



EDUCATIONAL THOUGHTS AND PRACTICES OF MAHATMA GANDHI

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi, an influential personality of the twentieth century had a profound impact on the contemporary world. His work in fighting a freedom struggle was witnessed with constant work on uplifting the downtrodden and improving social conditions in India. Gandhi's education ideas are plaited with his central ideals of Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya and Swadeshi. This article seeks to trace the central thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi that shaped his vision and his ideas on education.

Keywords: Gandhi, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Basic Education, Wardha scheme of Education

1. Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who led India in its non-violent struggle for freedom from British rule, also known as Mahatma Gandhi, is one of the few philosophers of modern India who shaped the education aims and ideals for the nation. As a barrister in his early years, he accepted a position as counsel for a shipping company to represent them in a case in South Africa. There, he started his journey struggling for equal treatment against the apartheid policy. He established Tolstoy Farm in South Africa in 1910, which proved to be an ideal laboratory to implement his educational ideals. The children living on the farm were given responsibilities of not only studying but also, giving their contribution to maintaining the farm. He included vocational training along with manual work from the studies to ensure overall development. Activities such as gardening, cooking, carpentry, messenger work, sandal making, general labouring etc., were encouraged and considered as helpful activities to maintain a healthy community life. Gandhi's objective for this was that the children would learn social responsibilities, citizenship, and regular studies. He held co-educational classes on Tolstoy farm, teaching girls and boys in the same class. His experiments at Tolstoy farm proved to be the foundation for his educational ideas later on.

2. Central Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi is not a philosopher in a widely accepted sense of the term, and still, his ideas remain to be distinguished among the top leaders in the world today. Starting a career as a lawyer and spending 21 years in South Africa proved vital in the formation of his ideals, thoughts, devices and ethics. He returned to India on 9th January 1914 and joined the Indian freedom struggle against British rule. During the freedom struggle, he constantly advocated ethical guidelines for society making the Indian freedom struggle revered worldwide for its righteous character. Talking about Gandhi's philosophy, some central ideas and principles that form an underlying theme of his thoughts in every area are Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Gram Swaraj and Swadeshi.

Gandhi, a devoted preacher on non-violence, believed it to be pursued by body, mind and spirit. Merely practising non-injury was considered a narrow interpretation of non-violence by him as he practised and preached not causing harm to anyone by thoughts, words and deeds and maintaining limitless love and acceptance for everyone as Ahimsa or non-violence (Ponnu, Ram, 2015). Hence, it can be said that the practice of non-violence had a prohibitive aspect that insisted on refraining from injury by thoughts, actions and deeds, that insisted on avoiding anger, hatred and evil in any form. And also, non-violence has an embracing aspect that demands accepting the truth, love, God and all of God's creations. Gandhi said that whoever loves God in the truest of all senses can practice non-violence. He considered Truth to be a means to attain non-violence and considered both to be the most potent tool of humanity. Non-violence, for him, was an active energy that required strength of body and mind to practice both the prohibitive and accepting characteristics of non-violence even under extreme and dreadful situations leaving no place for cowardice and weakness (Patra, 2021). He considered following Ahimsa was an act of bravery. As published in *Young India* in September 1928, Gandhi advised Ahimsa to be practised in education through the mutual relationship of respect and trust among students where everyone studies together irrespective of caste, religion or gender. Where the students would be compliant to their teachers with familial love, in such an atmosphere students broaden their visions and develop feelings of compassion and service. Being brought in this environment the student would not distinguish on the base of faith and class and would become a believer in Ahimsa (Allen, 2015).

Translated literally as an insistence of truth, Satyagraha is a non-violent or civil resistance that has inspired many leaders worldwide like Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama etc. who were in pursuit of justice, equality and freedom against

oppression. 'Insistence of the truth' or 'holding firmly to the truth' is an act of firmness to abide by the truth and not merely a simple act of passive resistance (Bharti, 2015). It encompasses spiritual perusal of the truth as it practices non-violence under every circumstance that would include extending peace, love and goodwill for the oppressor along with a refusal to agree with the wrong (Mayton & Daniel, 2001). The practitioners called 'Satyagrahi' have to follow the full extent of the ideal that would include correct rules of living, the practice of non-violence, the establishment of alternate political and economic institutions where the truth is sought via conversation hence leading to harmony and not vanquish or triumph. Prayers, fasting and boycotts were practices to insist upon the truth. Gandhi insisted that the practice of prayer services and fasting to be an important part of a student's life (Barua, A, 2023).

The ideal of 'Universal Uplift' or 'Progress for All' translates to the idea of Sarvodaya the word that is associated with the social moments led by Mahatma Gandhi who wanted equality for all and wanted equality to reach every stratum of society. Gandhi imagined a society that was free from greed and sustained everyone's needs through honest righteous work (Vettical, 1998). He envisioned a society that did not insist on the collection of wealth and limitless acquisition of material (Parekh, 1989). The inequality in income would be met by the use of surplus earnings for the good of society. In a Sarvodaya society, there was no place for class hatred, unhealthy competition, exploitation and tyranny of the majority. This ideal denied private property as it led to social discrimination, hatred and struggle. The central archetypal of Sarvodaya is non-possession or 'Aparigraha' and non-stealing 'Astey', where individual gain was small in measure and greed had no place. Emphasizing character development and practice of values among students from early in education would develop self-introspection leading them to practice truth, non-possession and non-stealing by mind, body and soul (Harris, 1987).

The economic thoughts of Gandhi can be understood by his philosophy of Gram Swaraj and Swadeshi. Gram Swaraj or the Village self-rule was a self-sufficient village community that met its own basic needs rather than a group of individuals merely competing among themselves for resources (Kumar, 1996). Swadeshi is buying and using local products made by local artisans instead of using machine-made goods. Gandhi's idea of 'craft-based education' where vocational training is an important part of the school curriculum is an important means to achieve this, as training in school would establish a student's involvement in the economic processes from early on, ensuring them to be part of self-sustaining community where they are a stakeholder of production and users of locally produced goods and services (Balasubramanian

& Dhanalaksmi, 2021). Gandhi emphasized that any educational system is useless if it does not fulfil the country's demands, and the curriculum should always include the requirements of home and village life.

3. Mahatma Gandhi and Education

Gandhi challenged the foundation of the British educational system in his educational thoughts. At the request of nationalist Jamnalal Bajaj in 1937 on the occasion of the silver jubilee celebration of Nav Bharat Vidyalaya of Marwari Educational Society at Wardha, which wanted to organize a National Educational Conference to discuss Gandhiji's thoughts on education, Gandhiji agreed to lead the conference to convey and discuss ideas on education. And for that purpose, he started to write his ideas and thoughts on education in his newspaper Harijan to gain momentum for the conference and that later proved to be the best source to understand his educational views and practices. Dr Zakir Hussain, Prof K T Shah, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Kaka Kalekar, Mahadev Desai etc., were among the various distinguished personalities that participated in the two-day conference on 22nd and 23rd of October 1937 at Wardha, Maharashtra. After Gandhiji presented his thoughts on education and a considerable debate, a comprehensive scheme of education was devised at the end of the conference. The term Basic/Buniyaadi is used in this scheme as in this scheme those subjects would be taught that would prove to be the foundation based on which the student learns anything and follow any vocation, as it proved to be fundamental to conduct oneself later in life.

3.1 Wardha Scheme of Education (Buniyadi Shiksha / Nai Taleem)

The basic precept of Gandhi's Buniyaadi Shiksha/Nai Taleem is that knowledge and work are not separate. It originated as a resistance towards the British-laid colonial education system that merely created a workforce for the British empire. This scheme was also called Nai Talim, as it was seen as a tool to evolve a new social structure and medium of dissolving colonial domination in India. Some main features (Varkey, 1940) of this scheme are:

- Primary education to include all subjects ranging in seven-year span except English
- A vocation of choice to draw out the best within the child and give an experiential and self-reliant essence to the learning.
- The medium of education should be the mother tongue.
- Free and compulsory education throughout the nation from seven to fourteen years of age.
- A specific craft is to be selected to develop a learning experience where future possibilities in a vocation can be explored.

- Selected craft or productive work to be centred around all educative experiences and should be followed through the education period.
- Proposed 288 teaching days in an academic year.
- The time allotted for basic craft skills to be taught daily was three hours and twenty minutes.
- Insisted for teachers training of one year, and that the urban and rural teachers should be trained together in collaboration.
- A teacher should be paid sufficiently to carry their basic needs and students through their craft-based orientation should also contribute to their teacher's salary.
- The education should be child-centred and students should have a choice in selecting subjects they want to study.
- A very important aim of education is attaining self-reliance, and hence vocational training and students' stake in the material development of society is also emphasized.
- Basic education also foresaw the educational institutions to get self-reliant and not depend on government grants and aids for education.
- Develop ideal citizenship in harmony with Indian ethos and culture where social welfare and moral growth were emphasized.
- Inculcation of manual work and social service among students leading to the development of dignity of labour and ultimately aiding in creating a classless society.
- Same education for girls and boys.
- Students should pay in any part, how negligible it may be, for their education through their labour, making them brave and self-reliant.
- Religious education of all religions should be taught to all, leading them to understand and respect all religions creating harmony and coexistence among students.

Acharya J B Kriplani said that the mother tongue was merely a means of communication in this scheme, and the actual medium of instruction was the craft that was the central education theme. Gandhiji insisted that the state should take care of education from seven years of age and return the student as an earning unit to their society.

3.2 Thoughts on Education

Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts on education can be grasped more comprehensively by understanding in detail how his scheme of education is reflected as a process in everyday teaching-learning situations.

3.3 Meaning of Education

Education for Gandhiji is developing an individual's capacities to the best possible potential. According to him, literacy was neither the beginning nor the end of education but just a medium through which men and women could be educated. Gandhiji stated that true education draws out and stimulates children's spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties. Thus, emphasizing the meaning of education to be a child developed to its full potential.

3.4 Aims of Education

Gandhiji always differentiated between a) the immediate aim and b) the ultimate aim of education. While the former were the ones that could instantly benefit the students and the latter, he considered them to be the realization of reality, self and God.

3.5 Curriculum

Gandhiji, an avid critic of the British laid educational system, questioned the lack of learning by experience, making them passive learners. He advocated for a curriculum to be imparted in the mother tongue that catered to a student's physical, mental and spiritual needs. Emphasizing students' freedom while choosing subjects of interest, he said they would learn more efficiently if taught topics of interest. The curriculum taught, and its utility in life should be correlated. Since he made students, practice being part of the material development of society, craft-based vocational education became the central theme of his curriculum. He also stressed the importance of arts, music, physical fitness, and sports hold an essential place within the curriculum. He considered value education, social service and prayer to be part of the daily routine within the school.

3.6 Teaching Methods

The teaching methods advocated by him were, first and foremost, Craft-based methods as it provided experiential learning. The traditional route method was only suitable for mental development, whereas delivering a learning experience through craft ensured physical. The mental, social, moral and spiritual development of a child. This method also ensured capturing the learner's interest in the learning process. His idea of establishing a correlation between various subjects and teaching with an interdisciplinary approach using craft as a medium ascertained the overall growth of a student. He also contended that the learning process to be collaborative, regardless of caste, class, religion and gender, guaranteeing cooperation, empathy and socialization. He also extenuated education to be a reflective process, highlighting the reflective method as essential to make learning permanent.

3.7 Discipline

Being an extremely self-disciplined personality, Gandhiji highlighted the role of self-discipline as an integral part of a student's personality. He ideated both the teacher and the student to be a self-disciplined unit as self-discipline has an individual's agreement to it, whereas, in contrast, when strict discipline is enforced without understanding, it is merely an act. Self-discipline leads to better control of senses, deletion of unhealthy competition and self-regulation leading to evolved moral personalities.

3.8 Child Centred Education

Gandhiji was a great advocate of educating children per their needs, interest and capabilities. He was against bookish knowledge and always emphasized keeping the student-centred approach that aided in realizing the true meaning of education, that is, physical, intellectual and spiritual development to its best potential.

3.9 Education and Self-Sufficiency

Craft-based education was a means to achieve self-sufficiency among the students. Gandhiji envisaged that a student, during their education, should involve themselves in learning a craft-based skill. He advocated that while the students would gain their school education, they would also learn and earn. By the time they completed their education, they would not depend on anyone to find a job or source of income as they would already be independently earning entities.

3.10 Education and Politics

Gandhiji termed the word 'Lokneeti' instead of 'Rajneeti' for politics. He considered the construction of a thriving democracy as an aim of education. It aided in creating future citizens, and hence he thought education to be a part of 'Lokneeti'. According to him, an ideal state is where all citizens are educated and complementary to each other. He wanted to remove the class difference within the society, as it secured the functioning of a thriving democracy, and education was the medium to achieve it.

3.11 Women and Education

Gandhiji considered the two-gender male and female as two wheels of a cart, one does not function without the other, and one cannot replace the other. He visualized the role of women as complimenting their male counterparts in every sphere, capable and self-dependent. He was a critique of women limiting their role and attention merely to household duties and dressing up thus defining themselves to be a consumable product. In contrast, their actual societal role is equal responsibilities, duties and power. He encouraged educating girls to realize

their best potential. He wanted girls to be self-reliant and brave. He said freedom will always be incomplete if women are burdened with evil customs and traditions.

3.12 Co-Education

Practiced coeducation on his ashram campus schools. From time to time, he reviewed his thoughts on the matter and believed that till the age of 8 girls and boys should study in the same class and if the environment remains favourable, the co-education should continue till 16 years. He says afterwards, if education has to be continued in a co-educational setting, it is a decision to be taken by the society per their sentiments and judgement as they see fit. He said that co-education should start from the house itself, where every household should give girls and boys equal opportunity to develop themselves. He encouraged the curriculum to be exact for girls as well as boys.

3.13 Craft-Centred Education

As perceived by Mahatma Gandhi, education was also aimed at transforming a student into an independent earning unit; he called for a specific craft to be chosen by the students for a central theme of their education. He asked the students to work on their studies and become earning units as soon as possible. In this way, they could contribute to bearing the cost of their education, making themselves and their institutions self-reliant. Thus, by the time a student graduates from schooling, he would be an earning and contributing member of society.

3.14 Character Building

As a highly ethical and spiritual person, he highly emphasized on the importance of the moral and ethical development of children. He proposed studies of all religions, moral science and ideal role modelling by elders and teachers to inculcate values of truth, compassion, empathy, equality, brotherhood, cooperation, welfare, harmony, non-stealing, non-possession and non-violence etc., among the students from a very early age. He insisted on keeping mind, heart and soul spotless so that character develops with the agreement to oneself.

3.15 Role of a Teacher

Gandhiji conceived a teacher to be an embodiment of personality that is to be exhibited by their students. A teacher should be a well-trained, disciplined, highly ethical and moral role model concerned not only with the immediate aims of education that lead to worldly achievements but also with the ultimate aim of education, which is the realization of truth and God.

4. Critique of Gandhiji's Thoughts

Gandhiji's educational thoughts have been put up for criticism from time to time by various scholars on the following grounds:

- a. It negates English education and that is very restrictive in global perspective.
- b. It is entirely craft-centred, ignoring the development of mental faculties.
- c. The emphasis on labour from an early age might lead to child labour and exploitation.
- d. Education would be perceived only as a medium to develop earning capabilities, and schools would become units of making a profit.
- e. Number of working days in a year is more and teaching hours of the subject in a day is significantly less emphasizing craft skill development making the process tiresome and ignoring the importance of school subjects.

5. Mahatma Gandhi and Education in Today's Context

The thoughts and practices of Mahatma Gandhi are still considered to be major contributors of the millennium that keep on shaping up the world for the better. The relevance of his philosophy remains unchallenged, and in the field of education, we can still see how much it still contributes to the learning community.

- a. Gandhiji spoke of learning with collaboration and cooperation; with the emergence of Education 3.0 the learning environment and mechanism it would be impossible to educate oneself without collaborating and cooperating with the peers.
- b. Importance of experiential learning is unchallenged, and every hands-on activity cannot be an experience, as reflection is required. The teaching methods proposed by Gandhiji call for hands-on skill-based activities and thoughts on both learning and activities, making it a comprehensive experiential learning process leading to lasting learning outcomes.
- c. Reflective process in learning, as advised by him to create critical rationality among students and its relevance in the education process is unquestioned as research from time and again prove its importance.
- d. Importance of developing vocational skills while modern schooling systems emphasise schooling. India has even launched the Skill India Programme in 2015, aimed to train citizens of India in different vocational skills by 2022. This emphasized the relevance of the craft-based education scheme as centralized in Gandhiji's reflections.
- e. Gandhiji's ideal of Gram Swaraj or village self-sufficiency is most relevant as a nation cannot progress without progress among its rural community. Most of the development takes place in urban areas, and the rural regions remain underdeveloped and marginalized in the development process. India witnessed farmer suicide and great unrest among the farming rural community. If Gram Swaraj is established and the rural community becomes self-sustaining, this would lead to a better-developed nation of schools and higher education.
- f. Gandhiji's proposed values of dignity of labour among students, social service, and manual labour is a need of the hour among the student community.
- g. His ideal of students, teachers and all community members contributing to the cleanliness of schools and community reflected in Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was

launched in 2014, reflecting upon measures yet to be taken up for a clean living environment for everyone.

As discussed above we can understand how Mahatma Gandhi's Thoughts and Practices are vividly entwined with each other and their relevance is still persistent in the present context.

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