



MAHATMA GANDHI'S VISION ON EDUCATION : ITS RELEVANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi, the father of Nation was a great leader as well as a Social Reformer, He was first called 'Mahatma' by Rabindranath Tagore and "Father of the Nation" by Subas Chandra Bose Considering his Contribution towards Society. Among them education is one. Education is a cultural Construct meant to socialize the citizen, transmit knowledge from one generation to another to better all generations. The education system is supposed to contribute to individual growth and Social transformation. Gandhiji played a very important role in the educational system in India.

The performance of roles by the individual in the society, Gandhi believes, is greatly influenced, affected and determined by the type of education as received and inculcated by him during the formative years of his life. He therefore, prescribes for a scheme of education known as the "Nayi Talim" (New Education of Basic Education) in which every child ought to be educated and trained for the realization of his ethical goal in life and also the goal of a just social order. According to Gandhi, education should aim at a balanced and harmonious development of the body, mind and soul of the individual. If it results in the development one without the other two, it can not be beneficial for the individual and the society as well. Therefore, there should be a balanced combination of intellectual educating and physical education by assigning equal importance to both. He affirms: "I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs. E.g. hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose etc. In other worlds, an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing, his intellect. But unless the development of the mind and the body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lop-sided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart. A proper and all round development of the mind therefore, can take place only when it proceeds pari passu with the education of the physical and spiritual facilities of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole... Therefore, it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piece-meal an independently of one-another.

In view of the above this paper will give reflections on the vision of Mahatma Gandhi on education which tends to provide an effective panacea for eliminating and eradicating the ills and evils of corruption, violence, crimes, conflict and disharmony that affect the contemporary societies throughout the world. The vision of Gandhiji on education seems to be relevant for the 21st century.

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(“An education which does not teach us to discriminate between good and bad, to assimilate the one and eschew the other, is a misnomer.” M.K. Gandhi)

The 150 birth anniversary of M.K. Gandhi, the father of nation has been celebrated not only in India but also in the world. Ideas, ideology and personality of Gandhi for construction and reconstruction of present social order across the globe have got remarkable bearings. Gandhi was not only a statesman and a freedom fighter, he was a multifaceted personality having in-depth and thorough ideas on different aspects of both human life and social life right from philosophy, economy, polity, education, science and technology, psychology, values and morality, trade and commerce to international peace and harmony. The 74 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA th 74) concluded on 30 September 2019 in New York City, USA discussed widely on top five issues such as terrorism, climate change, cyber threats, fiscal crises, and religious fundamentalism. It seems, the entire world is suffering from all these challenges. While searching for the solution to address all these issues the Gandhian thoughts come into mind. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation gave 'The Wardha Scheme of Education' or 'Basic Education' for modern India, which can be called the first blueprint of national system of education, which is job centered, value-based and mass oriented. It is the first model of vocationalisation of education in India. In Gandhian scheme of education, knowledge must be related to activity and practical experience. His scheme of education envisages, a close integration between the school and the community so as to make child more social and co-operative. This scheme was the first attempt to develop an indigenous scheme of education in British India by Mahatma Gandhi. As a nationalist leader he fully realized that the British system of education could not serve the socio-economic need of the country. So he had developed a complete philosophy of education for the whole country. He had worked out it after a good deal of experimentation based on his philosophy of truth and non-violence.

Generally the common people identify Gandhiji's educational philosophy with what is popularly known as the Wardha scheme. The Wardha scheme of education is no doubt an integral part of Gandhiji's educational philosophy but this is a scheme, or programme of education which is not synonymous with Gandhiji's entire philosophy of Education. Which aims at bringing about a change in the hearts and minds of pupils. In his own words- "Education must be of a new type for the sake of the creation of a new world". He elaborates it - "our system of (Basic) education leads to the development of the mind, body and soul. The ordinary system cares only for mind."²

Gandhiji's vision of education is in harmony with his philosophical beliefs. His philosophy of education is based on his metaphysical and ethical ideas. Gandhiji's believed 'God is Truth' and 'Truth is God'. But Truth without non-violence is not truth but untruth for him. His entire philosophy and activity stands on two foundation pillars i.e. 'Truth' and 'Non-violence'. Truth and non-violence are not merely abstract values cherished by Gandhiji but it is the quintessence of Gandhian thought. Gandhiji ranks among the greatest philosophers of the world. His view on the nature of reality is monistic as is found in his early writings "I believe", he said "in the absolute oneness of God therefore also of humanity"³. He affirmed "I believe in essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives"⁴. For Gandhiji there is no other God than Truth. What is truth? Though this is a difficult question, yet Gandhiji solved it for himself by saying that it is what the voice within us tells us. If Truth is God, how it can be realized. For Gandhiji the only means for the realization of Truth is Ahimsa. Realization of Truth i.e. God the ultimate goal of human life. For Gandhiji that education is true education which helps in obtaining the goals of life. For Gandhiji a student means one who is hungry for learning. Learning is knowledge of what is worth knowing about. "The only thing worth knowing about is the atman. True knowledge is thus

knowledge of the self”⁵. But Gandhiji’s philosophy of education is not merely a philosophy of education which aims at the spiritual salvation of man rather it is aware of the material dimensions of life. Gandhiji said - “By education I mean an all round drawing out of the best in child and man body, mind and spirit. I would therefore begin the child’s education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the movement it begins its training.”⁶ for Gandhiji true education is that which draws out the spiritual intellectual and physical faculties of the child.

The aim of education in society is determined by the nature of society and man we cherish. Gandhiji’s education aims apart from its social and economic bearing, transformation of the individual as well as the whole society. Thus for him education is a means for the upliftment not only of the individual but of the entire society. As Gandhiji wanted to establish a social order based on socio-economic justice in which “There will be neither paupers nor beggars, nor high nor low, neither millionaire employers nor half-starved employee.”⁷

The main feature of the educational system that Gandhiji considered the best was that education should enhance all-round development of the personality of the individual along with some vocational training to cater the economic needs of the members of the society. For Gandhiji “The education ought be for them a kind of insurance against unemployment.”⁸ Gandhiji believed that every man has an equal right to the necessities of life, but he has also the corresponding duty to do some manual work with his body. To cultivate such new values among the members of society and cater their economic needs and make them self-supporting, in his new scheme of education he laid emphasis on handicraft. However in his opinion “Given the right kind of teachers, our children will be taught the dignity of labour and learn to regard it as an integral part and a means of their intellectual growth, and to realize that it is patriotic to pay for their training through their labour. The one of my suggestion is that handicrafts are to be taught, not merely for productive work, but for developing the intellect of the pupils.”⁹ Thus in his scheme – aim of the education is to bring about a harmonious development of all the four aspects of human personality viz body, mind and spirit.

The broader aim of education according to Gandhiji is inculcate the values of Truth, non-violence, bread labour, non stealing, non-possession, brahmachrya or chastity, swadeshi, anti untouchability, worship and prayer, fasting and service to humanity. Education does not mean to Gandhiji only “a knowledge of letters but it means character building, it means a knowledge of Duty. Our own word literally means ‘training’.”¹⁰ Gandhiji wanted that the aim of education should be that children may get the training of leading corporate life based on social aspects of democracy. They should learn to adjust themselves with their social environment and development a proper civic sense.

Gandhiji’s philosophy of education is not the result of any study of modern or ancient educational movements in India or elsewhere. His educational theory is ‘original’, ‘new’, and epoch making. It evolved out of his wide and long experiences of the political social and economic life of his country. Gandhiji realized at an early age that education was a remedy for all the ills and evils with which India had been afflicted. Gandhiji believed that the existing system of education in India which was of foreign import did not suit to the culture and genius of the people of India therefore it needed overhauling to suit the needs of society and people of India. In order to understand the relevance of Gandhian vision of education India should have a clear picture of the educational system which was introduced during the British period and has been in existence till today the present time. The year 1835 was a turning point in the history of Indian education for lord Macaulay presented his famous minute in favor of the adoption of English as the medium of instruction to lord Bentinck. Dealing with the aim of teaching English in India, he said, “we must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern a class of persons Indian in blood and colours but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.”¹¹

The educational theory of Gandhiji evolved and he realized that whole system of education needed an overhaul. The defects of the existing system have been set out graphically in the Report of the Zakir Hussain Committee: Indian Opinion is practically unanimous in condemning the existing system of education in the country. In the past it has failed to meet the most urgent and pressing needs of national life and to organize and direct its forces and tendencies into proper channels.¹² The new scheme of education which Gandhiji launched in 1937 and advocated widely in India was named Basic National Education or the Wardha Scheme. In Harijan Gandhiji stated- “I would therefore begin the child’s education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. I hold that highest development of the mind and soul is

possible under such a system of education. Only every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically as is done today but scientifically i.e., the child should know the why and wherefore of every process.

This method is being adopted more or less completely wherever spinning is being taught to workers. I have myself taught sandal making and even spinning on these lines with good results. This method does not exclude a knowledge of history and geography. This is a revolutionary proposal, but it saves immense labour and enables a student to acquire in one year what he may take much longer to learn. This means all round economy.”¹³ Inaugurating the Wardha Conference on the 2nd October, 1937, Gandhiji said: “I am convinced that the present system of primary education is not only wasteful but positively harmful.”¹⁴ Gandhiji made a long inaugural speech wherein he dwelt length on the salient features of his educational philosophy.

The conference therefore appointed a committee of leading educationists with Dr. Zakir Hussain as its Chairman with the objects of preparing a detailed syllabus. This committee examined the problem of education in all its aspects and submitted its report to Gandhiji on the 2nd December, 1937. The Report embodies what is known as the Wardha Scheme of Basic National Education. Although Wardha Scheme of Education has been called ‘Nai Taleem’ as well as basic education but it is popularly known as ‘Basic Education’, Basic stands for fundamentals. It means that this scheme of education was based on the national culture and civilization India. It would have close relationship with the basic needs and interests of students. Some important features of the scheme are:-

• Free Compulsory Education-

Education should be free and compulsory for all boys and girls between the ages of seven and fourteen.

But this does not mean that Gandhiji was not cautious to the need of pre-primary, post-primary, higher and adult education. In fact Gandhiji’s educational philosophy comprises all these stage of education, but particular emphasis has laid on the education of the children between seven and fourteen years. In Gandhiji’s own words:

“Primary education, extending over a period of 7 years or longer and covering all the subjects up to matriculation standard, except English, plus a vocation used as the vehicle for drawing out the minds of boys and girls in all departments of knowledge, should take the place of what passes today under the name of primary, middle and high school education.”¹⁵

Gandhiji includes secondary in primary education, because it is the only education so-called that is available to small number of the people in our villeges. He was convinced that, if we wished to ameliorate the rural conditions, we must combine the secondary with primary education.

Gandhiji wants to leave higher education to private enterprise for meeting national requirements whether in the various industries, technical arts or fine arts. The State Universities should be according to Gandhiji, purely examining bodies, self supporting through the fees charged for examination.¹⁶

Thus it may be said that Gandhiji considered education as one, indivisible and integrated, process, but in views of the circumstances in which the country had been placed, he focused his attention on the education of the children between the age of seven and fourteen years. He did not under estimate the importance of the other stages of education years. He did not under estimate the importance of the other stages of education, but he was in favour of universal education at primary stages. In his own words “I think” he said, “we can postpone the question of higher education for some time; but the problem of primary education cannot be postponed even for a minute.”¹⁷

• Craft Education-

Education should be imparted through some craft productive work which should provide the nucleus of all the instruction provided in the school.

In his own words- “The core of my suggestion is that handicrafts are to be taught, not merely for productive work, but for developing the intellect of the pupils.”

- **Self-supporting aspect of education-**

The aim of education in society is determined by the nature of society and man we cherish. Therefore Gandhiji wanted to make the individual and society both self-supporting by his scheme of education. Gandhiji hold that the child at the age of fourteen i.e. after finishing a seven years' course should be discharge as an earning unit. As Gandhiji himself put it, "you have to start with the conviction that looking to the needs of the villages of india our rural education ought to be made self-supporting if it is to be compulsory".¹⁸ His plan aimed at imparting education and simultaneously cutting at the root of unemployment.

- **Non-violence as basic Principles-**

Gandhiji's scheme of education is imbued with his cardinal creed of non-violence. In his speech at the Wardha conference he said:

"The idea of self-supporting education cannot be divorced from the ideological background of no-violence and unless we bear in mind that the new scheme is intended to bring into being a new age from which class and communal hatred is eliminated and exploitation is echewed, we cannot make a success of it. We should therefore, approach the task with firm faith in non-vioence and in the faith that the new sceme is evolved by a mind that has conceived non-violence as the panacea for al evils."¹⁹

- **Emphasis on Democratic Values-**

Gandhiji wanted that the education should aim at training the children of leading corporate life based on social aspects of democracy. They should learn to adjust themselves in the best manner with their social environment. A proper development of civic sense and adjustment with the surroundings would make children worth citizens of the country.

Gandhiji's ideas on education seem to be very much relevant in the present conditions of society. Education commission 1964-66. Kothari Commission reported-In our opinion, therefore, no reform is more important or more urgent than to transform education to endeavour to relate to it to the life, needs and aspiration of the people and thereby make it a powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of our national goals strives to build character by cultivation social, moral and spiritual values.²⁰

Here it is self-evident how much Gandhiji's vision of education is relevant contemporary. Kothari Commission reported- "The present system of education designed to meet the needs of an imperial administration within the limitations set by a feudal and traditional society, will need radical changes if it is to meet the purposes of a modernizing democratic and socialistic society, in fact, what is needed is a revaluation in education which in turn will set in motion the much desired social, economic and cultural revolution."²¹

This is what Gandhiji envisioned while he promulgated his new scheme of education to develop a new socio-economic order based on justice. Gandhiji was a firm believer in the principle of free and compulsory primary education. He hold that we could realize this only by teaching the children a useful vocation and utilizing it as a means for cultivating there mental, physical and spiritual facilities. The resolution on National policy of education in 1968 adopted Gandhiji's idea of free and compulsory education for all the children up to the age of 14. Gandhiji's emphasis on vocational training to students has been given due importance by Kothari Commission in its report-

Another programme which can bring education into closer relationship with productivity is to give a strong vocational bias to secondary education, and to increase the emphasis on agricultural and technological education at the University stage. We visualize the future trend of social education to be wards a fruitful mingling of general and vocational education. General education containing some elements of pre-vocational and technical education, and vocational education, in its turn, having an element of general education.²²

The central advisory board education committee 1992 also reported- that every effort should be made to ensure the constitutional obligation of providing free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years becomes a reality before we enter the twenty-first century.²³ The vocational "core" would find place at the secondary and higher secondary stages; work experience/SUPW would related to elementary education.²⁴

We find that the genesis of our National policy of education and programme of action 1986 laying emphasis on early childhood care and education, Universal Elementary education, vocationalisation of education, education for women's equality, Adult education are present in Gandhiji's new scheme of education. Basic education as conceived and explained by Mahatma Gandhi, is an education which aims at creating a social order free from violence and injustice. Therefore, creative, socially useful and productive work in the schools in which all boys and girls may participate, irrespective of any distinction of caste and class is placed at the core of basic education. The fundamental objective of basic education is nothing less than the development of the child's total personality in totality which includes productive efficiency as well.

This is what we need in this age of globalization-Gandhiji's goal of 'Vasudhev kutumbkam' can be realized by such a scheme of universal education. In the scheme of Basic education no differentiation has been made between boys and girls. 'It is equally possible for a girl to grow to her full stature, if she receives her education. Without their emancipation from these bonds the society cannot progress-moral, material spiritual. Therefore, he came to the conclusion that education was the most potent instrument for the regeneration of women viz a viz society. In his own words- "As women begin to realize their strength, as they must in proportion to the education they receive, they will naturally resent the glaring inequalities to which they are subjected."²⁶ The introduction of the new pattern of education 10+2 in India envisaged the vocationalisation of higher secondary education at an extensive scale. National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) in 1967 prepared a document and spelled out details of implementation the scheme. Curriculum committee on Higher secondary Education and its Vocationalisation, 1967 emphasized vocationalisation of education at higher secondary level- The aim of which is to avoid forcing students into the academic channel alone and to offer them opportunities to choose subjects and programmes to study in a much wider field of education in keeping with their aptitudes, interests and abilities, with a view to increasing their employability which would in turn provide society with personnel having a wide spectrum of knowledge and training for its own needs and upliftment. It also aims at the education and elimination of frustration among the youth resulting from non-productive and aimless education offered at present.²⁷

Elaborating on vocationalisation of education the report quoted-Vocational Education as defined by Unesco; in its recommendation of 1967 on Technical and Vocational Education as a – Comprehensive term embracing those aspects of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations: in the various sectors of economic and social life. Such an education would be an integral part of general education and a means of preparing for an occupational field, an aspect of continuing education should further contribute to the achievement of society's goals of greater democratization and social culture and economic development. While at the same time developing the potential of the individual for active participation in the establishment and implementation of these goals.²⁸

Committee was clear in its recommendations that vocationalised higher secondary education cannot be equated with mere technical training; it is essentially education in the broader sense of the term. It would prepare and cultivate the individual to understand the social reality and to realize his own potential within the framework of economic development to which the individual contributes. Education does not produce jobs, but vocationalised education makes it more likely for an individual to get a job or to be his own master by either starting a new productive activity or a service which may satisfy a felt need of the community.²⁹

Here it seems to be very clear that Gandhiji is more relevant today than in the Era of pre-independence when he advocated that education should be imparted through some craft or productive work but the craft or productive work chosen should be rich in educative possibilities. Gandhiji approaches the problem of education with an open mind. He was opposed to stuffing child's mind with all kinds of information, his insight into human nature led him to the belief that it is through activity that the child can make intellectual progress. The child's tendency to spontaneous activity is the basis of education. In his view, the activity through which the child's mental, physical and spiritual faculties are to be cultivated should not be mere side activity, but a central purposive activity like a handicraft or manual work. Gandhiji started with the child's manual and constructive activity which appeals to his interests and tastes.

Moreover manual work brings the child in contact with matter. In working with matter, the child realizes, cleans and sharpens. Such knowledge opens his mind to science and economics. This is Gandhiji's vision of literary training through manual work. Therefore Gandhiji emphasized "every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically as is done today, but scientifically, i.e. the child should know the why and the wherefore of every process." For Gandhiji no education would be social that does not make useful citizens of boys and

girls. Thus Gandhiji's vision of education is indigenous and based upon the social condition and future needs of the country. The main function of education is to fit the individual to play his role in the society in a worthy manner.

Adult Education-

Gandhiji realized very early that it was by an awakening and re-orientation of the adult mind that society could be organized on a new and healthy basic. The UNESCO seminar on Adult education held at Mysore in November, 1949, discussed the definition of adult education. After it the following conclusion were arrived at-Adult education stands for basic minimum education of every adult above 18 years of age, but benefit of this type of education might be modified and extended to adolescents below that age. It was agreed that aim of adult education was to prepare the individual to live a sane healthy life in a decent home, to work profitably, and to raise economic level through literacy by the provision of extension of education and by recreational facilities. Literacy was defined as ability to read and write.³⁰

In conclusion it can be said that Gandhiji considered education not an end in itself, but a means to an end. It is seen as an instrument to serve the purpose of the allround development of individual personalities and the needs of the nation. In view of the above relevance of Gandhiji's vision- the essence of education lies in "an all round drawing out of the best in child and man, body mind and spirit." The core of the concept of Gandhiji's educational theory is that handicrafts to the pupils are to be taught not merely for productive work, but for developing their intellect. In Gandhian scheme of things education lays emphasis on manual labour, production and self-sufficiency, it will help students to choose vocation easily after completing their education, it will help students to choose vocation easily after completing their education-thus they will not become parasites on society after completing their learning. Instead of waiting for jobs requiring only mental labour they can employ themselves by learning the dignity of labour which lacks today among the young boys and girls. Correlation with craft and environment and co-ordination with other subjects is an important aspect of Gandhian conception of education. It caters to the varied talents and tastes of the child by offering different kinds of work. Various psychological, sociological and economic dimension of the programme aim at the development of totality of the personality of men and women. With the serious problems of mounting education unemployed young men and women, growing unrest among the students, re-orientation of the educational system on the spirit of Gandhian conception of education seems to be the need of the 21st century.

Education is a cultural construct meant to socialize the citizens, transmit knowledge from one generation to another and generate new knowledge to better all generations. The education system is supposed to contribute to individual growth and social transformation. The higher education has played significant role in social formulation, nation building and scientific development. UNESCO's international commission for 21st century by making it a process i.e. opened to all and continuous throughout a person's life time. It has focused on the relationship between education in six subject's areas of development, science, citizenship, culture, social cohesion and work. In the whole educational process, the educator in general and the leader in particular has a vital role to play. But, if the person in the helm of affair and educator is not fully developed, it will cause major damages to human resources itself. Hence, human resource development, at all levels, needs to be given priority and made a part of the nation overall strategy.

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