

**GRUNDTVIG, TAGORE, GANDHI AND FREIRE
THEIR EDUCATIONAL THOUGHTS: VIEWED FROM A THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVE**

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I

Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Paulo Freire (1921-1997) are four epoch-making thinkers of the last two centuries. They were pioneers of people's enlightenment in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. The movements they initiated in Denmark, India, South Africa and Brazil found universal acceptance.

Grundtvig is considered the father of adult education. His concept of Folk High School conceived as 'school for life' against the 'black' school or 'the school for death' is also the forerunner of the modern concept of life-long education. His idea regarding democracy and popular enlightenment is undoubtedly the answer not only to despotic regimes in many third world countries but also so-called 'democratic' rules in which the guardians of 'democracy' usurp all the wealth and power and the broad masses, the downtrodden and oppressed, perpetuate in poverty and ignorance. The root of modern-day Scandinavian socialism can be traced to Grundtvig's thoughts. Folk High School and Cooperative Movement which emanated directly from Grundtvig's idea of education charted an alternative path to development and social progress - a non-violent path to peaceful societal transformation.

Tagore's concept of education, vocational skill development and rural reconstruction found adherents not only in the countries of the Indian sub-continent but beyond. Every year visitors and students all over the world throng Santiniketan, Tagore's University, to learn first hand how his ideas found fruition in his own land.

Gandhi started his political, social and educational movement in South Africa. Historically, his was the first movement of enlightenment in that continent. He, of course, continued his struggle on his return to India. His social philosophy - particularly *Sarbodaya*, *Satyagraha* etc. - became powerful tools of struggle in the hands of activists all over the world. Needless to mention that his concept of education is closely related to his social philosophy.

Paulo Freire, though initiated his crusade for the pedagogy of oppressed in Brazil, his native land, found world-wide acceptance among the poor and the oppressed as well as among renowned thinkers in Europe, America and Australia. He himself experimented with his pedagogy in many countries across diverse continents. His theories of conscientization, liberation and humanization are unique additions to the philosophy of education.

II

NFS Grundtvig is the world's pioneer of adult education. Born in 1783, in Uby, Denmark, he developed way back in 1840's the concept of Folk High school which, in today's parlance, became one of the most effective mechanisms of imparting Life Long Education.

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Grundtvig's philosophy of education rests on the following tenets : i) 'Living word' rather than books. ii) Enlightenment for life as opposed to examination – based education. iii) People's enlightenment as fundamental condition for successful implementation of democracy. iv) the notion of *Vekselvirking* which speaks about creating preconditions for one's enlightenment within society and v) reliance on the wisdom of ordinary people rather than that of the educated and elite.

Professor Bugge ,an eminent Grundtvig specialist summarized the general educational ideas of Grundtvig in the following way: i)Emphasis on youth as opposed to childhood, as the optimal period of schooling ii) Emphasis on oral teaching, in particular , the inspiration to be derived from the stimulating spirited lecture iii) Emphasis on Danish – Norse tradition as opposed to classical Latin as the best foundation of education.

Grundtvig's concepts which are equally challenging today can be categorized in the following headings : 1) freedom and responsibility 2) mutuality 3) cultural identity.

If these Grundtvigism ideas are compared with Freire's concept of adult education, one will find striking resemblance particularly with Freire's notion of humanization and dehumanization, dialogical communication and creation and re-creation of culture.

III

Tagore, Gandhi and Freire worked in the colonial / post-colonial societies of the Third World fragmented by narrow domestic walls of racism, casteism and class-antagonism. All three of them deeply contemplated on the plight of the mute millions of their people and sought ways and means by which their economic, political and social conditions could be improved. Though Tagore worked only in India, Gandhi and Freire had their fields of activity spread out in diverse continents with different objective conditions. Most of the educational writings and experiments of Tagore and Gandhi centred around education of children and adolescents. Freire, though researched on education of children of the working class, concentrated on education of adults as his primary area of intervention. However, their thoughts transcended the specific domain and became rather universal.

If we consider the theories propounded by Tagore and Freire, we shall observe that both of them considered education as the practice of human freedom. Tagore called it 'Atma Shakti' or 'strengthening of the soul'. All his endeavours were geared towards fruition of this inner strength. For Freire, education is the process of *becoming*.

Tagore's concept of education called for an all-round development of the personality. Culture played a very significant role in this process. Fine arts and crafts, dance and music, literature and science – all these he prescribed for the proper growth of the faculties of the child. Freire started his literacy process from the premise of culture and then broadened it in the realm of freedom.

Both Tagore and Freire opposed rote-learning. Tagore considered creativity to be the key to the development of personality of the child. For Freire creation and re-creation constitute the process of liberation Narrative concept of education was anathema to both of them.

Gandhi and Freire contributed two most significant concepts to humanity – *Satyagraha* and *conscientizacao* . “Gandhi’s social and political movements emanated from his concept of Satyagraha. Vehemently opposed to any untruth or falsehood, *Satyagraha* was the bedrock of Gandhi’s philosophy.

Both Tagore and Gandhi were of the opinion that the medium of instruction should be the mother tongue. Both of them favoured craft education. For Tagore, craft was one of the subjects to be taught to the students. However, for Gandhi, craft was the center around which all education should revolve. The differences in their opinion came into the open when Gandhi offered his concept of basic education to the nation in 1937. The interesting fact is that Gandhi borrowed heavily from Tagore’s Sikshasatra experiment in which craft education played a major role.