

Chapter 7: Civilising the "Native", Educating the Nation

Activity: 1

Question: Imagine you are living in the 1850s. You hear of Wood's Despatch. Write about your reactions.

Answer: I would strongly criticize the Wood's Despatch especially on the following issues :

- It mentioned the practical benefits of a system of European learning as opposed to Oriental knowledge.
- I would record strong reactions to its argument that European learning would improve the moral character of Indians.
- I would also oppose its view that the literature of the East was full of grave errors and could not instill in people a sense of duty and a commitment to work.

Activity: 2

Question 1: Imagine you were born in a poor family in the 1850s. How would you have responded to the coming of the new system of government-regulated Pathshalas?

Answer: I would not have felt good. Being born in a poor family, I would have to supplement our family income.

- In the earlier system, children from poor peasant families had been able to go to pathshalas, since the time-table was flexible.
- The discipline of the new system demanded regular attendance, even during harvest time when children of poor families had to work in the fields.
- Inability to attend school came to be seen as indiscipline, so, I would have felt difficult to attend the school.

Question 2: Did you know that about 50 percent of the children going to primary school drop out of school by the time they are 13 or 14? Can you think of the various possible reasons for this fact?

Answer:

(1) Yes, I do know that about 50% of the children going to primary school drop out of school by the time they are 13 or 14.

(2) This has the following reasons:

- About one-third of our population still living under the poverty line. So, the children of these families have to supplement their family income.
- Many illiterate parents do not give proper importance to education.
- There is the unavailability of school in remote rural areas, the children of these areas are unable to study further.

Let's imagine

Question : Imagine you were witness to a debate between Mahatma Gandhi and Macaulay on English education. Write a page on the dialogue you heard.

Answer: I have heard the following dialogue between Mahatma Gandhi and Thomas Babington Macaulay on English education:

Gandhi: In fact, English education has enslaved us. There is poison in this education. It is sinful, it enslaved Indians.

Macaulay: Mr. Gandhi, India is an – uncivilized country that needs to be civilized. This is possible only through English education.

Gandhi: It is baseless. How do you say it?

Macaulay: No branch of Eastern knowledge can be compared to what England has produced. A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.

Gandhi: India has a very rich culture. While English education has created a sense of inferiority in the minds of Indians. It makes them see Western civilization as superior and has destroyed the pride they had in their own culture. I want an education that could help Indians recover their sense of dignity and self-respect.

Macaulay: British government should stop wasting public money in promoting oriental learning because it has no practical use.

Gandhi: It is wrong. While western education focuses on reading and writing rather than oral language. It values textbooks rather than experience and practical knowledge. Simply learning to read and write by itself do not count as education. People should work with their hands, learn a craft, and know-how different things operate. This would develop their mind and their capacity to understand.

Macaulay: The knowledge of English would allow Indians to read some of the finest literature the world has produced. It would make them aware of developments in western science and philosophy.

Gandhi: The reality is that education in English has gripped Indians, distanced them from their own social surroundings, and made them strangers in their own lands. On the other hand, the English educated do not know how to relate to the masses.

Let's recall

Question 1: Match the following:

1) William Jones	a) promotion of English education
2) Rabindranath Tagore	b) respect for ancient cultures
3) Thomas Macaulay	c) gurus
4) Mahatma Gandhi	d) learning in a natural environment
5) Pathshalas	e) critical of English education

Answers :

1) William Jones	a) respect for ancient cultures
2) Rabindranath Tagore	b) learning in a natural environment
3) Thomas Macaulay	c) promotion of English education
4) Mahatma Gandhi	d) critical of English education
5) Pathshalas	e) gurus

Question 2: State whether true or false:

- (a) James Mill was a severe critic of the Orientalists.
- (b) The 1854 Despatch on education was in favour of English being introduced as a medium of higher education in India.
- (c) Mahatma Gandhi thought that promotion of literacy was the most important aim of education.
- (d) Rabindranath Tagore felt that children ought to be subjected to strict discipline.

Answers :

- (a) True
- (b) True

(c) False, Mahatma Gandhi considered education as an all-round development of a man be it physical, mental or spiritual. He said that literacy is not the end of education.

d) False, Rabindranath Tagore felt that childhood ought to be a time of self-learning, outside the rigid and restricting discipline of the schooling system.

Let's discuss

Question 3: Why did William Jones feel the need to study Indian history, philosophy, and law?

Answer :

- In order to understand India, it was necessary to discover the sacred and legal texts that were produced in the ancient period.
- Only those texts could reveal the real ideas and laws of the Hindus and Muslims and only a new study of these texts could form the basis of future development in India.
- He believed that this project would not only help the British learn from Indian culture, but it would also help Indians rediscover their own heritage and understand the lost glories of their past.
- In this process, the British would become the guardians of Indian culture as well as its masters.

Question 4: Why did James Mill and Thomas Macaulay think that European education was essential in India?

Answer : Both James Mill and Thomas Macaulay saw India as an uncivilized country that needed to be civilized. And for this purpose, European education is essential. They felt that knowledge of English would allow Indians to read some of the finest literature of the world it would make them aware of the developments in Western science and philosophy. Teaching English could thus be a way of civilizing people, changing their tastes, values, and culture.

Question 5: Why did Mahatma Gandhi want to teach children handicrafts?

Answer :

- According to him, this would develop a person's mind and soul.
- Simply, learning to read and write by itself does not count as education. So, people had to work with their hands, learn a craft, and know-how different things operated. This would develop their mind and their capacity to understand.

Question 6: Why did Mahatma Gandhi think that English education had enslaved Indians?

Answer : Mahatma Gandhi was dead against English education. He argued that this type of education had created a sense of inferiority in the minds of Indians. It had made them see Western civilization as superior and had destroyed the pride they had in their own culture. It had cast an evil spell on Indians. Education in English had crippled them, distanced them from their own surroundings, and made them strangers in their own lands. What is more, it had enslaved them.

Let's do

Question 7: Find out from your grandparents about what they studied in school.

Answer :

- Urdu/Hindi language
- Mathematics
- The social study, Drawing.

Question 8: Find out about the history of your school or any other school in the area you live.

Answer : History of our school

- Established as a middle school - Organized in tents.
- No furniture.
- Supplied furniture by Government.
- Rooms got constructed.

- Raised to secondary level to senior school.
- After 10 years Pucca building got constructed.
- All the amenities provided.
- Now a full-fledged and flourishing Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya upto 12th standard.

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