

Gandhi's Educational Philosophy and its Relevance in the Current Education System

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi was a realistic educationist, experimentalist and idealist philosopher in his vision of the aims of education. In his educational experiments, he tried to transform his philosophy of life into achieving the realisation of the evolution and establishment of an ideal society in the country. He wanted to create a new society based on truth and non-violence. The scheme he recommended as basic education stands for a new courage and approach to education. Gandhi introduced a new and comprehensive way of education in an effort to improve the existing system. His suggestions are helpful to the contemporary Indian education system, and focus on the rapid growth and development of elementary education in the country with less burden on the government. The basic principles of the Gandhian educational scheme are significant in guiding the principles of the contemporary education system in India.

Keywords

Educational philosophy, basic education, relevance, current education system

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Introduction

M. K. Gandhi's life philosophy consisted of truth, non-violence, love and satyagraha. According to Gandhi, truth is the highest goal of life. He believed in the practical applications of truth in daily behaviour and in dealings with fellow individuals. He said, "truth is God" and emphasised on realising "truth is life." Non-violence which he referred to as *ahimsa* can be achieved by way of truth. He said that one can attain truth only through love. To see the universal and the all-prevailing spirit of truth face to face, one must be able to love the nearest of creation as oneself. *Satyagraha* is the supreme principle which implies an adherence to truth in one's life. A seeker of truth can practice truth in all its manifestations throughout his life. *Satyagrahi* is free from fear and learns to stick to the truth whatever the outcome may be. He is not a coward, rather a brave, straightforward and courageous person.

Gandhi articulated his views on education through his writings in various newspapers and autobiography. His detailed thoughts were reflected in the Wardha Scheme in the form of the recommendation of Nai Talim. The provisions of this education scheme were examined by various experts and educationists. Thereafter, Gandhi decided to include the recommendations of a basic education system for the country in the conference in Wardha in 1937. The basis of his educational philosophy was the national culture and civilisation of the country. This basic education system advocated for the development of a child to be self-dependent by encouraging him/her to apply their gained knowledge and skills in daily life. The recommendations of this system are closely related to the necessities and concerns of the individual. He suggested a child centred education system in his scheme, with the focus on craft. According to him, by correlating education with crafts, the students will be able to solve the problems of their livelihoods and develop qualities of good citizenship. Gandhi introduced the provisions of his educational thoughts in the name of basic education as these are directly concerned with the basic necessities and concerns of the Indian youth. Besides this, all the provisions of his basic education are closely concerned with the rural students of the country. His thoughts are for human beings who are the backbone of the nation. The goal of his educational philosophy was to make it possible for a student to get hands on experience.

Gandhi's Thoughts and their Relevance in the Current Education System

Education: Drawing out the Best

According to him, education is a process in the all-round development of human beings, i.e., physical, mental, moral and spiritual. Gandhi said, "by education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit" (Gandhi, 1947b: 401).

According to Gandhi, "literacy itself is no education, It is not the end of education or even the beginning of education. It is one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated" (Gandhi,1937a: 197). He advocated for the all-round development of individuals by education. He was in favour of emerging as an absolutely transformed personality with a healthy physique, sound intellect, and a spiritual human being. Gandhi's thoughts are significantly relevant to the current educational pattern, as it emphasises the holistic and proper development of the individuals. In the current education system, Indian regulatory bodies have various activities, both scholastic and co-scholastic, for drawing out the best in a child's body, mind and spirit. In Indian schools, a comprehensive syllabus is being used (NCERT,2005). Students are being trained in cognitive, affective and psychomotor development. They are engaged in co-scholastic activities such as life skills, communication skills, leadership, aesthetics, health and sports.

Preparation for Livelihood

Gandhi said that the aim of education should be self-reliance and the education system must teach students how to develop their abilities in order to make their livelihoods. Gandhi added that if education cannot make a boy or girl self-reliant, then it is useless. He said "education ought to be for them (the people) a kind of insurance against unemployment. The child at the end of 14 years - after he had finished his 7 years of schooling- is to be discharged as an earning unit" (Gandhi, 1937b: 23).He believed that education in the country must be oriented to crafts for skills development and training. In this regard, he recommended that education be combined with craft education so that, along with learning, children can also develop skills which will provide them with livelihoods. He believed in an education system aiming towards self-reliance.

According to Gandhi, every student should be prepared for technical knowledge from the primary level of their education. Chauhan (2004: 3) mentioned that “it is the milestone of Gandhi’s philosophy of education. Gandhi’s basic idea was to make education self-supporting through craft, agriculture and other productive work thereby by-passing potentially the need for government funding support.” In the present situation, it is significantly relevant and is well-worthy. His recommendations are similar to present day job-oriented education. It is true that the current system is producing degree holders only and they do not have sufficient skills. The Indian Government considered Gandhi’s educational recommendations of craft education and created the National Skill Development Policy in 2009 to enhance the national economic growth. The Ministry of Rural Development introduced the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) in 2014. This is part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission which specifically focuses on rural youth between the ages between 15 and 35 years from poor families. As a part of the Skill India campaign, it plays an influential role in the social and economic development schemes of the government. There is nothing new in these policies. They apply Gandhi’s basic education which reflects the importance of education. This scheme is financially fruitful because it is based on the principles of labour and a productive work culture in the schools. This scheme stresses the educational importance of labour and the dignity of work.

Character Building

Gandhi believed that education should lean towards the civilising aspects of the nation. This is more significant than its literary aspect, because it is important to further develop the character of the citizens in relation to good conduct in a democratic country. The aim of education should be a proper development of the individual’s personality instead of only giving information in the name of education. Gandhi agreed that the development of manual skills as well as character building are both uniformly significant. According to him, the parameter for measuring education is not the width of understanding but its internal augmentation. Besides this, the aim of education is to create a harmonious mellowness in the individual’s body, intellect, spirit and character.

Self-Realisation

Gandhi suggested that the ultimate aim of education is the realisation of a supreme power i.e., God. To realise the supreme power, realisation of self is paramount. Self-actualisation should be taken as the ultimate aim of education for the proper development of individuals regarding peace and international brotherhood. Gandhi said “a curriculum of religious instructions should include a study of the tenets of faiths 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 great religions of the world in a spirit of reverence and broad minded tolerance” (Gandhi, 1923: 43). He said, “I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the latter of the two on the same subject” (Gandhi, 1933: 2). He also said, “In the event that the government feels the need of the religious instruction to be included in education, it is imperative that the religious instruction offered should be of the best type” (Gandhi, 1947a: 76). His recommendations regarding self-actualisation have significant relevance in the present day education system as students are engaged in various activities that are not acceptable to society. His philosophical principles of truth, non-violence, and *Satyagraha* are significantly appropriate in the school, college and university education system by making the students disciplined. The educational administrators and policy makers need to adopt Gandhi’s philosophical principles in an educational context and also need to teach the students how to behave within the acceptable norms of society.

Curriculum

Gandhi recommended an activity-based and craft-centred curriculum. The major subjects should include useful crafts for society and community,

gardening, agriculture and spinning. The mother tongue ought to be included in the curriculum, along with basic mathematics, economic aspects of daily life in the society, natural sciences, biological sciences, physical sciences, arts, music, culture and drawing. Gandhi emphasised the 3Rs - reading, writing and arithmetic. "The features of basic education involves daily manual work and vocational training also hygiene, manual work, learning and earning, extra-curricular activities, reading, writing and arithmetic, vocational training, and character building are to be given top priority" (Gandhi, 1937c: 137). He supported a common and uniform curriculum for both boys and girls at the primary level. His scheme advocates for a curriculum-based proper understanding of the child's nature, with the child's natural and social environment also being considered. His educational thoughts are relevant in the present situation as the curriculum is comprehensive with a wide range of subjects as suggested by Gandhi. The present system is trying to shift the pedagogy from rote memorisation to the construction of knowledge. Opportunities are provided to connect the knowledge to life beyond the boundaries of the school. There is flexibility in the curriculum as well as a continuous and comprehensive assessment.

Method of Teaching

Gandhi suggested craft oriented methods of teaching to correlate all the subjects with craft. He was not in favour of rigidity in the school timetables and wanted to keep all the students busy doing work in school times. Gandhi holds that "craft, art, health and education should all be integrated into one scheme. Nai Talim is a beautiful blend of all the four and covers the whole education of the individual from the time of conception to the moment of death. He regards craft and industry as the medium of education" (Gandhi, 1946: 394). He also asked for freedom for the students to choose their craft as per their interest and abilities. According to his scheme, education should be activity-centred where both children and teachers are active in the teaching-learning process. It supports learning by experience, and learning by doing. The basic education scheme advocates for the inculcation of social and moral values in the minds of the citizens. The idea behind this scheme is proper rural reconstruction and agricultural

revolution, and it also provides solutions towards solving the problem of unemployment. Gandhi believed that the medium of instruction should be the mother tongue in order to enhance the expression of inner feelings. According to Gandhi, inflicting English upon children was to kill their originality. Even in the current education system a scheme of teaching a third language to students is present in India.

Students, Teachers and Discipline

Gandhi was in favour of self-discipline for students in schools. He believed in control over mind and body and cooperation amongst students. For this reason, he introduced work experience to schools so that the feelings of inferiority or superiority would be minimised. In craft education a boy from a rich family and a boy from poor family work together. Gandhi said that the learner should be self-disciplined in order to observe and apply knowledge in their daily life. He also stressed on curiosity within the child to know and discover new things surrounding them. Children should also be capable of expressing themselves. They should also be sound in character and have values instilled in them. The end of all education should be service and if a student has an opportunity to render service even whilst he/she is studying, he/she should consider it as a rare opportunity and treat it not as a suspension of his/her education but rather to complement it (Gandhi, 1927: 342). According to him, the teacher should be a role model for children who could influence the masses. The teacher should be sincere, honest, brave and should guide and facilitate learning. He should also be a philosopher, preach and practice non-violence and should have a strong character. He said, "the teacher's learning in this new education stands as the art of living. Therefore, both the teacher and the taught have to produce in the very act of teaching and learning, which enriches life from the very beginning" (Gandhi, 1947b: 401).

Education for All

Gandhi's scheme is helpful in providing the equalisation of educational opportunities for all. "As the sun gives light to all the rich and the poor and rain falls on all so also learning must be made available to all" (Gandhi, 1962: 39). The scheme of basic education removes the constraints

between the educated and the uneducated, between individuals doing the work of hand and head, between the economically sound and weak persons and between rural and urban people. The free and compulsory education for all children from 7 to 14 years of age was recommended in the basic education scheme of Gandhi. The Children's Free and Compulsory Education Right Act has the relevance of Gandhi's educational thoughts in the present scenario.

Work Experience

Gandhi's basic idea was to make education self-supporting through craft, agriculture and other productive work thereby by-passing potentially the need for government funding support (Chauhan, 2004). The central idea of Gandhi's education scheme was to instruct in the use of some craft or fruitful labour. The significant aspect of this is to strengthen the needs and requirements of the citizens of the nation. For this purpose, he introduced craft education so that the students can learn and earn simultaneously. He was in favour of the productive growth of schools. The present syllabus of school education includes productive and skills development. The use of craft and labour in schools helps the students to obtain sensory and motor co-ordination. According to Gandhi, it will also enhance the spirit of honest labour. The minds of the students should be trained in the handicrafts of the villagers right from an early stage. He emphasised the promotion of the authentic and disciplined development of the mind. The central idea behind his craft education was to empower the school management for the expenditures of the schools related to the salaries and infrastructure of the school. Besides this, craft education will develop the feelings of cooperation and dignity of labour. This type of education will ensure the future livelihoods of the students in a proper way. Gandhi was in favour of this scheme because it is economically sound and good for a country like India.

Citizenship Training

Gandhi's educational thoughts are helpful in giving proper training to students about the democratic principles and basics of national integration. The most important feature that is essential in the present scenario is citizenship training. His educational scheme fosters the dignity of labour,

equality of opportunity, sense of cooperation, respect for all religions, and the importance of duties for the nation. The present need is to reorient education so as to channelise manpower in the right direction. Thus it is reasonably warranted to state that the primary ideology of his thoughts is legal and productive in the context of the present educational system of the country. The increasing worry about the eroding of ethical values, unrest, and violence in social groups must be taken more seriously. Gandhian basic education recommends that young students are taught to be ethically sound, self-dependent and self-reliant citizens of a democratic country. His philosophy is appropriate in the present scenario for economic and social upliftment. His views and thoughts on education can play a significant role in the peace of the nation. Another important aspect of India's education system is that it fails to make human beings in the true sense as the educated people are responsible for many inhuman activities nowadays. They may have university degrees, but until and unless they are not able to be morally sound, these degrees are meaningless. A type of education in moral soundness is necessary and this can be found in Gandhi's philosophy of education. How can it be said that our education system is right, when a teacher is involved in the rape case of a student? The status of a society depends on how women are treated in that society.

Conclusion

Gandhi advocated the social and economic development of the society through education and educational institutions. The basic principles of his thoughts are work experience, non-violence, truth, honesty and equality. Craft education is a significant tool for the realisation of his thoughts and dreams for the successful development of the society and the nation. He advocated basic education for all children irrespective of caste, race, region and religion. Today, the nation needs to adopt all the principles of his educational philosophy to build a democratic, progressive society. Gandhi felt the need for result-oriented education for India. It is clear from his educational thoughts that every individual has some unique and particular inbuilt merits. It must be the responsibility of a good quality educator to recognise the potentials of their students at the primary level. The students must be educated as per the prescribed curriculum and di-

rection and as a result should advance their strengths. After completing their education to a certain stage, they must be provided with the necessary facilities. In addition to this general education, they should be given technical training according to the special traits that have been identified in their personalities by the teachers. After completion of this technical education up to the graduation stage, the students must have a clear guidance and direction. As a result, they must be capable of being self-sufficient due to their technical knowledge. According to the present situation in India, it is clear that after 72 years of independence the country is still unable to be self-sufficient. The vast human resources have not been utilised and the responsibility for this lies with the education system. Thus, in the Gandhian philosophy of education, more emphasis is placed on the teaching of self-sufficiency. The educational philosophy of Gandhi is an eye opener for the educational planners and policy makers of the country as he was completely in favour of a common and uniform education system in India.

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