles and responsibilities in a changing world”. The bonding with the country and an inherent sense of pride in its people is doubly emphasized, not limiting it to only in thought, but extending it to “spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen”.

Revert to what Mahatma Gandhi wrote in the *Harijan* of May 8, 1937: “Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education”. Essentially, the emphasis from *Buniyadi Talim* to NEP 2020 remains on transforming the learner into a personality, a person of strong character. In other words it must be “man-making education”. Gandhi put it like this: “By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind, and spirit”.

Based upon his experiences and experiments in education, Gandhi finally proposed the idea of *Buniyadi Talim*, basic education, at the Wardha Conference in the year 1937. Even earlier, he devoted time and energy to envision the shape of education in the post-independence period in India. He wanted art, craft, health, and education to be integrated into the process of teaching and learning. *Nai Talim*, to him, was a beautiful blend of all the four. He found it consistent with the environment in India, which is predominantly made up of villages. Further, he wrote, “it believes in establishing equilibrium between the body, the mind, and the spirit of which man is made. It is unlike the Western-type which is predominantly militarist, in which the mind and the body are the primary care of education to the subordination of the spirit. This is best done when education is given through handicraft.” He could propose this because of his deep understanding of the Indian mind, needs, and aspirations on the one hand, and experiences gained through his personal experiments in education at his *ashrams*.

Gandhi’s historic speech made at the Royal Institute of International affairs at Chatham House, London, on October 20, 1931, articulates the decline of Indian education after the arrival of the British: “ 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.”

Sir Philip Hartog challenged Gandhi, who remained steadfast in his conviction. Subsequently, eminent thinker and researcher Dharampal established that Gandhi was correct based on factual documentary evidence extracted from the records created by the British officers. The most important strategic intervention in sustaining the British hold over India was through education:

destroy the age-old edifice of knowledge creation, transfer the new model to the generation ahead and ensure its application in the welfare not only of the individual but of the people. In the process, the imperialists succeeded in “delinking Indians from their history, culture, and heritage.” They attacked the roots of that beautiful tree, and it dried up. The policy succeeded beyond expectations for the alien rulers, as Indians grabbed the bait of Western knowledge, culture, language, and its “superiority.” It has not yet been erased.

The NEP 2020 must be incisively scrutinized for how far it would link Indians to India and to what extent it would give young Indians not only degrees and certificates but also the knowledge, skills, and a personality to move ahead in life with self-assurance, dignity, and spirit of adventure. Let the implementers remember the defects Gandhi had identified in a long article in *Young India* of August 1, 1921, just a hundred years ago. Declaring the then system as defective, apart from its association with an utterly unjust Government, he points out three of them: “First, it is based on foreign culture to the almost entire exclusion of indigenous culture. Second, it ignores the culture of the heart and the hand and confines itself simply to the head. Third, real education is impossible through a foreign medium.”

The earlier national policies on the education of 1968, 1986, and 1992 made sincere attempts to bring in reforms in curricula, pedagogy, and the system of assessment and examination but the craze for more marks and English medium schools shrugged off all such efforts.

Gandhi’s understanding of India and the mind of its people was unparalleled. He knew the necessity of acquiring skills, working with hands, health, nutrition, and acquisition of character coupled with the internalization of moral, ethical, humanistic, and constitutional values.

And this would be achieved only when the goal of education is man-making, character development, and ensuring a full-blossomed personality. This is the eternal challenge before education and the NEP 2020 accepts it. The implementers of the NEP 2020 must seriously examine the continuity of the epistemological basis and practical realities, right from *BuniyadiTalim* to the challenges before them. They have before them a policy that is “rooted to culture and committed to progress.” It is easy to locate elements in this policy that could lead to the Sarvodaya that Gandhi had learned while in South Africa after reading John Ruskin’s book *Unto This Last*: “First, the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. Second, a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work. Third, the life of labor, that is, the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living”. The NEP 2020 prominently highlights equity, equality, working with hand, and value nurturance, right from the beginning in schooling.

Once the curriculum designers, textbook writers, and textual material developers are well-versed in the philosophy behind the formulation of the *BuniyadiTalim* and its relevance to India and its people, they would really be able to create a generation proud of its history, culture, and heritage. All of it appears very prominently in the policy that “envisions an education system rooted to Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India.”

Universal education was considered a ray of hope for one and all. The NEP 2020 endorses it as the “basic right of every child.” It must be correctly interpreted as the right of the child to get support in drawing the best out of body, mind, and spirit. It is his right to make choices of learning areas according to his likings and interests. It would be interference in his personal territory if subjected to a regimen that impedes his “power of ideas and imagination.” This is what the present examination system has exactly been reduced to; the policy envisages drastic

transformation in this crucial area. The recommendations on holistic and multidisciplinary education would permit the free flow of fresh air in schools and higher education institutions. It could lead to a surge of curiosity and creativity amongst young minds. That is the need of the current time and of the future. Now onwards, in knowledge societies, progress would depend on the quality of manpower, the measure of entrepreneurial skills, and the level of innovative contributions.¹

¹<https://www.dailypioneer.com/2020/columnists/from-gandhi---s-ideas-to-nep.html> **From Gandhi's ideas to NEP**
Friday, 02 October 2020 | JS Rajput