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## Contribution of Indian philosophers in early childhood care and education during the pre-independence period

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### Abstract

For the past decades, India has witnessed a drastic change in the field of early childhood care and education. Existing policies and programs in India had ensured considerable growth in investments together with improvements in children's school engagement. But the situation of ECCE during the pre-independence period remained dispersed, concentrated in cities, limited to specific regions of the nation, and only available to those who could afford them. Many philosophers have given their souls to develop a better education system in India. Gijubhai Badheka, Tarabai Modak, Gandhiji, and Tagore are some of the pioneers of the development of ECCE. The study aims to explore the contributions of Indian philosophers to Early Childhood Care and Education before the independence of India.

**Keywords:** ECCE, education, philosophers, Montessori, preschool

### Introduction

In India, formal preschool education did not start until the 19th century. According to the available information, child-rearing practices appear to have been governed by socio-religious patriarchal norms and heavily influenced by variables like caste, kinship, age, and gender starting in the early 17th century (Inflibnet 2022) <sup>[6]</sup>. Only male members of the high caste groups were allowed to attend formal school throughout India's history. Uneven distribution of educational chances among the population results in widespread illiteracy among female and low caste children (Pattnaik 1996) <sup>[8]</sup>. During the late 1800s, in various regions of India, the English and Scottish missionaries established institutions that offered education to children under the age of six (Verma 1994) <sup>[15]</sup>.

During the nineties, an organized initiative has taken by reformers like Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modak for formal documentation of early childhood education. Mahatma Gandhi asked for help from Maria Montessori to 'Indianize' her approach to ensure children in India could access preschool education. The first Montessori school was founded in 1915 in princely, Gujarat. Gijubhai Badheka, a visionary in the field of education, gave Montessori's westernized concept of learning an Indianised touch. Soon after, Tarabai Modak joined him in his amazing initiative to educate young children in the Bal Mandirs, which Gijubhai founded in accordance with Mahatma Gandhi's advice (Nutan balshikshan sangh, 2022) <sup>[9]</sup>.

Near Madras, at Adayar, Montessori received assistance from Annie Basant and Rukmani Arundal in establishing a teacher training facility. Numerous early child educators acquired training and propagated the early childhood education movement across the nation. Tarabai has started the Gram Bal Shiksha Kendra at Bordi in 1945. After spending several years working at Dadar, Tarabai relocated to the rural and tribal region between Bombay and Gujarat and opened a facility at Kosbad called "Vikaswadi" (Development Centre). This facility provided a thorough community development program that included a preschool, a primary school, and a training program. Tarabai Modak established Bal Shikshan Kendra in 1945 under the name "Balwadi" as she expanded the preschool movement into rural areas. Used in all Indian languages to describe a preschool program held in remote areas of towns or in rural villages. These Balwadis were later started in a tribal home (Early childhood care and education, 2022) <sup>[2]</sup>.

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Gujibhai Badheka wrote 223 books for kids and many more for teachers and parents. The first Indian educator to work in the field of early childhood education was Gujibhai Badheka. Giju Bhai established a training facility in Bhavnagar Dakshinamoorti, and Tarabai followed suit in Dadar Bombay. They created a native educational system, combining Madam Montessori's scientific pedagogy and educational concepts with the fundamental Gandhian philosophy. In 1920, Gijubhai began his career as a preschool educator in the Gujarati town of Bhavnagar. Tarabai afterward joined him. Together, they created teacher resources and established a preschool teacher training program. Later, he established an organization for preschool instruction and wrote articles for it (e-gyankosh 2022) [3]. Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modak launched, Nutan Bal Shikshan Sangh (NBSS- New Child Education Association) in 1926 at the Dakshinamurti Foundation in Bhavnagar, Gujarat. It is a pioneer in the field of education for children. Its goal was to raise awareness of children's education throughout India (e-gyankosh 2022) [3].

When Anutai, a philosopher saw a copy of Tarabai Modak's monthly publication "Shikshan Patrika (Education Newsletter)," she became interested in children's education. Tarabai Modak asked Anutai whether she would be willing to work with the tribal people in Palghar when they first met in 1945. Tarabai intended to open a tribal children's experimental school. Anutai answered positively, charting her future destiny while doing so. In a tribal neighborhood in Bordi that was heavily forested, she established a Balwadi (playschool) with Tarabai Modak. No electricity, no roads, and no form of communication existed. But necessity prevailed over discomfort. There were eight tribal hamlets nearby and around one hundred kids who needed to go to school.

When Anutai discovered that the lack of food in the children's homes between the months of February to June was the cause of their significant absenteeism, she made arrangements to feed them at school. Thus, the Anganwadi concept—a foundational element of India's Integrated Child Development Scheme—was created (ICDS). With her devotion, diligence, and dedication, Anutai led by example and served as an inspiration to her colleagues. Her focus was solely on her mission. The "Gram Bal Shiksha Kendra," which began as a play school for indigenous children, has developed over time into a center renowned for its experiments and inventions to give kids a worthwhile education (e-gyankosh 2022) [3].

Gandhiji was also troubled by the inadequacies of basic education. It includes the emphasis on memorization, the detachment of the curriculum from its surroundings, and its impossibility. Gandhiji provided a strong conceptual foundation for a new educational system called 'Nai-Talim' or Basic education in 1937, which did not address preschool education. Later, he concentrated on basic education, which is education for children younger than seven (Shiksha 2011) [11]. Children receive training in autonomy through basic education. When Gandhiji presented his Nai-Talim ideology to the nation in 1937, Aryanayakam was named the Secretary and Ashadevi the Joint Secretary of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, which has created to put Nai Talim into practice. Under their capable leadership, the Nai Talim concept came to fruition in full to the Nai Talim premises (Nai Talim Kuti 2022) [7].

One of the four main resolutions created by Vardha Parishad states that throughout the entire time period, the center of education must be some kind of physical and productive work and that children's abilities should be developed and

education should be imported as far as possible in coordination with the central major industry chosen by them and keeping in mind the children's environment. In this, individualism and productivity go hand in hand (Deshmukh and Sitaram, 2010) [1]. For the education of children under seven years old, he coined the term pre-basic education. According to him, Pre-basic education must be aim at "the development of all their faculties, undertaken by the school instructors in conjunction with the parents and the community in schools, in the home, and in the village (e-gyankosh 2022) [3]. Gandhi believed that the educational process should focus on the needs of children. He argued that a child should learn by doing, experiencing, and doing purposeful activities rather than by being overloaded with bookish knowledge. This idea has served as the foundation for the pre-basic education curriculum (e-gyankosh 2022) [3].

Dr. Zakeer Hussain came from Berlin to India and collaborated with Gandhiji, particularly on the implementation of the basic education program. Following the Congress Haripura Session's 1938 decision to establish an institution to oversee the implementation of Basic Education, the "Hindustani Talimi Sangh" was launched at Sevagram Ashram. His involvement with pre-basic and basic education while serving as President of Hindustan Talimi Sargh from 1938 to 1950 was his most significant contribution to education (Holzwarth 2022) [5].

In 1901 Tagore established 'Shanti Niketan' in a natural and secluded area near an open jungle. He emphasized the development of individuals and all the intrinsic faculties that leads to the holistic development of the child's personality. He condemned examination-oriented education and emphasized providing education in natural surroundings and those children should enjoy freedom (Thrivevi 2022) [13]. Tagore's main focus was going beyond the curricula imposed by a foreign government. It was the cause of the lack of innovative thought coming from our advanced learning institutions. Tagore used the Irish experience as an example to support his views. In Ireland, a British-controlled education did not bring any benefit, and the students were subjected merely to Saxon-oriented curricula. Irish replaced with English at the primary and secondary education levels (Sharma 2022) [10].

Tagore traveled to Denmark to attend the first International Montessori Congress in 1929. From there, he met Jean Piaget, a famous Swiss educationist. When Dr. Montessori came to India in 1940, Tagore cordially met her and, taking inspiration from her, started spreading the idea that young children can learn via music and play. Additionally, he made drama and the arts required courses in preschool about a century ago (Vats 2020) [14]. His founding of Visva Bharati was motivated by idealistic thinking. His educational thoughts have powerfully highlighted the suffering and pain a kid might experience in a heartless educational system. He also asserted that even if we lacked resources, we could always make up for it with human resources by establishing contemporary educational institutions in the tradition of Taxila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila, where the brightest minds from far-off places came to enrich themselves through high-quality and fulfilling education (Sharma 2022) [10].

For a child to fully develop all of his latent abilities, Aurobindo recommended a free atmosphere, and he also proposed that all of those topics and activities should incorporate elements of creativity and educational expression. To enable the creation of superhuman beings, he intended to breathe new life and spirit into every subject and activity.

According to Aurobindo, a kid should receive an education tailored to his/her cognitive abilities and psychological requirements. He supports and desires child-centered education. In 1943, Sri Aurobindo founded the Ashram School in Pondicherry, which is close to the water. Twenty of Aurobindo's disciples' kids were the first to use it. It subsequently grew from an elementary school to an entire high school (Educational Guruji, 2021)<sup>[4]</sup>.

Jiddu Krishnamurti, a philosopher, speaker and writer opposed conventional schooling for making it extremely difficult to think independently and impeding one understands of him as a whole process. Although it academically awakens us, the current educational system is making us obedient, mechanical, and profoundly thoughtless; internally, it leaves us lacking, stultified, and uncreative. He believed that because each person is made up of several entities, education should help those entities come together because, without it, life would be nothing but a succession of disputes and sorrows(Sharma 2022).<sup>[10]</sup>

All significant committees and commissions set up by the government of post-independent India have consistently focused on early childhood education. The Committee on Early Childhood Education advised adding pre-primary courses to the existing Indian primary schools in 1953 after seeing the drawbacks of entrusting parents with sole responsibility for their children's early education. To better align programs with the demands of Indian society, the Committee on Child Care (1966–1964) advocated a complete revision of preschool educational philosophy and concepts. The midday meals to preschool programs were another recommendation made by this group. The creation of state-level pre-primary education facilities was advised in 1964 by the Indian Kothari Commission(Pattnaik 1996)<sup>[8]</sup>.

Early childhood education services gradually but steadily spread during the pre-independence era. Convents, infant schools managed by foreign missionaries, and Kindergartens all thrived. A network of "Montessori" schools has been established throughout the nation. Several pre-basic schools have also been established in rural and tribal areas. Despite these pioneering efforts, early childhood education programs remained dispersed, concentrated in cities, limited to specific regions of the nation, and only available to those who could afford them(Swaminathan 1992)<sup>[12]</sup>.

## Conclusion

In India, before independence, preschool education stands as useful as a chocolate teapot for many children. The situation of ECCE during the pre-independence period remained dispersed, concentrated in cities, limited to specific regions of the nation, and only available to those who could afford them. Many philosophers like Gijubhai Badheka, Tarabai Modak, Gandhiji, and Tagore had given their blood and soul to developing Early Childhood Care and Education. Contributions made by them are the main resources for current development in the field of ECCE. During the 17th century, only male members of the high caste groups were allowed to attend formal school throughout Indian history. Uneven distribution of educational chances among the population results in widespread illiteracy among female and low caste children.

Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modak had started formal documentation of early childhood education. During the late 1800s, in various regions of India, the English and Scottish missionaries established institutions that offered education to children under the age of six. Gijubhai Badheka has

established Bal Mandirs. Tarabai Modak established Bal Shikshan Kendra in 1945 under the name "Balwadi" as she expanded the preschool movement into rural areas. When Gandhiji presented his Nai-Talim ideology to the nation in 1937, Aryanayakam was named the Secretary and Ashadevi the Joint Secretary of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, which has created to put Nai Talim into practice. The "Gram Bal Shiksha Kendra," launched by Anutai, which began as a play school for indigenous children, has developed over time into a center renowned for its experiments and inventions to give kids a worthwhile education. In 1901 Tagore established 'Shanti Niketan' in a natural and secluded area near an open jungle. He emphasized the development of individuals and all the intrinsic faculties that leads to the holistic development of the child's personality. All significant committees and commissions set up by the government of post-independent India have consistently focused on early childhood education. Early childhood education services gradually but steadily spread during the pre-independence era

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