

Mahatma Gandhi and His Contribution to Education

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Abstract: Education certainly is a means to all-round progress of man. In other words, the pathway to human-development goes through the lanes of education. Moreover, true education is the sole basis of achieving one's purpose in life. It is education, which can ascertain ultimate peace for a human being. In addition, the essence of all the ancient scriptures, messages of scholars and thinkers of repute have always categorically expounded the significance of education in human life. The utility, significance and importance of education are inevitable at all levels in all walks of life. It develops into the most beautiful and valuable ornament of human life. Education as expounded through Gandhi's imagination and explanation is a means to guide and lead a human-being from his birth to death. It helps man achieve his goal. Gandhi believed that the way modern education was structured; it essentially served one low purpose. He also believed that education had to deal with the moral and spiritual, not merely with the earthly or mundane. The "whole person" was to receive an education.

Keywords: Goals of Education, Basic Education, Scheme of Education, Tenets of Gandhi's Educational Philosophy.

Introduction

"By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning." –M. K. Gandhi [Harijan: July 31, 1937]

As such, education becomes the basis of personality development in all dimensions—moral, mental, and emotional. Therefore we can say that in the long run education forms the foundations on which the castles of peace and prosperity can be built. The English meaning for education is derived from the Latin word 'Educare', which further relates to 'Educere', the symbolic of manifestation or expression. This definition reveals the inner capability of man that guides him continuously at various levels. The whole process which leaves an impact upon the mind, character and physical strength, plays a vital role in human development. It accords continuity to intellect, knowledge and values, which provides the base and scope of education. Education means, "To nourish" "To bring up" and "To raise"

This means educating a child, nourishing or bringing out a child in accordance with norms, ends or aims. It also implies to lead out or to draw out. This means educating a child or drawing out what is ingrained in child or to lead out of darkness into light. Education not only moulds the new generation, but reflects a society's fundamental assumptions about itself and the individuals which compose it.

Gandhi devoted his life for a great mission and worked for the upliftment of the millions of down trodden, poverty stricken, half naked and semi-starved masses of India. He performed miracles of Indian socio-political life without any magic wand but with his mystical life, magical speeches and whiting human, philosophy and winnowing personal qualities. He was a man with mission: freedom for India - political, economic, social, intellectual and spiritual freedom; freedom from exploitation, oppression, wants, hunger, poverty, ignorance, evil-social practices fatalism etc. His economic institutions, educational experiments, political and social activities were directed to this end. Being aware of the life and achievements of Gandhi, Einstein observed that; "Generations to come will scarce believe that even a man, in flash and blood, walked upon this earth". Mahatma Gandhi, who led India to freedom from 150 years of British rule, had prescribed a democratic system based on village self-government. He called it Gram Swaraj where political parties would have no role. Unfortunately, the framers of Indian Constitution ignored it and opted for the British model of parliamentary democracy based on the party system. This has proved to be most unsuited to the Indian ethos. Where religion, caste and ethnic rivalries prevail, political parties tend to exploit them to gain dominance and perpetuate themselves in power.

The real difficulty is that people have no idea of what education truly is. We assess the value of education in the same manner as we assess the value of land or of shares in the stock-exchange market. We want to provide only such education as would enable the student to earn more. We hardly give any thought to the improvement of the character of the educated. The girls, we say, do not have to earn; so why should they be educated? As long as such ideas persist there is no hope of our ever knowing the true value of education. As Time rolls by, Gandhi's global stature is growing. Gandhism is taking roots all over the world and will eventually sprout into a Universal Religion based on Gandhian Spirituality. Then Gandhiji's place will be among the prophets of the world, after Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ and Mohammed. The Prophets had laid down Commandments, edicts and sacred duties to be performed for individuals. So has Gandhiji without giving them directly.

"My life is my message," he has said when asked for one. Anyone can derive these dictums from his own life, so vividly recorded in his autobiography, "The Story of My Experiments with Truth." Be truthful. Truth begets trust. Trust begets respect, recognition and rewards. You may not always follow truth, but if you find truth stand by it. And make it your business to find Truth. Don't do anything in secret that you cannot divulge in public.

Gandhiji influenced the lives of our countrymen for more than half a century. His approach to most issues was down-to-earth and holistic-be it social, cultural, economic, health or education. Gandhiji's model was not only holistic and practical, it was highly decentralized and integrated, with a demonstrated capacity to motivate the entire community and place responsibility and accountability at the community level versus the State. According to M.K Gandhi; True education is all-round development of the faculties, best attained through action. It bases itself on the fact that knowledge and understanding develop in relation to problems set right by action. Information thrust on the mind only burdens the memory and causes intellectual indigestion, casting learning into oblivion.

Gandhi's Views on Education

Character cannot be built with mortar and stone. It cannot be built by hands other than your own.

- Gandhiji in Ceylon by Mahadev Desai. P.89

An education which does not teach us to discriminate between good and bad, to assimilate the one and eschew the other, is a misnomer.

- Harijan, 18-2-1939 and 4-3-1939

Basic education links the children, whether of cities or the villages, to all that is best and lasting in India.

- Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place

Is not education the art of drawing out full manhood of the children under training?

- Young India, 12-3-1925

Mahatma Gandhi and Basic Education

According to Mahatma Gandhi, education is an unending exercise till death. For him, only education can act as a means to a successful life. Likewise, "*education can help mould*

and shape the human body, mind and character in such a manner that they may act as the means to achieve joy and efficiency.”

Gandhi states that English cannot and ought not to become the National language. In this connection Gandhi refers to the requirement of a national language.

The Agenda, formulated by Gandhi, contained four propositions, which may be summarized as follows:

1. “The present system of education does not meet the requirements of the country....”
2. “The course of primary education should be extended at least to seven years and should include the general knowledge gained up to the matriculation standard, less English and plus a substantial vocation.”
3. “For the all-round development of boys and girls all training should as far as possible be given through a profit-yielding vocation.”
4. “Higher education should be left to private enterprise and should be to meet national requirements whether in the various industries, technical arts, belles-letters or fine arts” (Varkay 3-4).

Mahatma Gandhi wrote many articles on education from time-to-time. On several occasions, besides addressing students and teachers, he issued worthy statements regarding its meaning, purpose and importance in life. The prime aim of education is to make a man self-dependent; The purpose of education is to make the one efficient and skilful; and The objective of education is to guide and lead him to the pathway to progress in the prevailing situation of space and as per the demand of time so that he could ascertain his physical and mental development to achieve a goal in life for himself on the one hand and he could equally contribute to the society, nation and the globe on the other.

Mahatma Gandhi believed that education is very important for development and well of individuals as well as of a society. He also had very specific views about methods of education. For example he believed in education that aims at overall development of individual rather than just learning of facts and figures relating to different subjects. At the same time he did not favour religious instructions as a part of formal education system of a nation. He believed that imparting of religious education should be left to religious organization. He favoured making education job oriented. He believed that the education

system should prepare individuals to take up useful jobs in the society. Mahatma Gandhi explained the concept of Basic Education through a series of articles in his Harijan magazine in 1937. In the conference at Wardha after a detailed discussion about Gandhiji's articles the scheme of Basic Education took shape under the leadership of Dr. Zakir Hussain. The following four resolutions were passed.

1. Free and compulsory education should be given to all children for a period of seven years.
2. The medium of instruction should be the mother tongue,
3. The process of education should be centred round some form of manual production work in the shape of a craft.
4. This education should be self-supporting to some extent.

The Central Advisory Board of Education set up a Committee under the Chairmanship of Sri B. G. Kher to suggest measures for implementing these resolutions. Then another Committee was appointed under the same Chairman to recommend action coordinating the Basic Education with higher education. The recommendations of both these Committees were approved by the CABE and included in the Report on Post-war Educational Development in India. In 1944, although Govts, both at the national and state levels accepted Basic Education as the national pattern, progress in its implementation was not satisfactory.

Merits of Basic Education

Since work occupies a central place in life, it had an important place in Basic Education. Dignity of labour was emphasized by him and work was made an integral part of this education. Through Basic Education Gandhiji introduced a new method of teaching. This method is to teach all subjects through crafts and taken as activity-centred meant to free children from tyranny of words and cramming. As a corollary to craft-centred education, it was visualized by Gandhiji that schools need be self-supporting. The crafts organized scientifically would result in more production and the sale-proceeds must fetch a good income. Basic education was sound sociologically. The then class-labour and chasm between mental and physical labour and the spirit of dependence on others were required to be removed from the society. In short, Basic education was intended to eradicate many ills of the society. Basic education was providing for training students in democratic living and practices. It was aiming at forming positive attitudes, creating interests and appreciation,

developing understanding and imparting skills in citizenship. On the whole, it was a training citizenship.

Drawbacks in Basic Education

Since craft was occupying an important place in Basic school curriculum, selection of a suitable craft was determining the success and efficiency of Basic Education. But most of the schools followed the trodden path or stereotyped process without bothering for the local conditions and needs. For example, in the areas where cotton was not grown and had to be brought from a long distance, weaving was introduced as a craft even in those areas. In Basic schools every subject was being taught through a craft. The principle of correlation was tried to be adopted in all subjects, but in real situation it was done as a ritual without any sincerity or seriousness. In fact, correlation was a slogan and fiction. It was complained that the schools cannot be made self-sufficient with the production by children. The concept of self-sufficiency was thought to be idealism and was not emphasized by most of the teachers and inspecting officers. Products by unskilled hands were not selling well and fetching adequate income. Rather Basic Schools were more expensive than traditional schools. Although Basic Education was visualized to be socially sound for removing the existing disparities, it was rather aggravating the situation. It was tending to be meant for the children of poor labourers and farmers only and children of high class families were not going to these schools. The gulf between poor and rich classes rather widened due to Basic Education. Basic schools called for highly qualified and well-equipped teachers for properly teaching subjects through correlation and organizing crafts with efficiency. But in fact many teachers employed in such schools were lacking proper understanding of the Basic Education principles and desired orientation with the idealism or values impregnated in the system.

Present Condition

Although Basic Education faced a sorry state of affairs many of its principles are still appreciated for their practical value and psychology as well as sociological importance. The Kothari Commission, 1964-66 endorsed a large number of its essential features like work experience, community living, community service, citizenship training, world brotherhood, social and spiritual values and integrating knowledge with experience and so on. After a lapse of more than three decades a National Education conference was convened by Shri Manmohan Singh at Sevagram in 1972 where Basic Education was praised by many. A resolution was passed with consensus of all Education Ministers and Vice Chancellors who

attended the conference, "education at all levels should be imparted through socially useful and productive activity, linked with economic growth and development in both rural and urban areas".

The Iswarbhai Patel Committee supported most of the principles of Basic Education with great stress on work education or socially useful productive work. The UNESCO Commission Report "Learning to Be" also used the term Basic Education for Primary Education and laid emphasis on many forms of social and economic activities to be organized in the schools.

The Basic Education system has been hailed as "the ideal solution for the reform of teaching methods in Indian Schools" by Dr. Gunnar Myrdal, the celebrated author of "Asian Drama" and as "one of the most interesting and promising developments in Indian Education" by Prof. Castle the renowned writer of "Education for self-help". It goes without saying that India would have been a happier place at present, if the useful features of Basic Education had been given effect to with sincerity of all concerned.

He was also of the opinion that manual work should not be seen as something inferior to mental work. He felt that the work of the craftsman or labourer should be the ideal model for the 'good life'. Schools which were based around productive work where that work was for the benefit of all were, therefore, carrying out education of the whole person - mind, body and spirit.

Gandhi's basic education was, therefore, an embodiment of his perception of an ideal society consisting of small, self-reliant communities with his ideal citizen being an industrious, self-respecting and generous individual living in a small cooperative community.

Gandhi's proposal intended to stand the education system on its head. The social philosophy and the curriculum of what he called 'basic education' thus favoured the child belonging to the lowest stratum of society. in such a way it implied a programme of social transformation. It sought to alter the symbolic meaning of 'education' and to change the established structure of opportunities for education.

Gandhi's Scheme of Education

In the Gandhian constructive program, the most important element is Nai Talim or the new education, which in the words of Acharya Kripalani, "... is the coping stone of Gandhi's social

and political edifice.” Gandhiji regarded his scheme of education as spearheading the silent social revolution and expected it to provide a healthy relationship between the city and the village, which would go a long way in eradicating the poisoned relationship between the classes. This view was affirmed by various other scholars and thinkers in the field of education.

Zakir Hussain once commented on Gandhi’s views on education. He wrote, “... Gandhi socially considered the introduction of such practical productive work in education to be participated in by all.” The children of the nation will tend to break down the existing barriers of prejudice between manual and intellectual workers and harmful elites to both. Such is the social significance of the so-called new educational concept of Gandhi, but it does not entail any sacrifice of the individual goal of education or its social goal. Gandhi laid the foundation of a scheme of national education that was suited to our needs, requirements, genius, and aspirations for the future. It is left up to us to perfect it and extend it to cover the entire field of education. In this process, adjustment and adaptation may be necessary, but these actions must be undertaken in the spirit of the total philosophy of Gandhi, that is, for the individual and the society. Whatever may be its merits and demerits, we should not forget that education to Gandhi meant inspiring the children with a new ideology based upon personal purity and unselfish service, resulting in the creation of a society based upon truth and love. This is precisely the Buddha’s concept also.

Gandhiji says that we must draw out the best in adult and child, as I mentioned earlier. This radical scheme was geared up, checking the progressive decay of our villages, reviving the village economy, laying the foundations of a just social order, in which there is no unnatural division between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ and everybody is assured of achieving acceptable standards. The basic educational scheme was an essential ingredient of Gandhi’s plan to eliminate the rural-urban divide and redress the structural and socio-economic imbalances that were abundant in Indian society. Gandhi also addressed the issue of free education. By free education, Gandhi did not mean an education fully supported and subsidized by the state or other outside agencies. Instead, he implied a system that had the maximum possible capacity of self-support from the people’s work experience, which is both an instrument of education and a source of income. The Gandhian system was free in another sense also: It did not regard formal, full-time schooling of the pupil as essential. He had very specific views about secondary and higher education. There is a feeling that Gandhi was against research, higher education, etc.

Goals of education as per Mahatma Gandhi

In his own words, Gandhi felt that "...under ideal conditions, true education can only be imparted by the parents...with a minimum of outside help." (Gandhi, M.K. 1957) .

Gandhi felt that the goals of education were to develop and prepare Indians for society. Given Gandhi's values and his vision of what constituted a truly civilized and free India, it was not surprising that he developed firm views on education. Gandhi believed that education not only moulds the new generation, but also reflects a society's fundamental assumptions about itself and the individuals that compose it. (Burke,2000).

Gandhi's experiences in South Africa not only changed his outlook on politics, but also helped him see the role that education played in that struggle. He became so opposed to all aspects of English education that he consistently referred to it as "rotten." (Burke, 2000).

In order to strengthen morality and ethics in students, Gandhi advocated the introduction of religious education. He believed that this kind of education brought the values of forbearance, tolerance, and reverence in ones character. In turn, these values are an indivisible part of ethics. Explaining the importance and need of religious education, Gandhi wrote in "Young India" in December, 1923,

"a curriculum of religious instructions should include a study of the tenets of faith other than one's own. For this purpose, the students should be trained to cultivate the habit of understanding and appreciating the doctrine of various religions in the world in a spirit of reverence and broad-minded tolerance." (Kumar, R., 2008).

Education as Per Mahatma Gandhi

The medium of instruction should be alerted at once, and at any cost, the provincial languages being given their rightful place. I would prefer temporary chaos in higher education to the criminal waste that is daily accumulating. Education through a foreign Language entails a certain degree of strain, and our boys have to pay dearly for it. To a large extent, they lose the capacity of shouldering any other burden afterwards for they become a useless lot who are weak of body, without any zest for work and imitators of the West. They have little interest in original research or deep thinking, and the qualities of courage, perseverance. Bravery and fearlessness are lacking. That is why we are unable to make new plans or carry our projects to meet our problems. In case we make them to fail to implement

them. A few who do show promise usually die young. English is today studied because of its commercial and so called political value. Our boys think and rightly in the present circumstances, that without English they cannot get Government service. Girls are taught English as a passport to marriage. I know several instances of women wanting to learn English so that they may be able to talk in English. I know families in which English is made a mother tongue. Hundreds of youth believe that without the Knowledge of English. Freedom of India is practically impossible. The canker has so eaten into the society that in many cases the only meaning of education is Knowledge of English. All these are for me signs of our slavery and degradation. It is unbearable to me that the vernaculars should be crushed and starved as they have been. I cannot tolerate the idea of parents writing to their children, or husbands writing to their wives, not in their own vernaculars but in English.

Among the many evils of foreign rule, this blighting imposition of a foreign medium upon the youth of the country will be counted by history as one of the greatest. It has sapped the energy of the nation, it has estranged them from the masses, it has made education unnecessarily expensive. If this process is still persisted in, it bids fair to rob the nation of its soul. The sooner, therefore educated India shakes itself free from the hypnotic spell of the foreign medium, the better it would be for them and the people. Mahatma Gandhi calls upon all teachers to impart proper education of morality and ethics to students both at school and college levels. In this regard suggesting some guidelines for teachers, he says that it is the duty of teachers to develop high morals and strong character of their students. If teachers fail to do so, it means that they depart from their social and national responsibilities and as such they are also insincere towards their noble profession. He said that a teacher should lay an example, to be followed, before society and students. This can only be done when he himself leads his life with high standards of morality and strong character. An ideal teacher should be free from any addiction. He needs to be polite and should set an ideal example of simple living and high thinking. He should also remember that wasting time is a sin; therefore, he should be aware of his duties towards students and society. Moreover, he should have a good reputation in the society. Therefore, it is the foremost duty of students, as well as of teachers to make it certain that moral and ethical knowledge continues to be the integral part of the education process. By doing so, they can contribute in the development of Value Education.

Conclusion

Lastly, it was an education that aimed at educating the whole person, rather than concentrating on one aspect. It was a highly moral activity. In Gandhi's scheme, higher education performed the essential function of providing training and properly motivating human power for national needs and there was an urgent need for the purposive expansion of such education. To Gandhi Education is a potent tool for social reconstruction. His interest in education was the outcome of a revolt against the defects of the then British system of education was purely literacy in content. It neglected the vocational and aesthetic dimensions of education. Mass education was not possible through English medium. Learning of English brought up a separate class of English educated Indian people who were known to be intellectual elite of the country but cut off from social stream of Indian life. As Lord Macaulay stated in his 'Minutes; he "wanted a class of people Indian in bold and colour, but English in taste, in morals and intellect, in opinions," etc. Gandhi believes, "by education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man - body, mind and spirit". He laid stress on the all - round development of the child.

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