

EDUCATIONAL THOUGHTS OF MAHATMA GANDHI (1869-1948)

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Mahatma Gandhi (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi), popularly called as Gandhiji, was born on October 2, 1869, at Porbandar in Gujarat. He was married at the age of 13 years. At the age of 18 years, he went to England for higher studies. After getting Bar-at-Law Degree, he started his lawyer profession at Bombay. Later, he shifted to Rajkot. While working in Gujarat, he went to South Africa in connection with a court case. During his stay at South Africa, he fought against apartheid. On return to India, he took up lead role in Indian freedom movement. He was assassinated on January 30, 1948. Gandhiji is famous throughout the world for non-violence in the Indian freedom movement.

Gandhiji had respect for all religions (Gandhi 1937a). He found fasting as a useful alternative for prayer (Gandhi 1947a). He gave stress on role of spinning and weaving for economic development (Gandhi 1947b). According to him, untouchability was a heinous crime against humanity (Gandhi 1920). He gave stress on prohibition (Gandhi 1937 b). He gave stress on stress on cultural development (Gandhi 1930 a). He loved rural life and worked hard for rural upliftment. (Gandhi 1940). He had deep faith on God and his hand behind various phenomena (Gandhi 1932 a). Sri Aurobindo (1997, pp. 459-460) also said about an unseen hand behind all actions.

Mahatma Gandhi's educational thoughts started getting formed in South Africa as part of his responsibility for giving education to the children who accompanied their parents and stayed in Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm, during his struggle against apartheid. Here training in a useful manual vocation consisted of gardening, shoemaking, carpentry, and cooking (Gandhi 1927 a). Shortage of teachers made senior students teach lower class students. Perhaps, knowledge about this strategy adopted by Gandhiji has led the recently formulated draft document of the Government of India for formulation of education policy has suggested a National Tutor programme (MHRD 2019, p. 60). This experiment at Tolstoy Farm helped Gandhiji in consolidating his views on education, which he utilised in suggesting a new education plan for India.

Giving stress on the all-round development of the learner, Gandhiji said, "By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man- body, mind and spirit" (Gandhi 1937 c). He said that "True education is that which draws out and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties of the learners" (Gandhi 1937 d). There should be simultaneous training of physical and spiritual faculties (Gandhi 1937 e). Gandhiji believed in truth arrived out of experimentation and democratic approach. He said, "True education means a knowledge of one's true essence and conduct which befits such knowledge." (Gandhi 1928 a). In the ancient school system, character building occupied the first place in it (Gandhi 1938 a). According to Sister Nivedita (1918, pp.53-54) ideal education gives primary importance to the development and consolidation of character in students. Moral education needs to base on religion (Gandhi 1936 a). Schools need to provide lessons on moral upliftment of the learners (Gandhi 1947 c). Students should be helped to develop virtues such as fearlessness, truth, brahmacharya (celibacy) and so on. For a spiritual person, all religions are same, and one must go beyond their limits. Gandhiji gave stress on making effort towards a knowledge of God and self-realization." (Gandhi 1927 a). Students need to pay respect to all religions. According to him, life and character of the teacher play important role in the training of spiritual faculties (Gandhi 1927 a) and in teaching of religious education (Gandhi 1928 b). Religious education should include teaching students about truths common to all religions.

The Mahabharata tells about the story of Abhimayu, who, while in his mother's womb could learn certain fighting technique by listening to his father's narration (Mohanty 2012, p.328). Gandhiji believed in the theory of beginning of the education of the child from the time of conception and the development of the baby much depended on the physical and mental states of the parents at the moment of conception and also on the mother's moods, desires and temperament and her ways of life (Gandhi 1927 a). According to The Mother (1951, p. 11), "the nature of the child to be born depends very much upon the mother who forms it, upon her aspiration and will as well as upon the material surroundings in which she lives." The Government of Scotland of the United Kingdom, in its Early Years Framework document defined early years as pre- birth to 8 years old (Scottish Government 2008, p. 3). Learning and Teaching Scotland (2010, p. 15) stated that "Babies start to learn in the womb, particularly in the last trimester. They are born able to recognise familiar sounds and they have already developed some taste preferences."

Gandhiji's stress on vocational education had originated during his stay in Tolstoy Farm, South Africa, when he made it a point that the youngsters had some training in manual work (Gandhi, 1927a). His scheme of education hoped that a student completing seven years of study could earn his living (Gandhi, 1937 f). He suggested spinning as a compulsory subject in the school (Gandhi 1921). Referring to Indian cultural tradition, Sister Nivedita (1967, p.168) the acquisition of manual dexterity found among masses due to the habit of eating with the fingers and she suggested that the useful manual training may cover developing skills for decorating, giving solid and plastic form to ideas of beauty, *alpana* patterns, saree borders, cotton prints, incised tiles, dishes of black earthen ware, modelling of doorways and house fronts, etc. Gandhiji's idea was not restricted to manual training for developing skills. He wanted the manual training to enable the student to develop the capacity to earn for his living. He suggested craft centered education, which would ensure equal opportunity for all (Gandhi 1947 d). He hoped that craft-based education would be able to make India stand before the world. (Gandhi 1947 e). It could develop dignity of labour. Instead of recommending craft centered education, the Secondary Education Commission 1952-53 (Mudaliar 1953) recommended teaching craft work from the middle school level and the Education Commission 1964-66 (Kothari 1966) recommended teaching of Work Experience from the Primary level. Socially Useful Productive Work was recommended by the suggested by the Report of the Review Committee on the Curriculum for the Ten-Year School (Patel 1977) and also by the Report of the National Review Committee of Higher Secondary Education with Special Reference to Vocationalisation (Adishesiah 1977). National Policy on Education 1968 (Ministry of Education 1968) and National Policy on Education 1986 (MHRD 1986) did not recommend craft centered education, but work experience. Recently, the Mahatma Gandhi National Council of Rural Institutes (2018a, p.4) stated that various advantages of craft centered education include facilitating creative and critical thinking skills; developing dignity of labour; etc.

Love for Ancient Indian Education

Gandhiji, highlighting the techniques followed by teachers in ancient India, said that: "The rishis taught their pupils without books. They only gave them a few mantras which the pupils treasured in their memories and translated in practical life." (Gandhi 1925 a). According to Joshi 2012, p.16) "Education was conceived as something springing from life itself, and it was conceived as a part of the organisation of life and it was designed to relate education with life and its highest possible fulfilment." During days of Puranas, there were no institutions meant for education for all, as found today. The students had their education at the home of the teacher called as *ashrama* or *gurukula*. The teacher of those days "taught best, not so much through instruction, as through the example of his wisdom and character and through his personal and intimate contact with the soul of each student." (Joshi 2012, p. 17). According to Gandhiji, teachers of that age taught for teaching for the love for teaching although it provided the barest maintenance, and they even made their pupils

members of their families (Gandhiji 1925b). However, Gandhiji also pointed out that the said system of education was restricted to a few and was not available for masses, who got their education in their families.

Gandhiji gave much importance on inculcation of the spirit of ahimsa (non-violence) among students. According to him, there were “many instances of people who were highly learned and yet were satanic in their pursuits.” (Gandhi 1947 c). Gandhiji laid much stress on social service as part of education. According to him, social service needs to be treated as a complement of the programme of study (Gandhi 1927 b). According to him, service to man was the service to God.

Mahatma Gandhi was in favour of sex education in schools, which had to develop in students the ability to control passions (Gandhi 1936 b). It should have for its object the conquest and sublimation of the sex passion (Gandhi 1936 c). It could teach students the importance of celibacy (brahmacharya). It could include physical education- Assans and Pranayam, etc.

In early phases of his life. Gandhiji did not believe in women working for a living and undertaking commercial enterprise (Gandhi 1918), However, later he recommended same education for both boys and girls, with education of girls to cover “special functions and duties of women (Gandhi 1932 a). Curriculum for girls may cover topics such as home management, natal care, nursing, and care of children, etc. He also suggested that girls could “develop their intelligence through learning some handicraft in a scientific manner.” (Gandhi 1937 i). Separate schools were needed for girls as they were not expected to be trained in the same vocations as recommended for boys (Gandhi 1937 j).

Mahatma Gandhi was not in favour of any foreign language to be taught to all the students in schools. According to him, all students should study (a) Hindi with the option of writing it in Persian or Nagari characters, (b) own provincial language, and (c) Sanskrit, if a Hindu or Arabic, if a Mohammedan, or Persian, if a Parsee, Persian (Gandhi 1938b, p. 86). However, he hoped that some Hindus would know Arabic and Persian, some Mohammedans and Parsees, Sanskrit. He also hoped that some north Indians and West Indians would learn Tamil. His suggestion for Hindi as the language for all has not been accepted even if it has been suggested by national policies. Before giving above statement that did not mention about continuation of English language as a school subject, Gandhiji earlier had hoped about retention of English as a cultural language (Gandhi 1931). Gandhiji advocated instruction through mother tongue (Gandhi 1947 f). However, it is a fact that since second half of the nineteenth century, fully residential English medium public schools appeared that exclusively had rich students. These types of schools even continue today. As there were instances of many political leaders advocating mother tongue as medium of instruction, sending their children to English medium schools motivated many poor parents to send their children to private English medium schools, even if these schools are of low quality because of inadequate salary paid to their teachers.

Gandhiji, pointed out importance of physical education as support for intellectual development (Gandhi 1937 f) and considered craftwork as a part of physical education. He urged the students to have “passion for knowledge and eagerness to learn” (Gandhi 1937 g). He advocated joyful learning (Gandhi 1930 b). Joyful educational programmes can be provided in a learner friendly school. “A learner friendly school is identified by a welcoming atmosphere that is friendly, warm and secure” (Mohanty 2018, p. 2). Since last century, the UNICEF has been making efforts to remind education systems to give more attention to make the schools child friendly (UNICEF 2009). Gandhiji gave stress on training of students in developing power of discrimination (Gandhi 1925). Class size was not so important in the education system prevailing during the thirties of the last century. However, Mahatma Gandhi suggested a class size of 25 (Gandhi 1937 h). Like many

other contemporary experts in education, Gandhiji did not approve of teaching writing of alphabet at the starting (Gandhi 1926). Teaching of alphabet to start after a student has developed appreciable mastery in spoken language and having understanding of common words (Gandhi 1937 c).

Gandhiji wanted to revolutionise higher education and relate it to national requirements. He suggested that in case of Engineering education, the institutions are to be attached to industries “which should pay for the training of the graduates they need” (Gandhi 1937 l). As in 1937, several private arts colleges were self-supporting, according to him there was no need for state supports for arts colleges. He expected voluntary contributions of the rich people for medical colleges. According to him, performance of agriculture colleges was unsatisfactory. Their students need to have apprenticeship on farms, before having degrees. Gandhiji did not approve of foreign language as medium of instruction (Gandhi 1938 c). This idea of Gandhiji has not been accepted in case of technical higher education, even after 80 years.

THE TEACHER

Gandhiji placed heavy responsibility on the teachers. He viewed the teacher as a Guru of ancient *Tapovans*. During freedom movement, there were national schools. Gandhiji hoped that teachers at these schools were to be swaraj missionaries and should possess adequate knowledge about the students and about their parents (Gandhi 1924). According to him, the teacher must lead an ideal life that has to serve as the example to be followed by the students. He should teach to develop ability in students to discriminate between what to be received and what to be rejected. He suggested books for teachers not for the taught. The teachers must prepare instructional materials from the resources available at their disposal, suiting to the special requirements of the students of their classes. Thus, Gandhiji has a greater amount of expectation from the teachers than one finds to-day. He wanted the teachers to be lifelong learners. As Gandhiji conceived of a low budget education scheme, he was not for high salary for teachers (Gandhi 1937 m). He urged the public to give respect to teachers for their work for the community (Gandhi 1947 g).

BASIC EDUCATION

In the year 1937, a Conference was called by the management of the Marawadi High School (Nava Bharat Vidyalaya), Wardha, and Maharashtra, in connection with the Silver Jubilee of the school. The conference was held on the 22nd and 23rd October 1937. Mahatma Gandhi presided over this All India Conference. Educationists, loyal to Gandhian educational ideas attended some of the issues that affected quality of education at that time discussed at the conference include : 1. More than one craft could involve huge expenditure; 2. Craft centered education could not be self-supporting; 3. There was possibility of craft in school affecting the earning of the local artisans; 4. Craft education could develop working motive from early ages.; 5. There could be wastage of raw materials ; 6. Teacher salary was meagre; 7. Hours of instruction would be reduced; 8. There could be premature choice of career; 9. There could be problem of migration from a village school to a town school; 10. It could affect industrial development.

The conference appointed a committee under the chairmanship for Dr. Zakir Hussain to prepare a detailed syllabus etc. for the proposed national system of education. The committee submitted its report to Gandhiji on the 2nd December 1937. The report was known as Wardha Scheme or Basic National Education. In 1938, the Indian National Congress approved of Basic Education Scheme. It entrusted the work of formulation of an all India Board of Education to Dr. Zakir Hussain and Shri E. W. Aryanayakam. In the same year, the Central Advisory Board of Education of the Government of India appointed a committee under the Chairmanship of Shri B.G. Kher to examine the scheme. It to explore Wardha the possibility of its implementation as the government system of education. The Committee did not recommend conversion of the prevailing system of education to Basic system. It recommended introduction of Basic education first in rural areas; Period of

compulsion should be extended from 7 years to 8 years covering the age group of 6 to 14 year; Medium of instruction to be mother tongue and provision for transfer of a student from Basic school to a non-Basic school at the end of the class V or after 11 years of age. The Government of India accepted this, and Basic education did not become compulsory education for all schools. The provisional governments and princely states were free to have Basic schools or non-Basic schools.

In the year 1939, Gandhiji talked about Nai Talim, to give broader meaning to the concept of Basic education. An organization named as 'Hindustani Talim Sangh' was created and it prepared guidelines and curriculum for Basic education. The term 'Basic education' was used for school education up to class VIII. Post Basic Education covered classes IX-XII. Pre-Basic education covered education of children below school going age. According to Gandhiji, the field of Nai Talim stretches from the hour of conception in the mother's womb to the hour of death. Recently, a central government organisation - Mahatma Gandhi National Council of Rural Education (2018 b) has brought out a document *Experiential Learning: Gandhiji's Nai Talim*.

Reasons for the decay of Basic Education programme may be 1. Non acceptance of basic education by the political leadership; 2. Lack of support from administrators; 3. Non acceptance of Basic education by the education commissions and education policies of the central government; 4. Non acceptance of Basic Education by the masses; 5. Lack of higher education facilities in Basic Education; 6. Lack of proper training of teachers; 7. Lack of dedicated teachers; 8. Paucity of instructional materials; 9. Failure of self-supporting aspect of Basic Education; 10. Continued Dominance of English language; etc.

IMPACT OF GANDHIAN THOUGHTS ON MODERN EDUCATION

A few developments in school education owes their origin to the Gandhian educational thoughts are: 1. Provision for teaching of Socially Useful Productive Work / Work Experience subjects; 2. Provision for mother tongue as medium of instruction in government schools; 3. Inclusion of moral education in school curriculum; 4. Stress on activity methods in imparting school curricula; 5. Introduction of training in a craft (weaving/tailoring / wood work etc.) and training in community development work in teacher training curricula; 6. Student government in schools; 7. Constitutional provision for universal education for all children up to 14 years of age ;8. Adult literacy programmes; 9. Provision for pre-school education (*Purva-Buniyadi*) / (Balwadi) / Anganwadis (ICDS) and pre-school classes in government schools in certain parts of the country; 10. Establishment of Rural Universities; and Introduction of National Service Scheme in higher education institutions..

CONCLUSION

After India got independence from British rule, especially after death of Mahatma Gandhi, criticisms were voiced in an increasing manner on application of Gandhian thoughts on education and today, there are only a few institutions as relics of Gandhian thoughts on education. Since Mahatma Gandhi is respected as the father of the nation, there have been government initiatives to ensure a few drops of Gandhian thoughts on education in the ocean of the present education system in India. Funds are being provided to conduct workshops, seminars, and conferences. There have been Study Centres on Gandhian thoughts in universities and colleges. There are also post graduate courses. University Grants Commission has been providing funds for establishment of Gandhian Centres and institutes. However, all these actions are only limited to reminding the present generation of Gandhian thoughts.

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