

## **NON-CONVENTIONAL METHODS OF EDUCATION: FOR PEACE, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

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### Introduction

Education is empowerment and will always be an important tool in development of a society. In India over 40% students drop out of school before the 10<sup>th</sup> grade<sup>1</sup>. It therefore becomes especially important to implement methods of education that can reach the society at large, as there may not be enough resources for formal training for all. Also, while conventional methods used in formal education are as important, non-conventional methods of education like literature, generating awareness and religion to name a few are also important in bringing about individual transformation leading to cultural changes. Also, formal education tends to be creating a rat race and is not focussed on skills building. Traditional education that helps in building professional skills are important as they help in economic development and while traditional methods of education works towards nation-building too, some developing countries like India may not have sufficient resources to provide for education for the socially and economically backward sections of the society who are unable to attend formal training at schools. Hence, non-conventional methods as listed in this paper may be employed in such societies. This may result in cultural changes and would equip societies with necessary skills by using minimum resources.

When we have a free and sustainable agency, we have a better and more promising scope of development.<sup>2</sup> The free and sustainable agency spoken about by Amartya Sen in his book '*Development as Freedom*', is us- Individuals. When we take upon ourselves to bring about promising changes and if we have the freedom to do so, we become leaders or components of change, we become catalyst in bringing about a transformation.

Being a lawyer in the field of academia, I feel the use of law to bring about social change is not very efficient unless we have a concrete structure of education. But my main emphasis through this paper would be primarily on non-conventional methods of education to bring about social change.

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<sup>1</sup> Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development Bureau of Planning, Monitoring & Statistics New Delhi 2014, Latest Statistics Report of 2013-2014

<sup>2</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (OUP 2004)

### Why Law may sometimes fail at bringing about social change and Education would help

Being a lawyer, I would like to point out why law may sometimes be taken over by education to bring about social change. While law is a social tool, its main purpose being the betterment of society and to eradicate any form of social unrest, law too has its limitations. Sometimes legalism<sup>3</sup> as a theory, cannot always be used as an instrument of social change, the reasons being non-appreciation of legal rules by an individual or excessive adherence to religion or traditions and so on. While law is one of the most important tools of social transformation that encourages one to act according to the desired social behaviour, at times it fails to do so due to these limitations and hence other tools or methods should be encouraged to mould an individual for the purposes of transforming oneself and the society at large. One of the most important ways of doing this can be non-conventional methods of education, as will be proposed and emphasised throughout this article. The non-conventional methods of education are modes of educating a person, other than the usual classroom formal teaching methodology, that may prove to be efficient in bringing about a desired change within persons for the benefit of the society at large. The following article is an attempt to discuss the various forms of non-conventional methods of education that may serve as important tools to bring about social change.

### The History behind the Current System of Education in India

Most of us have an aversion to the traditional methods of learning, as it is hardly learning and more of swotting to survive our exams. The knowledge imparted does not last for long and so we impetuously rely on other sources to gain the kind of knowledge that lasts with us forever.

So while it is easy to disregard the current conventional method of education, let us understand the reasons why it has been practiced in the first place.

### Education- what we mean and what it is.

The early system of education can be traced to the teaching of Vedas, where all the teachers called *gurus*, were mild in discipline and humane in treatment of their pupils. The instructions were given under trees in the open air on pleasant days and in a tent or shed when the weather was bad. Instructions were given in arithmetic, writing, reading, though religion constituted the principle theme. Memorizing the holy sayings of Brahma occupied a large portion of the

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<sup>3</sup> An ancient Chinese philosophy that advocated adherence to law and promoted stringent legal control on human social behaviour

time. The cultivation of memory was considered important. The school was often held in an open shed where students, only boys, would sit on earth to shout the Vedas after the teacher, in a singsong voice. This would go on until all the sentences for the day were memorized. No one knew what he was repeating and the teacher never explained neither were the pupils inquisitive.<sup>4</sup>

If we observe today, the same arrangement in classroom teaching has continued in our school system, there is a set syllabus and the students work extremely hard in completing their portion without much knowledge of why they are working so hard. The exams also expect whatever was taught in class and no external knowledge is required. This is the form of teaching and learning that never helps to change attitude or thought process of a student and hence non-traditional methods of teaching and learning becomes specifically important.

Having already explained why the Indian teaching methods have evolved and continues; let us look into the attributes of our ancient education system which has proven to be a limitation on social change and transformation of ideas.

The original system of imparting education in ancient times had the following characteristics<sup>5</sup>

- a. Was not universal, only boys belonging to a certain class participated, and hence a large part of the society was excluded from its benefits.
- b. Based on castes and the promulgation of the caste system.
- c. Depended too much upon cultivation of memory, no practical knowledge or explanation was given.
- d. Had no philosophy of education, hence was non-progressive.
- e. Did not properly honour woman, and excluded her from its advantages.

All of these above attributes is what makes up the Indian society that we live in today, the education system to an extent also reflects the same. And hence this article tries to evaluate the forms and benefits of non-conventional methods of teaching to bring about social development.

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<sup>4</sup> Levi Seeley, History of Education (American Book Company 1904)

<sup>5</sup> Levi Seeley, History of Education (American Book Company 1904)

Why are non-conventional methods of education apt for peace and development?

Law can impose itself on people and due to its authority and capability of punishing those who do not follow it, legal rules are universally followed. They are thought to be appropriate to bring about social change, but the only problem is that while people may accept legalism, they may also disregard it. Violence, bloodshed, wars and revolutions are a result of the same. And that is where the limitation of law begins; it is education that can change the internal characteristics of a person, to transform her or him and eventually begins transformation of the society.

While criticising a thinker's conclusion about the power of education to change a person's character and intelligence, convictions and ideas, Emile Durkheim in his book says that 'Education is only the image and reflection of a society...Education, therefore, can be reformed only if society itself is reformed'<sup>6</sup>. Durkheim of course was talking about the classroom conventional method of education, even so, I feel regretful to differ with Durkheim's ideas, because I believe that education is a great force behind social change and can be used to better the society, and even overrides law at that.

Swami Vivekananda spoke about the importance of education when he said 'set yourself to the task of spreading education among the masses....as that can guarantee a desired transformation'.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most prominent of examples of consequences of non-conventional education is- Revolutions for Independence. Be it the American, French or Indian. They were all a result of spreading information and knowledge of self-rights. It was a result of covert operations on spreading awareness and making people understand how they were being exploited by scheming rulers who were using their money and resources. Finally these awareness programs made people develop a common consensus amongst the public, who came together and fought for their country. This brought about the biggest social change and that was 'Freedom'.

This kind of non-conventional method of education can be termed as 'Education through Awareness Method', it involves spreading of knowledge and making people understand self-importance, makes people aware of what they can achieve, it changes ideologies,

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<sup>6</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (George Simpson ed, A. Spaulding and George Simpson trs, Routledge Classics 2002)

<sup>7</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *State, Society and Socialism* (Advaita Ashrama 1995)

overshadows self-doubt and brings in a changed identity of a person, it changes the whole society for good. The society, state or the world, becomes a better place, people become more confident. The process may be a lengthy one but the change is permanent.

It is critical to note that these methods are tools to bring about social change, therefore it can be employed to a society as a whole irrespective of social standing and hence the approach taken by the Marxian philosophy which states that education is the privilege of the bourgeois would not stand true.

### Non-conventional methods of education for social development

Having established the efficacy of non-conventional education for development, let us discuss the methods that can be employed to do it.

#### 1. Religion as a method of education

The earliest form of education in India was to impart the knowledge that was scripted in Vedas. As previously mentioned the scriptures in Vedas were recited by the guru to his students, who would memorise it. While it was a way of learning, it was also a way of living. Vedas taught people the way of life and how to conduct themselves. They were said to be the words of god, and is till today considered a holy text for Hindus. Similarly, the Quran is a holy book for Muslims that teaches the way of living within a society and touches many aspects of human conduct. In the same manner is the Bible for Christians, or several other texts for other religions. Religion imparts knowledge; it makes a person to have a certain kind of belief system. It also changes a person's attitude and influences his ideas.

Hence while religion is the oldest form of education, it can today be helpful in making people better human beings and if religion modernises and can impart knowledge that will be helpful for the society then it can help bring a change from the system of violence and aggression that we are aware of and bring in change for peace and humanity.

Historically, religion has been one of the most powerful forces in bringing about social change. Today maybe due to growth of modernisation, the role of religion to do so has slightly decreased. Yet, religion still remains one of the strongest methods in changing the attitude, belief and ideologies of a person. Rather than causing violence and riots, if religion can be employed for a noble purpose, it can produce more good than harm in the society and help evolve it completely.

## 2. Literature, narratives and books

Literature has always had a social function. For instance, books on feminism have encouraged people to oppose male chauvinism. Religious literature has played a part in shaping ideas and attitudes of people. Similarly, various texts on politics, nationalism and revolutions have made people realise the importance of statehood. The pamphlets containing messages for freedom during the pre-independence era proved to be a device to motivate people to struggle for independence in India.

Various popular texts have been responsible for influencing the society and led to social movements. Literature has had a key impact on development of society. Many a books, biographies, autobiographies, narratives and poems have sometimes largely impacted thoughts, and beliefs; it has changed perceptions and brought about individual and societal changes. Mythologies and historical writings have shaped traditions. Literature has had a major impact on the development of society. It has influenced civilisations and shaped political systems. Literature teaches us to live and to grow, it teaches us to behave and to respect, it has helped in the advancement of a human being and therefore the society at large and to that extend its role in social change is reflected.

## 3. Education through Awareness

There are certain kinds of themes that cannot be a topic of discussion in a classroom. And due to the nature of the subject matter, such issues are more efficiently made to understand and promoted through various awareness methods. This is another kind of non-conventional education method.

While the awareness method is an important tool of educating people, if done for wrong reasons, it may sometimes harm the society than change it for the better. The Nazi regime created during Hitler's dictatorship is an example. While he used the awareness method to win over and influence the Nazis against the Jews, he did so with an ill intent, and the consequences are still spoken of and can be seen in world. For a while during that time, Germany as a society was oppressed, ill influenced and was devoid of any kind of values and culture. The society had been changed for the worse.

On the other hand, freedom fighters and promoters of independence have played an important role of advancing the idea of justice and the importance of freedom. They spent a considerable amount of time to urge the population to disregard the rulers and be free of external oppression, till ultimately the whole society got together to fight for what was theirs and that led to some great movements that has shaped history. This was done using the method of awareness positively.

Public awareness is being used over a long period of time to bring in social change. Be it to prevent crime, educate people about their rights or spread information about something people are unaware of. Awareness methods help a society to reach its fullest potential.

Media, legal aid camps, pamphlets, street plays etcetera have proved to be some very important ways to educate people.

Awareness method remains one of the most reliable ways in imparting knowledge and changing societies.

#### Using these Methods to Eradicate Social Problems and Maintain Peace

A very important question in today's times is whether the transformative effects of religion, literature and awareness can contain social tensions and encourage peace?

I believe that most of the problems in the society can be curtailed through education, through knowledge. Education is the key for development of societies and establishment of peaceful communities. For instance when Gandhi launched the *Salt March*, several citizens joined the movement and this became a significant aspect of the independence movement, the movement made people aware of their strength when united, leading to a successful peaceful revolt against the British policy and witnessed strengthened unity amongst masses. This is one example of a non-violent awareness method in use. It is to be realised that arms and weapons are not the only solution for conflicts, something that we are largely observing in the conflicts taking place in the world today. Educating citizens about ways of peacefully revolting against an unacceptable policy is also possible. And education can be used to encourage peace even in conflicting times.

It of course goes without saying that the awareness method of educating masses may lead to conflict and hostilities too. The greatest example would be of Hitler's regime in Germany leading to Holocaust that witnessed aggression and hostilities amongst the people of Europe towards a community and which ultimately led to the killing of about 6 million Jews.

Unfortunately, Hitler's teachings were based on wrong motives, they were based on discrimination, on violation of human rights, they were against peace. This example portrays that when the method of awareness is used wrongly it can lead to more conflicts than maintain peace.

Similarly when religion and literature promotes violence or discriminates between people, and is wrongly used it hampers peace instead of maintaining it. But at the same time when it is used efficiently, it can bring in development, transformation and peace.

These methods are not only alternatives to formal education but are as important, they become especially important in times of disturbances as those may be the times when formal education may have been suspended, something which is a routine in areas suffering from constant social tensions.

### Conclusion

The article discussed the importance of non-conventional or informal methods of education. While the article highlighted why such a system is desirable and efficient, it also traced the evolution of our current system of conventional method of education. The article is not a criticism of the formal education system but merely written to bring to light the efficacy of incorporating ideas and influencing people with good thoughts to change set ideologies and attitudes. The article is written to emphasise on techniques to change mind-set, something that traditional class room education may at times fail to do.

While social change is something that cannot be envisaged to take place in a certain manner or at a certain time, some methods of bringing about social change can be effective.

Incorporating cultural and social values through religion, improving oneself through literature, educating people through awareness, are some methods in which the society at large can be empowered and development may take place.