



Gandhian Ideology Of Sustainable Education Thoughts

1 Dhanwantari Sharma and Ajay Shukla 2

1 PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Jayoti Vidyapeeth Women's University (JWU), Jaipur, Rajasthan-303122, India

2 PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Agra-282004, India

Corresponding Author: 1 PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Jayoti Vidyapeeth Women's University (JWU), Jaipur, Rajasthan-303122, India

Abstract

Gandhiji's educational philosophy, which evolved during his lifetime in the form of Gandhian School of educational thought, has not received adequate attention in policy formulations during last seven decades. Globally, it is being realized that his views were dynamic and futuristic in nature. Fully understanding inadequacies of our over dependence on the alien model of education and the needs of the weakest, the poorest and the neglected, he evolved an indigenous strategy to provide equality of opportunity and success to each and every individual of this category. NCTE lays great emphasis on the contribution of Indian educationists and thinkers and has undertaken a project to acquaint teacher educators with their thoughts. Since Gandhiji has written practically on every aspect of human life and his writings, particularly on education, are full of incisive insight, practical experiences and pragmatic foresight, I cherished the idea of having an anthology of his writings on Education compiled which I relish to present in the form of this book. It traces, in brief, Gandhiji's experiments in South Africa and in India and presents his thoughts on various stages of education, from pre-primary to higher education. Present this paper focuses on views and thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi ideology on sustainable education in global perspectives.

Key Words: Anthology, Educational Philosophy, Global, Policy, Practical and Universal

1) Introduction:

The real difficulty is that people have no idea of what education truly is. We assess the value of education in the same manner as we assess the value of land or of shares in the stock-exchange market. We want to provide only such education as would enable the student to earn more. We hardly give any thought to the improvement of the character of the educated. The girls, we say, do not have to earn; so why should they be educated? As long as such ideas persist there is no hope of our ever knowing the true value of education (True Education, p. 38). In Western countries education is so highly valued that senior teachers are treated with much respect. There are at present in England, schools that have been running for hundreds of years and have turned out many renowned men. One of these famous schools is Eton. A few months ago the old boys of Eton presented an address to the Head Master, Dr. Weir, who is well known throughout the British Empire. Writing about the occasion, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, a well-known journal in England, has explained the nature of real education. Its comments deserve the attention of us all. The writer in *The Pall Mall Gazette* says: We hold that real education does not consist merely in acquainting oneself with ancient or modern books. It consists in the habits which one knowingly or unknowingly imbibes from the atmosphere, one's surroundings and the company one keeps and above all in work. It is all very well to acquire a stock of knowledge from good books or from other sources. But the more important thing is to learn humanity. The primary function of teachers is, therefore, not to teach the alphabet, but to inculcate humanity. Aristotle said that virtue is not learnt by reading big volumes. It is by doing good deeds that we learn virtue. Another great writer also says that it is well for one to know what is good, but one will be considered a happy person only if one acts upon that knowledge. Judged by these standards, English schools will not be found wanting. If we think of English schools as places for turning out human beings, we shall see that they give us statesmen and administrators. Those educated in German schools may have greater knowledge, but if they become also men of action like the pupils of Eton, it is not by virtue of their training in the schools. Despite the defects that may exist in English schools, it is these that produce true men. They are men who are ever ready to meet an enemy threatening at the gates of England. We can readily realize how a country that invests education with such a noble purpose becomes prosperous. India's star will shine bright when Indian children receive such education. Parents, teachers and pupils ought to ponder over the passage quoted above. It would not do merely to know it, it is necessary to act upon it. That is to say, parents should provide for excellent education, teachers should discharge their responsibility and pupils should recognize that mere literacy is not education. *Indian Opinion*, 18 May 1907 (CW 6, pp. 484-85) (Translated from Gujarati)

2) Education as Training:

Now I have read a great deal in the prison. I have been reading Emerson, Ruskin and Mazzini. I have also been reading the *Upanishads*. All confirm the view that education does not mean knowledge of letters but it means character building, it means knowledge of duty. Our own word literally means 'training'. If this is the true view and it is to my mind the only true view, you are receiving the best education training possible. Letter to Manilal Gandhi, 25 March 1909 (CW 9, p. 208)

3) Education as Service:

True education lies in serving others; oblige them without the least feeling of one-animosity. The more mature you grow, the more you will realise this. Great deals of religious obligations on us are fulfilled when we nurse the sick. I am not worried about your bookish learning so long as you perform your duties and observe solemn ethical conduct. For me carrying out the fundamentals of ethics is *duty*. I shall support you if you want to study further out of your love for it or for excellence. But I won't scold you if you do not do it. Try your best to carry out the decisions you have made. Write to me what you do at the press, at what time do you get up and about your work at the farm. Letter to Ramdas Gandhi (*The Making of the Mahatma*, p. 97)

4) Service before Self:

I was extremely glad to read your letter of the 21st (ultimo) about Mr. West. I read the letter twice. I felt proud of you and thanked God that I had such a son. I wish you to remain such forever. To do good to others and serve them without any sense of egoism—this is real education. You will realize this more and more as you grow up. What better way of life can there be than serving the sick? Most of religion is covered by it. Letter to Manilal Gandhi, 17 September 1909 (CW 9, p. 417)

5) Moral Path:

The true occupation of man is to build his character. It is not quite necessary to learn something special for earning [one's livelihood]. He who does leave the path of morality never starves, and is not afraid if such a contingency arises. Letter to Manilal Gandhi, 27 September 1909 (CW 9, p. 435)

6) Living a Good Life:

The service you are rendering to Mr. West and others is the best study for you. He who does his duty is all the while studying. You say that you had to leave your studies; but it is not so. You are certainly studying when you are serving. It would be correct to say that you had to give up reading books. There is no harm in thus leaving studies. One can get academic education later on. One cannot say that one will get an opportunity of serving others later on...' Let this be inscribed in your heart that, since your mind is pure, you will not fall ill while serving others. And even if you fall ill, I will not worry. You and I, all of us, will achieve perfection only by being moulded in this manner. Learning to live a good life is in itself education. All else is useless. Letter to Manilal Gandhi, 12 October 1909 (CW 9, p. 475)

7) Laying Strong Foundation:

What is the meaning of education? It simply means knowledge of letters. It is merely an instrument, and an instrument may be well used or abused. The same instrument that may be used to cure a patient may be used to take his life, and so may knowledge of letters. We daily observe that many men abuse it and very few make good use of it; and if this is a correct statement, we have proved that more harm has been done by it than good. The ordinary meaning of education is knowledge of letters. To teach boys reading, writing and arithmetic is called primary education. A peasant earns his bread honestly. He has ordinary knowledge of the world. He knows fairly well how he should behave towards his parents, his wife, his children and his fellow villagers. He understands and observes the rules of morality. But he cannot write his own name. What do you propose to do

by giving him knowledge of letters? Will you add an inch to his happiness? Do you wish to make him discontented with his cottage or his lot? And even if you want to do that, he will not need such an education. Carried away by the flood of Western thought we came to the conclusion, without weighing pros and cons, that we should give this kind of education to the people. Now let us take higher education. I have learned Geography, Astronomy, Algebra, Geometry etc. What of that? In what way have I benefited myself or those around me? Why have I learned these things? Professor Huxley has thus defined education: That man, I think, has had a liberal education who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will and does with ease and pleasure all the work that as a mechanism it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine with all its parts of equal strength and in smooth working order; whose mind is stored with a knowledge of the fundamental truths of nature. whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience; who has learnt to hate all vileness and to respect others as himself. Such a one and no other, I conceive, has had a liberal education, for he is in harmony with nature. He will make the best of her and her of him. If this is true education, I must emphatically say that the sciences I have enumerated above I have never been able to use for controlling my senses. Therefore, whether you take elementary education or higher education, it is not required for the main thing. It does not make men of us. It does not enable us to do our duty. Reader: If that is so, I shall have to ask you another question: What enables you to tell all these things to me? If you had not received higher education, how would you have been able to explain to me the things that you have? Editor: You have spoken well. But my answer is simple: I do not, for one moment, believe that my life would have been wasted, had I not received higher or lower education. Nor do I consider that I necessarily serve because I speak. But I do desire to serve and in endeavouring to fulfil that desire, I make use of the education I have received. And, if I am making good use of it, even then it is not for the millions, but I can use it only for such as you, and this supports my contention. Both you and I have come under the bane of what is mainly false education. I claim to have become free from its ill effect, and I am trying to give you the benefit of my experience and in doing so, I am demonstrating the rottenness of this education. Moreover, I have not run down knowledge of letters in all circumstances. All I have now shown is that we must not make of it a fetish. It is not our *Kamadhuk*. In its place it can be of use and it has its place when we have brought our senses under subjection and put our ethics on a firm foundation. And then, if we feel inclined to receive that education, we may make good use of it. As an ornament it is likely to sit well on us. It now follows that it is not necessary to make this education compulsory. Our ancient school system is enough. Character-building has the first place in it and that is primary education. A building erected on that foundation will last. *Hind Swaraj*, Chapter XVIII, 21 November 1909 (CW 10, pp. 54–55)

8) Education as Liberation:

"That is true education which leads to freedom." That alone is true education which enables us to preserve our dharma. This is the motto accepted by our university. The idea has appealed to me very much: "That is true education which leads to freedom." That which liberates is education. Liberation is of two kinds. One form of liberation consists in securing the freedom of the country from foreign rule. Such freedom may

prove short-lived. The other kind of liberation is for all time. In order to attain *moksha*, which we describe as our *paramadharma*, we should have freedom in the worldly sense as well. He who is ridden with many fears cannot attain the ultimate *moksha*. If one would attain this, would achieve the highest end of human effort, one has no choice but to attain that *moksha* which is nearest to one. That education which delays our freedom is to be shunned, it is Satanic, it is sinful. Whatever the quality of the education given in Government schools and colleges, it is to be shunned because the Government which imparts it is Satanic and deserves to be shunned. Speech to students, Ahmedabad, 18 November 1926 (CW 18, p. 471)

9) Education as Assimilation:

But I must advise you, students, to read these prize-books carefully, to reflect over their real import and, keeping in mind all the profound truths set out in them, follow the path enjoined by religion. Whether you are a girl or a boy, you will grow up one day and have to carry a heavy burden of worldly duties; give some thought, therefore, to the future. Truth is revealed not only in our scriptures but in the scriptures of other religions as well. It is the duty of students to assimilate whatever they have learnt. They should have religious and moral instruction, as much of it as they can usefully apply. They need education in such measure that it would not become too much of a useless burden on them. I should like to address a few words exclusively to students. Men and women students, you will benefit from what you have learnt only to the extent that you have assimilated it. That should be the object of this institution too. You should ponder over the element of truth in whatever books of religion you read. If you cling to truth, success is yours. I would advise you from my experience, to profit well from your education. That will be to your advantage and to your country's as well. Speech to students in Bombay, 14 February 1915 (CW 13, p. 23)

10) Overcoming Fear:

Speaking about the timidity induced by their education, Gandhiji said: We may feel in our heart any measure of devotion for Tilak Maharaj, but where is the student who will express it freely?

For us, fear has become synonymous with life. What is the use of that education which does not help us to overcome fear, but which, on the contrary, strengthens it? What kind of an education is it which does not teach us to follow truth and to cultivate devotion for the country? Speech at students' meeting, Agra, 23 November 1920 (CW 19, p. 16)

11) Culture of the Heart:

There is one thing which, as I am speaking to you occurs to me, which comes to me from my early studies of the Bible. It seized me immediately. I read the passage: But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.¹ I tell you that if you will understand, appreciate and act up to the spirit of this passage, you won't even need to know what place Jesus or any other teacher occupies in your heart. If you will do the proper scavenger's work, clean and purify your hearts and get them ready, you will find that all these mighty teachers will take their places without invitation from us. That, to my mind, is the basis of all sound education. Culture of the mind must be subservient to the culture of the heart.

May God help you to become pure! Speech at Central College, Jaffna, *The Hindu*, 2 December 1927 (CW 35, p. 343)

12) Character vs. Knowledge:

In brief, formation of character should have priority over knowledge of the alphabet. If this order is reversed, the attempt would be like putting the cart before the horse and making it push the cart with its nose, and would meet with the same success as the latter course. 9 January 1924 (CW 37, p. 248)

13) Education as Contemplation:

Education, character and religion should be regarded as convertible terms. There is no true education which does not tend to produce character, and there is no true religion which does not determine character. Education should contemplate the whole life. Mere memorizing and book-learning is not education. I have no faith in the so-called systems of education which produce men of learning without the backbone of character. Interview with W.W. Hall, October 1928 (CW 37, p. 320)

14) Education of the Whole Child:

Education does not mean knowledge of the alphabet. This type of knowledge is only a means to education. Education implies a child's learning how to put his mind and all his senses to good use. That is to say, he really learns how to use his hands, feet and other organs of action and his nose, ear and other organs of sense. A child who has acquired the knowledge that he should not use his hands for stealing or for killing flies nor for beating up his companions or younger brothers and sisters has already begun his education. He has started it, we can say, when he understands the necessity of keeping his body, his teeth, tongue, ears, head, nails, etc., clean and keeps them clean. That child has made good progress in education who does not indulge in mischief while eating and drinking, eats and drinks alone or in society in a proper manner, sits properly and chooses pure foodstuffs knowing the difference between pure and impure foodstuffs, does not eat like a glutton, does not clamour for whatever he sees and remains calm even if he does not get what he wants. Even that child has advanced on the road to education whose pronunciation is correct, who can recount to us the history and geography of the country surrounding him without knowing those terms and who understands what his country means. That child has made very good progress in his education who can understand the difference between truth and untruth, worth and worthlessness and chooses the good and the true, while rejecting the bad and the untrue. *Navajeevan*, 2 June 1929 (CW 41, p. 6)

15) Education as Self-Discipline:

All your scholarship, all your study of Shakespeare and Wordsworth would be vain if at the same time you do not build your character, and attain mastery over your thoughts and actions. When you have attained self-mastery and learnt to control your passions you will not utter notes of despair. You cannot give your hearts and profess poverty of action. To give one's heart is to give all. You must, to start with, have hearts to give. And this you can do if you will cultivate them.

Speech to students, Agra, 19 September 1929 (CW 41, p. 391)

16) Right Learning:

I have been all this time looking at the motto in front of me: "Learning owes its worth to dharma." What the motto says is true. I have discovered in the course of my travels in India that, without dharma, learning is barren. This raises the question: "What is right learning?" I have given my reply often enough. We shall settle afterwards the issue of what manner of learning to provide. For the present, we may follow one definite method and include religious instruction in it. Religion is not a matter for reflection but of conduct. It is not a subject for talking about, be it noted. Teachers can create the thing only by their conduct. Gurjarat itself should produce such teachers; it is shameful to go looking for them outside. Speech at foundation lying of Vanita Vishram, Ahmedabad, 13 July 1919 (CW 15, p. 410) (Translated from Gujarati)

17) Becoming Strong:

In the circumstances in which you pursue your studies, you can only learn to fear man. I would say, on the other hand, that he alone is a real M.A. who has given up the fear of man and has learnt to fear God. Any education you receive will have justified itself only when you have become so strong that you will not beg of anyone for your living. It will have justified itself when the feeling has grown in you that, so long as you are strong of limb, you need not humble yourselves before anyone for a livelihood. Speech at students' meeting, Banaras *Navajivan*, 5 December 1920 (CW 19, p. 27) literary training by itself adds not an inch to one's moral height and that character-building is independent of literary training. *Young India*, 1 June 1921, p. 172

18) Development of Body, Mind and Spirit:

The English word 'education' etymologically means 'drawing out'. That means an endeavour to develop our latent talents. The same is the meaning of *kilavani*, the Gujarati word for education. When we say that we develop a certain thing, it does not mean that we change its kind or quality, but that we bring out the qualities latent in it. Hence 'education' can also mean 'infolment'. In this sense, we cannot look upon knowledge of the alphabet as education. This is true even if that knowledge gains us the M.A. degree or enables us to adorn the place of a Shastri¹ in some *pathshala*² with the requisite knowledge of Sanskrit. It may well be that the highest literary knowledge is a fine instrument for education or infolment, but it certainly does not itself constitute education. True education is something different. Man is made of three constituents, the body, mind and spirit. Of them, spirit is the one permanent element in man. The body and the mind function on account of it. Hence we can call that education which reveals the qualities of spirit. That is why the seal of the Vidyapith carries the dictum 'Education is that which leads to *moksha*'. Education can also be understood in another sense; that is, whatever leads to a full or maximum development of all the three, the body, mind and spirit, may also be called education. The knowledge that is being imparted today may possibly develop the mind a little, but certainly it does not develop the body and spirit. I have a doubt about the development of the mind too, because it does not mean that the mind has developed if we have filled it with a lot of information. We cannot therefore say that we have educated our mind. A well educated mind serves man in the desired manner. Our literate mind of today pulls us hither and thither. That is what a wild horse does. Only when a wild horse is broken in can we call it a trained horse. How many 'educated' young men of today are so trained? Now let us

examine our body. Are we supposed to cultivate the body by playing tennis, football or cricket for an hour every day? It does, certainly, build up the body. Like a wild horse, however, the body will be strong but not trained. A trained body is healthy, vigorous and sinewy. The hands and feet can do any desired work. A pickaxe, a shovel, a hammer, etc. are like ornaments to a trained hand and it can wield them. That hand can ply the spinning-wheel well as also the ring and the comb while the feet work a loom. A well trained body does not get tired in trudging 30 miles. It can scale mountains without getting breathless. Does the student acquire such physical culture? We can assert that modern curricula do not impart physical education in this sense. The less said about the spirit the better. Only a seer or a seeker can enlighten the soul. Who will awaken that dormant spiritual energy in us all? Teachers can be had through an advertisement. Is there a column for spiritual quest in the testimonials which they have to produce? Even if there is one, what is its value? How can we get through advertisements teachers who are seekers after self-realization? And education without such enlightenment is like a wall without a foundation or, to employ an English saying, like a whited sepulchre. Inside it there is only a corpse eaten up or being eaten by insects. *Navajivan Education Supplement*, 28 February 1926 (CW 30, pp. 58-59)

19) Science and Responsibility:

At the time when emphasis in education is put more upon literary knowledge than upon character building, the following from the article of Principal Jacks in the *Sunday School Chronicle* will be read with profit: Our life presents itself as an endless movement, in which the march of science never quite overtakes the final problem of its own application. The point where responsibility rests upon us all is always just ahead of the last point reached by advancing science. The more the pursuer quickened his pace the more the fugitive quickens his. This inability of science to overtake responsibility is what I mean by its limitations. Applied science will tell you how to make a gun, but it will not tell you when to shoot nor whom to shoot at. You say that moral science will look after that. I answer that moral science in revealing the right use of my gun, inevitably reveals the wrong use also, and since the wrong will often serve my selfish purpose better than the right, my neighbours run a new risk of being shot at and plundered. A bad man armed with moral science is another name for the devil. If Mephistopheles had been examined in moral science in the University of London, he would have carried off all the prizes. At that point moral science and natural science are both in the same boat. How shall we name this fugitive thing which science never catches? I have called it life; others call it spirit or soul or sense, or perhaps the will. I do not think it matters greatly what we call it, so long as we recognize that it exists and that it carries in its arms the fortunes of mankind. Let education look to that. This is the point where all the enterprise of education and all the activities of religion come to their focus the point of responsibility. If we do it at all other points and leave the point of responsibility uncared for, we shall inevitably come to grief. *Young India*, 30 September 1926.

20) Against Atheism:

My association with the students of our country dates back to 10 years, since my return to India. I know the hardships and the difficulties of the students. I have been seeing them every day. I also know their weak points. It has been my privilege to have a corner in their hearts. They have not hesitated to open their hearts to me, to tell me even what they had concealed from their parents. I do not know how I could bring them peace, or what message I could give them. I share in their sorrows, and I have been striving to alleviate their hardships. But in this world, we have to look only to God for help. None other could render any effectual help. There is no sin equal to that of disbelieving in Him, in denying Him. Amongst the students of today the spirit of atheism is gaining ground. I am deeply grieved that things should be so. Whenever I see Hindu students, I ask them to think of God, to pray, to repeat Raamanaama. They ask me where is God, where is Rama and such other questions. When I see Mussalm; 876 an youths and ask them to read the Koran, and to live the life enjoined therein, they also ask me similar questions. The education which leads to the negation of God cannot make for the service of the country nor of humanity. In your address, you have referred to my service to my country. Whatever I have been doing is done with a sense of my duty to God. And this I consider to be the right thing. God is not seated in the skies, in the heavens, or elsewhere. He is enshrined in the heart of everyone be he a Hindu, Mohammedan, Christian or Jew, man or woman. Speech to students, Mysore *The Hindu*, 21 July 1927 (CW 34, pp. 203–04)

21) Education and Culture:

"Culture" means refinement of feelings and "education" means knowledge of literature. Education is a means and culture is the end. The latter is possible even without education. For instance, if a child is brought up in a truly cultured family, it will unconsciously imbibe culture from its environment. In our country at any rate, present-day education and culture have no connection with each other. If the educated still retain some culture that is in spite of their education. This fact shows that the roots of our culture are deep. Letter to Premabehn Kantak, 5th January 1931 (CW 45, pp. 63–64)

22) Conclusion:

Scholars, both from the west and east have acknowledged the strength of Indian Social Values that formed the basis of political life. Warren Hastings, the Governor General of Colonial India recorded that 'India was the only county having a strong tradition emerged on the basis of humane approaches influencing every walk of life and it had, therefore, a great ambience to rule the world morally'. The cultural value that influenced every walk if traditional Indian life was meticulously theorized by Gandhi as a "Village Republic", cemented by the traditional values of sustainability, private and public morality and spirituality. It is also to be noted that in his book 'Clash of Civilization', Samuel P. Huntington noted after making an extensive analysis on seven civilizations of the world community that 'Hindu civilization can give a paradigm shift to the world'. Arnold J Toynbee in his magnum opus "A Study of History" reiterates that the sole reason for the survival of a

civilization is its morality, which also forms the basis of stability. While modern discourses on good governance and sustainability heavily borrows western paradigm, very little has been attributed to Indian contribution towards sustainable development and good governance that remain recorded in Arthasashtra. There is an imminent need for revisiting Indian indigenous thinking: social, political, economic, educational and even spiritual to unravel our own contribution to Good Governance and Sustainability in the new millennium.

In my wanderings among the students I made the discovery at an early stage of the movement that in order to conduct a movement of this kind character must be the foundation. We also found that real education consists not in packing the brain with so many facts and figures, not in passing examinations by reading numerous books but in developing character. I do not know to what extent you students of France lay stress upon character rather than upon intellectual studies, but I can say this that if you explore the possibilities of nonviolence you will find that without characters it will prove a profitless study. Speech at meeting of students, Marseilles *Young India*, 1 October 1931 (CW 47, p. 422)

References

1. Bhaneja, Balwant. 2007. "Understanding Gandhi's Ahimsa (Non-violence)", *Asteriskos*, 3/4: 215-224, pp. 216.
2. Bose, Anima. (1981). "A Gandhian Perspective on Peace", *Journal of Peace Research*, XVIII(2): 159-164
3. Gupta, A K Das. "Gandhi on Social Conflict", *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 7, 1876-1878.
4. Hague Appeal for Peace [Online] Available at: <http://www.haguepeace.org/>
5. Harris, Ian M. and Mary Lee Morrison. (2003), "Peace Education", McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers: North Carolina, USA
6. Page, James. (2008), "Peace Education: Exploring Ethical and Philosophical Foundations", Information Age Publishing Inc.: USA
7. Parekh, Bhikhu, 1997, "Gandhi: A Brief Insight", Sterling Publication Co. Inc.: New York. Peace Education in UNICEF. Susan Fountain. [Online] Available at: <http://www.unicef.org/education/files/PeaceEducation.pdf>
8. Ravi, S. Samuel. 2011, "A Comprehensive Study of Education", PHI Learning Private Limited: New Delhi.
9. Gandhi's Views On Education: Buniyadi Shiksha [Basic Education] - http://www.gandhimanibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_education_%20buniyadi shiksha.htm
10. Suresh Vadrnam, Ajeet Jaiswal and P. Moorthy (Eds) (2021)
11. "Mahatma Gandhi Vision: Sustainable and Human Development", Delhi: Avon Publishing House (ISBN: 978-81-945684-6-9)