

# Gopabandhu's Innovations and Experimentation in Educational Practices

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## Abstract

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*Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das was a firm believer of God or Jagannathanism and his sacrifices and suffering for the cause of Swaraj testified to the remarkable saga of his selfless service to people, society and nation. To liberate people from all types of social evils, i.e. ignorance, blind belief, starvation and all forms of exploitation he started a social revolution by establishing Satyabadi Vanavidyalaya at Sakhigopal, eleven miles from Puri, on 12th August 1909, with nineteen students on the roll and himself as the Secretary along with a group of young Oriya scholars namely Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Acharya Harihar Das, Pandit Nilakantha Dash, Kripasindhu Mishra and Godavarish Mishra. The entire staff, under the inspiring leadership of Pandit Gopabandhu, was devoted to reconstructing the nation through education.*

*Their philosophy of education was based on education for humanisation, open-air schooling, free and universal education, earning while learning, community-centred education, to achieve the objective of humanisation and completely developed personality by giving training to the mind and the body of the students. The school will be a beehive of active community-living and sustain co-operative effort. Thus he adopted an activity-centred curriculum for transaction of learning experiences. The teachers followed individualised instruction as per the needs of students which was very personal and cordial. A very healthy and intimate relationship developed between the teachers and the students in the Satyabadi School. The personal example of the teachers influenced the students for healthy personality development. The Satyabadi School provided an ideal training in self-discipline to the students. Students used to solve their problems in the "Boy's own court."*

*The Satyabadi school hostel was organised on a novel plan with the aim of humanising the learning process. The boarders developed many good qualities*

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*through its programmes like debates, musical evenings, indoor games, paper reading, community dinner and the cultural programme, etc. Thus Satyabadi school hostel supplied right conditions for the development of the whole personality of the boarders. It was a training ground for humanism, socialism, self-discipline, ideal student life and democratic management.*

### **Introduction**

Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das (1877-1928) was born in a small village Suando in the Sakhigopal Police Station in Puri District, Orissa on 9 October 1877. Gopabandhu passed his Matriculation examination in 1898 from the Puri Zila School and joined the Ravenshaw College to study Arts.

After passing B.A. examination he took his law degree in 1906 which ended a chapter of his life. He sacrificed his life for the cause of his motherland 'Utkal' presently Odisha and became known as Utkalmani. He was a legend in the Indian culture. He served his people even at the cost of his family. Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das was a unique man in many respects. He was a poet, a social reformer, freedom fighter, legislator, educationist, founder of leading Oriya daily newspaper 'Samaj' and above all a selfless and self-effacing person ever dedicated to the cause of suffering humanity. He was a great creative writer. His poem and prose were superb and he had an inimitable style altogether. His lyrics, epics and poems contain through of patriotism, love of our heritage and dedication to divinity. Though Gopabandhu qualified himself the legal profession, his first love for education made him anxious to gain some experience of running an educational institution 'Satyabadi Vanavidyalaya'. He strongly believed that education is one and only one

instrument for social change in wider scale. Thus, he approached education for emancipation of all types of unwanted social evils from the soil of Bharat Varse. According to Gopabandhu, "By education I do not mean the teaching in school, education is what was imparted in the ancient Indian institutions and centres of religion". Essentially, however, it was a revivalist educational philosophy, taking people back to vedic culture, the ideal of 'simple living and high thinking' and of turning each individual life into a continuous sacrifice in the service of the nation and of humanity as propounded in the Bhagawad Gita. His concept of personality was based on 'ideal man' or 'integrated personality' — *Sthitaprajna* of the Gita, one fully developed. Therefore, he advocated that the educational institutions should help the student to develop qualities such as self-control, universally non-violent, selfless social activity, fearlessness and a truth-centred life.

### **Gopabandhu's Unique Experiment in Education: Satyabadi Vanavidyalaya**

Gopabandhu founded a Vihar, a garden-school at Sakhigopal eleven miles from Puri on 12 August 1909, with nineteen students on the roll and himself as the Secretary. He made a survey of the 'Bakul grove' and selected a small area, which was covered with a thick

overgrowth of the branches of Banyan, Peepal, Chhuriana and Bakul trees. These leafy trees protected the school from sunlight. This area was popularly known as Gupta Brundaban or 'Secret grove'. The school became known as the 'Satyabadi Vanavidyalaya' or the 'school in the grove' which had a great impact on the national life of Odisha. This Satyabadi system, in the words of Gandhiji was a 'serious experiment in open-air teaching'.

This Satyabadi Vanavidyalaya started with a band of highly educated scholars and selfless young men namely Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Acharya Harihar Das, Pandit Nilakantha Dash, Kripasindhu Mishra and Godavarish Mishra who distinguished themselves in later life as scholars and national leaders popularly known as Pancha-Sakha or five comrades contributed their best for the cause of national aspirations who worked on small pittances, forgetting lucrative jobs under the alien master which they could have got for the asking. The entire staff, under the inspiring leadership of Pandit Gopabandhu was devoted to reconstructing the nation through education.

### **Aim of Education**

Humanisation not specialisation was the aim of education in the Satyabadi system. The realistic idealism of Gopabandhu aimed at "producing men, and not merely workmen". His aim was to so train the mind and the body of the students that they would have a completely developed personality and "the stamp of Satyabadi would make them acceptable wherever they went".

He developed a centre of multi-purpose education where student had been given training in craft and agriculture; social service, humanism, patriotism, games and sports, vocational training, debate competition, cultural activities etc. which had helped them to acquire lifelong education.

### **Curricular and Co-curricular Activities**

Gopabandhu felt that life training will be the central thing in the curriculum. Book learning and intellectual equipment will be there, but just as an important aspect of that life training. The school will be a beehive of active community-living and sustain co-operative effort. Thus he wanted an activity-centred curriculum. The important components of Satyabadi Vanavidyalaya curriculum were

- **Community service:** To make education meaningful, Gopabandhu wanted to develop a sense of social welfare in the minds of the students. Therefore, he introduced community service as a compulsory subject in the Satyabadi school. Students went to different villages to help the poor and destitute and to render voluntary service to cholera and small pox patients. They use to provide relief to the people of flood and drought-affected area. They also carried the dead body of needy families to the burial ground. In community service programme, the teachers of the school helped the public.
- **Vocational education:** Gopabandhu considered that vocational education should be made compulsory in a

developing country like India. It will enable the students to find self-employment after completion of their education. With this aim in view, he introduced crafts like carpentry, spinning and weaving, agriculture, coir and cane work, etc. in the Satyabadi school. For agriculture, twenty-five acres of land was allotted. Spinning was made compulsory for all students where as weaving was meant for some selected students. Sixteen looms and hundred charakhas were used for weaving and spinning purpose.

- **Music:** To discover the talent, organising skill and resourcefulness that lie dormant in the students, music was introduced in the Satyabadi school curriculum. To make the students efficient in that art of music, a blind singer Shri Gayakaratra Apparna Panda was appointed as the music teacher.
- **Moral education:** Pandit Gopabandhu introduced moral education in the Satyabadi school curriculum. In prayer meetings, which were conducted daily, the teachers used to explain the importance of sound moral character. Attempts were made to humanise the learning process through moral education. Lives and works of great men were narrated to the students to enable them to follow their way of lives. This moral teaching had left a very great impact on the mind of the students. For harmonious development of body and mind of the students, Satyabadi system emphasised on following co-curricular activities:

- **Debates:** Gopabandhu organised debating societies to develop oratorical abilities of the students. The society sat on every saturday. Meeting was compulsory for every student of Satyabadi school. In the debating society, discussions of different problems were held. Eminent scholars were occasionally visiting the society to address the students. Gopabandhu also used to participate in their meetings.
- **Literary Activities:** A school magazine was published in the Satyabadi school in which valuable articles of the students and the teachers were published to develop the writing abilities of the students. A class magazine in manuscript was also published. Occasional 'Kabi Sammilanies' or 'Poets' gatherings' were organised by the school where students and teachers participate. It was organised with the aim to discover the innate potentialities of the students and to produce men of calibre.
- **Games and Sports:** Gopabandhu organised Akhara's or rural gymnasium to make the student physically efficient. A teacher named Basudev Mohapatra was incharge of physical education. Activities like country games, use of 'Lathis' and 'swords' athletics and four mile race in groups, etc. were organised. Teachers of Satyabadi school also used to participate in these community exercises. The students used to take these exercises everyday after school hours. Sometimes morning hours were utilised for the purpose.

- **Excursion:** To sense new thing, to have new experiences to meet new people, to know the past glory of one's own country, man wants wonder. School excursion gives these opportunities to our young pupils. Therefore, Gopabandhu thought excursion as an indispensable part of education. Students of Satyabadi school used to walk the distance on foot to sea sides to enrich their outlook and to supplement their classroom learning. Teachers also participate in these activities. The movement of the student on foot looked like grand procession. The villagers used to entertain the students and also participate in this padayatra. An advanced party was arranged to make necessary arrangements. This Satyabadi system of excursion was a 'living education' which could change the attitude and interest of the students and which gave them instructions in different branches of education.

### **Method of Teaching**

Satyabadi School was a residential institution, where all students and teachers lived together. As a result the school life was interesting, pleasant and enjoyable both for the teachers and the taught. The headmaster was the headman of the institution and used his knowledge and influence to make the teachers useful and competent. The headmaster and teachers of the school sat together in a big hall to carry on mutual discussion about school and students' problems. Teachers used to devote ten to fifteen minutes time in the

beginning of a period to discuss the courses covered in the previous class. They also corrected the written work of the students with great care. Before the completion of the period the teacher asked some 'application test' questions. The headmaster tried to maintain uniformity in the method of instruction.

Teachers regularly visit the hostel and help the students in their study. Even the headmaster work together with the teachers in supervising the hostel and helping the students.

### **Student-teacher Relationship**

A very healthy and intimate relationship developed between the teachers and the students in the Satyabadi school. Both the teachers and the students used to organize debate competitions and stage drama, celebrate cultural function and publish magazine. The teachers were always ready to help the students. The students also acted as volunteers in the annual celebration of Utkal Sammilani. During the Car festival at Puri, the students acted as ideal volunteers under the guidance of their teacher. The personal example of the teachers influenced the students for healthy personality development.

### **Discipline**

The Satyabadi school provided an ideal training in self-discipline to the students. Students used to solve their problems in the 'Boy's own court.' The teachers and the monitor looked to the discipline of the school. In the school hostel, the monitor used to hold secret meeting to discuss the problems of discipline in the hostel. Serious problems were controlled

by the superintendent or by the headmaster.

### **The School Hostel**

The Satyabadi school hostel was organised on a novel plan with the aim of humanising the learning process. The boarders developed many good qualities through its programmes like debates, musical evenings, indoor games, paper reading, community dinner and the cultural programme, etc.

The life at Satyabadi school hostel began with a prayer which made the students spiritual. Students were busy from morning till they go to their beds with the continuous timetable like the study hour, dining time, the school periods, the games and sports, discussion and co-curricular activities, etc.

The school hostel was managed on democratic principles. Students were allowed to run their own mess. They used to settle their problems in the 'Boy's own court'. *Gudakhu*, *bhanga*, *bidi* and 'betel' were strictly prohibited. Students found guilty of sex crime were totally isolated from the boarders and lived in a mud-hut constructed for the purpose. During their period of isolation, lessons in Brahmacharya (observation of celibacy) was given to them. Wicked students were appointed as monitor. As a result they were able to modify their own behaviour.

Attempts were made to eradicate all the social evils through the hostel programme. Community dinner was one of the important features of hostel life, where students belonging to all castes eat together and wash their

plates. In community dinner they followed the ideal of Jagannath temple at Puri where Mahaprasad could be taken together by the people irrespective of caste. It was a revolt against the then caste-ridden society.

Thus, Satyabadi school hostel supplied right conditions for the development of the whole personality of the boarders. It was a training ground for humanism, socialism, self-discipline, ideal student life and democratic management.

Gopabandhu and his colleagues converted the Satyabadi school into a national school like the 'Gujarat Vidyapitha' and 'Kasi Vidyapitha'. The idea of universal education league is the most wonderful creation of Pandit Gopabandhu in the field of education. His aim was to cover the whole country by his ideal system of education which will provide so many selfless leaders. The products of this system can grow a new society after a few years. But his ideals remain unfulfilled because of his pre-matured death. On Satyabadi system of education Gandhiji wrote in the column of 'Young India' 1921 in the following way: "Pandit Gopabandhu has an open-air school at Sakhigopal, twelve miles on this side of Puri. It is a grove school. It is worthy of visit. I passed a most delightful day in the midst of boys and their teachers. It is a serious experiment in open-air teaching".

### **Gopabandhu's Contribution to Modern Education**

Let us have a brief discussion about Gopabandhu's contribution to modern education in India.

### **1. Social modernisation through education**

Gopabandhu spearheaded a movement for social modernisation through education by establishing the Satyabadi Bana Vidyalaya which possibly became the first ever experiment in our country for conducting open-air school. A celebrated educationist of that time Sir Asutosh Mookerjee understood its significance for the nation when he wrote "The promoters of this school have set a laudable example to the country...one cannot but wish that every village in Bengal should possess a genuine place of instruction like the Satyabadi School". The thoughtful observation highlighted the nationalistic approach of Gopabandhu whose ideas are of immense importance for our age. The dearth of literature and research on Gopabandhu's worldview is a sad reflection on our intellectual tradition which has failed to adequately appreciate and make people aware of the genius of Utkalmani as a fine exponent and practitioner of a movement for modernisation of our social tradition through education.

### **2. Education for all**

Gopabandhu's commitment to national development through education strongly opposed the then caste-based organisations for the spread of education. In the address cited above he painfully observed that Brahmana Samiti, Karana Samiti, Kayastha Samiti, etc., were engaged in extending educational facilities to the members of their respective castes. His observations "these associations are communal, not universal", *Ehi Sabu Samiti*

*Sampradayika—Sarvajanin Nuhen*, brought out the limited scope of caste associations and therefore advocated and pursued the wider vision free from all constrictions. He specifically emphasised on spread of education among all castes and communities and the establishment of Satyabadi School was a splendid example of his broad-minded approach to education. Today we talk of the division of society in terms "haves" and of have-nots". In 1912, Gopabandhu talked about division of society in terms of literates and illiterates. The cause of the dichotomy was obviously due to lack of education among vast masses of ordinary men and women. He therefore expressed the opinion that efforts should have been made much earlier to dispel ignorance among people. He forcefully argued for a campaign in all villages and among people of all castes and creed to make them understand about the value and utility of education for them.

### **3. Equal access of educational facilities**

One of the distinguishing features of the movement for spread of education in twenty first century has been to make education accessible for those who are in the margins of society. Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das had nurtured that vision at least nine decades back and much before Mahatma Gandhi reached the shores of India from South Africa. He carefully analysed the report concerning spread of education in India and learnt with a heavy heart that for every five villages of India there existed only one school.

Referring to the Puri district he said with lot of sadness that in 10, 25 and even 50 villages one hardly heard of the pronouncement of the alphabets. He informed that the first syllable represented by AA and AAA was never uttered in those villages. Continuing to reflect on the deepening ignorance of people in remote villages he told that the dim ray of education had not reached there. He entertained the doubt that in hundreds of villages of Odisha people even would not be aware of the basic fact that they were being ruled by the British authorities.

Gopabandhu in his speech at the Puri District Education Conference in 1912 had referred to the Education Code of Japan announced by the Emperor of that country. He said that the code outlined the vision of the modern Japan in which not a single subject would remain unlettered and deprived of education. Stating that Japan laid the foundation of its national development the day it announced and implemented the code, he asked with a heavy heart "When would our so called benevolent Government announce such a code for us?" That stirring question represented the agitation of his mind and his restlessness for liberating the people of India from the thralldom of ignorance which paralysed their mental faculties and crushed their spirit even as they struggled to physically survive. It also meant that had Gopabandhu's desire to have a education code been implemented, Odisha and indeed the whole of India would have had the indices of development no less significant than that of Japan.

#### **4. Promoted vocational education**

He favoured for broadening the scope of the campaign to include in it not only book learning but also vocational education. For he believed that excessive reading of books puts heavy burden on the brain and therefore suggested that public instruction should give equal emphasis on the use of hand, feet, ears and eyes to make mind steady, stable and focused. In 1921, Mahatma Gandhi wrote a book for school children called *Bal Pothi* in which he wrote that household work is education. Elaborating it further, he explained that both boys and girls by doing household work could exercise their hand, feet, eyes, muscles and brain and grow up as healthy and balanced human beings. The comprehensive understanding of education by Gopabandhu Das and Mahatma Gandhi and the stress they laid on both the physical, intellectual and spiritual development of the student need to be followed by the present generation which is plagued by the decline of values and crisis of standards of behaviour. Keeping in mind the special concerns of the people belonging to the labour class he specifically wanted that they would be taught about the new methods for using their skills in local industries. In this connection, the Government of India is doing concretising effort since last one decade to integrate newer technologies to increase the productivity of traditional work. It is almost 10 decades ago Gopabandhu had stressed for spread of modern science and technologies for social upliftment of large mass of half-skilled and unskilled population in India.



### **5. *Emphasis on total literacy mission***

Above all he wanted that education, be made the principal instrument for building our national character. The all encompassing approach and the nobility of the challenging vision of Gopabandhu contained the seeds of total literacy campaign which took the form of a mighty tree in Ernakulam district of Kerala in the 1980s and gradually branched out to different parts of India including Odisha and emerged as a

giant movement for spreading literacy in the country. The current focus at the national level on *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan* embodies the vision of Gopabandhu Das which covered all communities and which emphasised on their inherent right to be the recipients of knowledge and wisdom. The ideal of fraternity enshrined in our Constitution can only be realised in full measure only if the objectives set by Gopabandhu to educate every citizen of the country are realised in practice.

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