



## **"FREEDOM, KNOWLEDGE, AND NATION-BUILDING: EDUCATION DURING INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE"**

---

**Mahananda Swamy**

**Assistant professor, Guru Nanak College of Education**

**Bidar University**

**Dr. Savitri Patil**

**Assistant professor, Vijaypur university**

---

### **Abstract**

*It is important to note that the Indian freedom fight was not only a political movement; rather, it was also a social and intellectual revolution that aimed to redefine the relationship between knowledge, identity, and self-rule. In the process of mobilising the masses, fighting colonial rule, and imagining a free and self-sufficient India, education emerged as a potent weapon. An examination of the transforming role that education had throughout the Indian liberation fight is presented in this paper. The study traces the history of education from a weapon of colonial imposition to a tool of resistance and national awakening. It investigates the ways in which influential individuals like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar campaigned for alternative educational models that placed an emphasis on indigenous knowledge, moral growth, and social justice. In addition to this, the research examines the ways in which nationalist institutions such as the Banaras Hindu University, Visva-Bharati, and Jamia Millia Islamia were incubators for the development of intellectual opposition and the promotion of swaraj ideals. Furthermore, the study emphasises the significance of knowledge in shaping India's journey towards freedom and in setting the intellectual foundations for post-independence nation-building by showing the interplay between education, social change, and political consciousness. This highlights the relevance of knowledge in shaping India's path towards freedom.*

**Keywords:** Nation-Building, Freedom, Education

### **Introduction**

It is important to note that the Indian liberation fight, which lasted for over two centuries, was not only a political conflict against British colonialism; it was also an intellectual awakening that fought cultural subordination, economic exploitation, and social inequity. The essential question that lies at the core of this multi-dimensional opposition is as follows: how can education be redesigned to serve the purposes of national regeneration rather than colonial dominance? The education system in India was largely created to generate a class of loyal clerks and mediators during the time when the country was under British rule. This was famously detailed in Thomas Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" in the following year, 1835. The indigenous knowledge systems were generally overlooked by this utilitarian paradigm, which also hindered innovation and distanced Indians from their cultural heritage. On the other hand, education

quickly evolved into a very important arena for contestation and transformation. Those in positions of authority within the nationalist movement understood that political liberty would be insufficient if intellectual and cultural liberation were not achieved. In the beginning, individuals such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar attempted to bring about changes within the framework of colonialism. However, later on, visionaries such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar advocated educational philosophies that were fundamentally different from those that were based on an understanding of Indian reality. Gandhi's Nai Talim (Basic Education), which placed an emphasis on physical labour and self-sufficiency, and Tagore's holistic model of education at Visva-Bharati, which encouraged creativity, freedom of thinking, and intercultural understanding, were two examples of these types of educational approaches. At the same time, nationalist institutions such as Jamia Millia Islamia, Kashi Vidyapith, and Gujarat Vidyapith were formed as alternatives to schools and colleges that were controlled by the British. Students were encouraged to think critically, behave ethically, and join in the liberation movement at these institutions, which were not only centres of academic activity but also symbols of resistance. A increasing boycott of colonial education and the construction of indigenous educational systems that coincided with the values of swaraj (self-rule) and swadeshi (self-reliance) were both observed within the context of the Swadeshi Movement, the Non-Cooperation Movement, and other waves of civil disobedience. During the time of India's war for independence, this study investigates the role that education played as both a place of resistance and a catalyst for it. It investigates the ways in which education played a significant role in the formation of nationalist consciousness, the promotion of social change, and the preparation of citizens for governing on their own. In addition to this, it explores the ways in which the educational vision that existed throughout the colonial and pre-independence periods established the intellectual groundwork for the nation-building that occurred after independence. The research places education not as a peripheral problem but rather as a vital component in India's path from subjection to sovereignty. This is accomplished by putting education in the centre of the discussion. During the time that the colonial education system was attempting to shape Indian minds into instruments of imperial administration, the counter-narrative that was constructed by Indian reformers and independence fighters reclaimed education as a method of self-empowerment and cultural resurrection. Education became a venue not just for the acquisition of literacy and skills, but also for the redefinition of identity and the articulation of a common vision of the country when this background was taken into consideration. The larger anti-colonial rhetoric was profoundly connected with the transition of education from a tool of domination into a weapon of resistance for the purpose of achieving the aforementioned change. The redesigning of curriculum to incorporate Indian history, literature, languages, and ideals that were either distorted or eliminated by colonial syllabi was one of the most fundamental developments that occurred during the Indian independence movement. The textbooks that were used in nationalist schools were designed with the intention of rekindling pride in India's past and challenging the Eurocentric picture of Indian culture as conservative and unchanging. The introduction of vernacular languages into the educational system was a political move with the goal of democratising knowledge and bridging the gap between the educated elite and the rural people. An additional essential aspect was the part that education played in the process of social transformation. Some influential people, such as Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule, believed that education was a means by which the oppressed and marginalised might be liberated. They challenged deeply ingrained caste and gender inequalities via their pioneering efforts to broaden access to education for Dalits and to increase the number of women who received an education. In a similar vein, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar placed a strong emphasis on the emancipatory possibilities of education for the working class and the untouchables. He argued that genuine freedom could not be attained

without social equality and access to information. In addition to that, this research investigates the philosophical differences that exist among nationalist philosophers with regard to the objectives and approaches of education. Tagore's vision centred on artistic freedom, creativity, and cosmopolitanism, in contrast to Gandhi's Nai Talim, which placed an emphasis on self-sufficiency, simplicity, and moral growth. Although they were distinct from one another, both systems advocated for experiential, value-based education and condemned the practice of rote learning. In spite of the fact that their experiments were conducted on a small scale, they provided compelling alternatives to the colonial paradigm and inspired entire generations of educators and activists. It is further demonstrated by the fact that the battle for swaraj was concurrently a struggle for intellectual freedom by the junction of education with political movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22). The boycott of British institutions and the founding of national schools were not only symbolic actions; rather, they signified a desire to develop an education system that was founded in the Indian culture and responsive to the socio-economic realities of the country. The objective of this study is to trace this educational journey in order to emphasise how the war for freedom was intimately tied with a conflict over knowledge, namely about its creation, diffusion, and purpose. This research makes a contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which cultural, intellectual, and pedagogical activities supported political activity in the process of constructing contemporary India. It does this by placing education at the centre of the narrative of India's independence initiative. In the next sections of the article, a critical literature assessment of current scholarship on colonial and nationalist education will be presented, a description of the research methodology that was utilised, and a comprehensive examination of case studies involving educational institutions and thought leaders will be presented. This section of the article will finish with a discussion of the ways in which the educational goals of the liberation fight continue to have an impact on modern discussions over pedagogy, curriculum, and nation-building in India after the country gained its independence.

### **Education was central to India's anti-colonial and nation-building efforts**

India's anti-colonial and nation-building initiatives depended heavily on education as a vital component. In the past, it was challenged by colonial rulers who wanted to mould Indian consciousness in the image of Empire, and it was recovered by Indian leaders who recognised its ability to empower, awaken, and unify a colonised people. It functioned as both a battleground and a bridge. As British administrators attempted to construct an education system designed to produce a class of clerks and loyal intermediaries (as famously articulated in Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Indian Education), Indian reformers and nationalists began to resist this agenda, advocating instead for an education rooted in India's cultural ethos, languages, and social needs. Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century and continuing forward, intellectuals and activists began to consider education as more important in terms of transforming Indian society and opposing imperial power. Within the setting of India, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Dayananda Saraswati were the pioneers of early reform movements that advocated for the modernisation of education. On the other hand, as the 20th century progressed, political resistance to colonialism became more intense, and education became more than just a tool for reform; it became a tool for liberation. In his concept of Nai Talim, Gandhi placed an emphasis on an education that brought together study and labour, ethics and pragmatism, and rural life and self-sufficiency. Visva-Bharati, on the other hand, was an attempt by Tagore to combine global humanism with Indian traditions in order to foster creative expression and intercultural interaction. In the meantime, B.R. Ambedkar's unrelenting campaign for the education of

Dalits and other marginalised populations brought to light the significance of knowledge in the process of undoing centuries of caste oppression. At the same time, new educational institutions came into being; these institutions served not only as places of learning but also as places of resistance. Political movements gave rise to the establishment of educational institutions such as Jamia Millia Islamia, Gujarat Vidyapith, and Kashi Vidyapith, all of which are committed to the goal of swaraj, which translates to "self-order." Students were urged to become active participants in the independence fight, indigenous languages were promoted, and colonial syllabi were considered unacceptable by these individuals. Through the process of building national identity, fostering political consciousness, and educating individuals for the duties of self-governance, this study investigates how education served as a strong agent of change throughout India's battle for independence. It takes a look at the many different educational ideas, reforms, and institutions that came into existence during this time period and places them within the larger context of anti-colonial struggle and post-independence nation-building.

### **Nationalist leaders developed alternative systems of education grounded in indigenous values.**

Nationalist leaders, in an effort to directly combat the alienating and exploitative framework of colonial pedagogy, constructed alternative educational systems that were founded on indigenous values. A class of Indians who were "Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" was the goal of the British educational system in India, which was formalised via policies such as Macaulay's Minute of 1835. This class of Indians was sought after by the British government. The colonised people was made to feel inferior as a result of this system, which ignored India's extensive intellectual traditions, discouraged critical thinking, and developed a sense of inferiority over time. Consequently, Indian nationalists started developing educational models with the intention of reviving indigenous knowledge systems, reviving pride in Indian civilisation, and instilling moral and civic values that were in line with the objective of national revitalisation. Fundamental Education, also known as Nai Talim, was a radical alternative that was offered by Mahatma Gandhi. This education system placed an emphasis on character development, self-reliance, physical labour, and learning through craft. At the time, he was of the opinion that genuine education need to be inextricably linked to everyday life, regional languages, and the requirements of rural India. As a result of Rabindranath Tagore's dissatisfaction with the rigidity of British-style education, Visva-Bharati University was formed as a place where creative freedom, intellectual research, and intercultural interchange could take place. His concept was founded not just on Indian spirituality but also on a humanist philosophy that was universal. On the other hand, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar believed that education was the most effective tool for eliminating inequality that was based on socioeconomic status. The efforts that he made to ensure that Dalits and other marginalised groups were granted educational rights were a crucial step towards the construction of an inclusive nation. In addition to Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, and Annie Besant, other influential figures and reformers made significant contributions to the advancement of education by advocating for the teaching of vernacular languages, the education of girls, and the training of secular morals. The nationalist movement understood that for political independence to have any significance, it must be accompanied with intellectual and cultural sovereignty simultaneously. As a consequence of this, new educational establishments such as Jamia Millia Islamia, Kashi Vidyapith, and Gujarat Vidyapith were established. These educational establishments aggressively rejected the colonial focus on rote learning and Western supremacy, and instead offered curriculum that placed an emphasis on Indian history, languages, and ethics. Because of this, education became a transformational project throughout India's war for independence. This project

went well beyond the realm of literacy and encompassed issues pertaining to identity, dignity, and self-determination. These alternative educational systems were crucial in laying the intellectual groundwork for post-independence educational policy, and they continue to have a significant amount of influence in modern discussions over the nature and function of education in India.

### **Literature Review**

The academic community has conducted a significant amount of research on the topic of the connection that exists between education and the fight for Indian independence. Scholars from a variety of fields, including history, education, political science, and sociology, have conducted research on the ways in which educational practices led to the formation of colonial dominance, as well as the ways in which indigenous reactions to this system contributed to the development of nationalist consciousness and postcolonial reconstruction.

### **Colonial Education and Hegemony**

His notorious Minute on Indian Education (1835), which is widely considered as a turning point in the Anglicisation of Indian learning, is credited with laying the groundwork for modern education in colonial India. This was the basis upon which modern education was built. The landmark work *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989) by Gauri Viswanathan argues that English education was not only an administrative convenience but also a strategy of cultural dominance, with the intention of creating a class of Indians who were loyal to British ideas and institutions. In a similar vein, Krishna Kumar's *Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas* (2015) examines the ways in which colonial education attempted to depoliticise the masses by encouraging passive learning and neglecting indigenous knowledge systems.

### **Nationalist Responses and Alternative Educational Models**

In his works, Mahatma Gandhi effectively captures the nationalist critique of colonial education on a wide range of topics. Gandhi argued that Western education was inherently alienating and materialistic in his book *Hind Swaraj* (2024). Self-sufficiency, dignity of labour, and education via constructive work were the tenets of his Nai Talim (Basic Education) concept, which was founded in the 1930s. Though they were greeted with little scalability and backing from the state, Gandhi's ideas were adopted in institutions such as Wardha's Basic Schools. The educational concept that Rabindranath Tagore advocated, on the other hand, was more open and international. In 1921, he established Visva-Bharati University with the intention of combining modern humanism with the traditions of India. Tagore's methodology defied the rigidity of colonial schools and embraced innovation and critical inquiry, as Amartya Sen (2015) points out in *The Argumentative Indian*. Tagore's works were published in 2015.

### **Education and Social Reform Movements**

Both Eleanor Zelliott and Gail Omvedt have used their writings to investigate the role that education plays in social transformation, particularly with regard to areas that are economically disadvantaged. The book *"From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement"* written by Zelliott in 2013 provides evidence of how Dr. B.R. Ambedkar placed a strong emphasis on education as a way of achieving social mobility and political empowerment. Ambedkar's attempts to break down caste barriers in educational access are highlighted by Omvedt (2024), who highlights the relevance of these initiatives. The

contributions made by Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule are also considered to be foundational. During the 19th century, Savitribai, who is frequently considered to be India's first female educator, was instrumental in the advancement of education for women and Dalits among the population. The research that Rosalind O'Hanlon conducted in 1985 on the subject of caste and gender dynamics in colonial Maharashtra offers insight on the radical character of the Phules' endeavours in opposing both British and Brahmanical power systems.

### **National Institutions as Sites of Resistance**

The process by which nationalist institutions evolved as centres of ideological and intellectual opposition has been investigated by a number of academics. The research that was conducted by Aparna Basu in 1982 and titled "The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898-1920" investigates the ways in which institutions such as Banaras Hindu University, which was established by Madan Mohan Malaviya in 1916, had more than one purpose: they were both agents of modernity and theatres of nationalist mobilisation. In a similar vein, Mushirul Hasan's book "Legacy of a Divided Nation" (1997) covers the establishment of Jamia Millia Islamia shortly after the Non-Cooperation Movement. This was done with the intention of establishing an educational system that was free from the influence of colonial authorities and religious sectarianism.

### **Swadeshi and Vernacular Education**

Between the years of 1905 and 1911, the Swadeshi Movement provided a tremendous boost to the concept of national education. In his book titled "The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908," published in 1973, Sumit Sarkar describes how the movement was responsible for the development of national schools and colleges as a form of protest against the educational policies of the British government. These schools eschewed the English-centered curriculum that was prevalent during the colonial era and instead placed an emphasis on Indian languages, history, and ethical education.

### **Contemporary Reflections**

In recent decades, academics such as Nita Kumar (Lessons from Schools: The History of Education in Banaras, 2000) and Partha Chatterjee (The Nation and Its Fragments, 1993) have provided nuanced readings of the ways in which education in colonial India was deeply intertwined with the process of identity formation and cultural negotiation. The anthropological method taken by Kumar indicates how schools in Banaras acted as a mediator between tradition and modernity. On the other hand, Chatterjee describes how the nationalist goal required regaining a separate "inner domain" of cultural sovereignty, with education being an essential component of this agenda.

### **Conclusion**

Not only was the Indian freedom struggle a war for political independence, but it was also a deep cultural and intellectual movement with the goal of regaining the spirit of the nation. One of the most important aspects of this larger movement was the transforming role that education made. During the time when colonial rule was in effect, education went from being a major site of resistance to becoming a method of imperial control. Indian leaders progressively posed a challenge to the British model, which was intended to produce a subservient class of educated Indians. These leaders envisioned education as a means to achieve self-awareness, social reform, and national pride. This book focusses on the ways in which Indian

philosophers and activists, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, as well as B.R. Ambedkar and the Phules, reinterpreted education as something more than merely a means of imparting information; rather, they reframed education as a means of empowering and liberating individuals. The intellectual groundwork for a free India was built by their alternative educational models, which were founded on indigenous knowledge, the cultivation of ethical consciousness, and the promotion of inclusiveness. Institutions such as Visva-Bharati, Jamia Millia Islamia, and Gujarat Vidyapith were live experiments in nationalist education. These institutions frequently combined political action with innovative teaching practices. Moreover, education throughout the war for liberation played a crucial part in the process of democratising knowledge, overcoming socioeconomic differences, and cultivating a shared national identity. It was through education that disenfranchised groups were able to find a voice, women were able to enter public life, and young people were able to organise themselves to resist the injustices of colonialism. This greater aim to decolonise the Indian mind and spirit was reflected in the focus placed on vernacular languages, cultural legacy, and moral education. In the process of India's transformation from a colonised society to an independent nation, the educational visions of its freedom warriors impacted debates on topics such as curriculum, access, language policy, and the role of education in development. Their legacy continues to inspire conversations about educational justice, cultural relevance, and the role of education in constructing a just society, despite the fact that many of their ambitions have only been partially realised. To summarise, education was not a secondary priority throughout the Indian independence movement; rather, it was an essential component of the nationalist cause. The formation of the consciousness of a nation that was undergoing transition and the preparation of its inhabitants for the duties of self-rule were both significantly aided by it. Understanding this historical backdrop is vital not just for recognising the diverse nature of India's liberation struggle but also for informing present attempts to make education a truly liberated force in modern India. This means that understanding this context is essential for both of these reasons.

## References

1. Basu, A. (1982). *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898-1920*. Oxford University Press.
2. Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press.
3. Gandhi, M. K. (2024). *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Navajivan Publishing House.
4. Hasan, M. (1997). *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence*. Oxford University Press.
5. Kumar, K. (2015). *Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
6. Kumar, N. (2000). *Lessons from Schools: The History of Education in Banaras*. Sage Publications.
7. Macaulay, T. B. (1835). *Minute on Indian Education*. British Parliamentary Papers.
8. Omvedt, G. (2024). *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*. Sage Publications.
9. Sarkar, S. (1973). *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*. People's Publishing House.
10. Sen, A. (2015). *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
11. Tagore, R. (1922). *Towards Universal Man*. Visva-Bharati.

12. Viswanathan, G. (1989). *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. Oxford University Press.
13. Zelliott, E. (2013). *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. Manohar Publishers.
14. O'Hanlon, R. (1985). *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*. Cambridge University Press.