

M. K. GANDHI ON EDUCATION: A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The present world engulfed with greed and materialistic attitude is to some extent seemingly devoid of value oriented educational attitude. This era is of scientific advancement and technology, Information and communication technology, Artificial intelligence and machine learning. And human beings at least at the core of his mind cannot deny the fact that in some ways we have suppressed or underestimated the significance of cultivating ethical virtues. It is of immense necessity to revisit Gandhian concept of education from philosophical perspective whereby moral education could play a significant role in shaping a world of peace. Recognition of inherent capacities in the self is also an important and integral part of Gandhian educational thought. In an attempt to understand true meaning of education certain quest aroused in my mind, such as, Does education stands as a means for livelihood? Does education is to achieve an academic recognition? What is the highest end of education? With some of these query in my mind I ventured to explore Gandhiji's idea on education. Thus, in this paper my sincere attempt would be to assess true meaning of education for a harmonious co-existence of all beings.

Key words: Education, Moral education, Character building, Inherent capacity, Modern civilisation, Philosophy, M. K. Gandhi

I

The concept of education is related to life itself in the sense that life and education are interwoven in a meaningful way. Education, in ancient India denotes self-culture and self-realisation for the ultimate realisation of the ultimate truth. Education is indeed a life – long process. One of the very important aims of ancient education was character training and moral education. Character training was imparted through instruction, glorification of the heroic men of character and through a scheme of discipline. The disciplinary moral concept of life found expression in Brahmacharya. In the Upanishads, self-knowledge has been acknowledged as the true aim of life and education. Such concept of education of the people of ancient India has developed from their philosophy of life. In modern sense, “Education means that process of development in which consists the passage of a human being from infancy to maturity,

the process whereby he gradually adopts himself in various ways to his physical, social and spiritual environment”.¹ Thus, education stands for self-culture or self-improvement that goes on till the end of one’s life. It is a universal process from the cradle to the grave, from the birth to maturity.

Education as an academic discipline ought to have a value-orientation for its impact on society. The philosophical perspective provides directives and offers values to which education should be oriented from time to time. Philosophy provides a framework within which education and educational problems can be discussed. Thus, one may be inclined to say that the philosophical basis makes education more purposive towards ends which are fundamentally good. Philosophical outlook enhance in making education harmonious and self-sufficient in true sense.

II

Gandhiji’s educational thought:

His thought on education well cohere into a complete educational philosophy, which is the coping-stone of his general philosophy. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “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”.² One can perceive clearly that Gandhiji emphasise importance on moral education or character building as the goal of education. He had conducted educational experiments at Tolstoy Farm in South Africa and he further continued at Sabarmati and Sevagram ashramas. Every work of the ashrama had to be carried on by the inmates of the ashrama, such as adults, women and children. The inmate of the ashrama was required to observe strict celibacy, to learn self-control, truth speaking, non-violence, and non-untouchability. In the later period, Sevagram ashrama was founded the near Wardha where he conceived the idea of his new system of education which is commonly known as *Buniyadi Shiksha* – Basic Education. Under *Buniyadi Shiksha* Gandhi has emphasised the importance of combining theoretical imparting of instruction with practical training.

He had also evolved a new dynamic philosophy of education with this object of realising God in an ideal moral society. What is true education to Gandhiji? To quote

in the words of Gandhi, “By education I mean an all round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is one of the means whereby man and women can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education”³. It is obvious that utility of sense organs in the rightful way is of immense necessity for the proper growth of a child’s intellect. In the meantime, spiritual training cannot also be discarded. In other words, proper correspondence of body, mind and spirit is the core of education.

Literacy can never be, as people are apt to believe, the be-all and end-all of education. In his philosophy of education, the personality of the educand is of primary importance, and not the tools and subjects. To him, “True education is that which draws out and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties of the children.”⁴ The principle of education lies in the fact that none of these aspects of a man can be segregated from the other. In addition, education is not to be considered for academic recognition or as a means of livelihood rather it should be for education’s sake.

He had profound faith in the absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. Service to humanity is the core of his philosophy and the end of all education should be service. In the moral society, service to God and community was the greatest creed. Furthermore, “Man’s ultimate aim is the Realisation of God”.⁵ All the activities of man – social, religious, political – is to be motivated by this one aim. Therefore, the first and foremost duty of every man is service to all. Education is a lifelong process whose function is to produce responsible citizens, complete men and women, and also to bring about a harmonious development of all four aspects of the personality – body, heart, mind and spirit. Through sound education children must also be taught to adjust to their immediate environment. The child is being brought up in a family and in a later stage he learns to mingle with others and grow up in a larger society. Thus, in this sense, the elders and parents should also play active role in helping the children to realize their hidden potentiality as well as in character formation. In formal educational institutions also a child learns to develop himself physically as well as intellectually.

His educational thought may be in contradictory to the present day system of education that is prevalent in India. He was not satisfied with the system of education introduced by the English as it did not suit the country and fails to fulfil the needs and aspirations of the people. Education system introduced by the English tended to neglect Mother-tongue, whereby leading to mass illiteracy. To him, this system of education was narrow, theoretical, bookish and impractical. It has failed to develop also the sense

of citizenship. It seems to be the fact that present education system merely imparts instructions, or makes man literate.

In this consonance, he opposed 'Modern Civilization' or 'Western Civilization' indicating that it is emphasizing more importance on bodily comfort rather than spiritual growth of an individual. The mind of every child should be implanted with value oriented education not just being mechanical in thought and action. Mere transformation of life in the form of industrial growth cannot be a parameter of civilization. However, an individual must put an effort for betterment each and every moment through cultivation of virtues and character building. This would ultimately lead society as a whole towards upward mobility.

To him every individual is born with certain basic and inborn tendencies and capacities. To bring out such inherent capacities of every individual should be the aim of education. Further, if education is to fit the future citizens for playing his role in society, he should cultivate in school the character appropriate to a social being. He must be trained for his life. He must have an opportunity to practise civic virtues at schools. He should cultivate breadth of vision, toleration and good neighbourliness.

His educational philosophy has been coloured and shaped by several factors, such as, his experiments in Tolstoy farm, Sabarmati ashram and Sevagram ashram. There are other secondary features which deserve to be mentioned here, such as, free compulsory education under the age of 7-14, Craft centred education, Education should be self-supporting, Emphasis on mother-tongue – the mother-tongue not only to become the medium of instruction, but to occupy the first place among languages, & Philosophy of Non-violence.

An aim of education may be compared, as done by John Dewey, to the summit of a hill from where we get a clear view of a landscape. There is no single aim of education, however, moral or character building has been attached the highest priority as an aim of education by Gandhiji. Gandhiji laid so much emphasis on character building as an aim of education that he would relegate to a subordinate position or even sacrifice literary training, if the choice were to be made between the two. Purity of personal life is for him an indispensable condition for building a sound education. "Students have to search within," he affirms, "and look after their personal character," for "What is education without character, and what is character without elementary personal purity?" The end of all knowledge must be, "the building up of character."⁶ Undoubtedly, to Gandhiji one must strive towards shaping of self character and this

would lead to the harmonious existence. Character building or value oriented education is the necessity of the education system without which education may seem incomplete.

III

To sum up, Gandhiji regards righteousness or good life as an essential part of character, at which education ought to aim. Addressing a gathering of college boys, he said: “Your education is absolutely worthless, if it is not built on the solid foundation of truth and purity. If you, boys, are not careful about the personal purity of your lives, and if you are not careful about being pure in thought, speech and deeds then I tell you that you are lost, although you may become perfect finished scholars.”⁷ He was convinced that life devoid of the principle of truth and non-violence is worthless. Education is the dynamic side of life and he wanted to realise the ideal of life in and through education. He had always dreamt of an ideal moral society based on truth and non-violence where every citizen should be entitled to equality, liberty, and fraternity. He also wanted to build a society in which the condition should be such that each man should be able to realise the highest aims of life and to regenerate India from moral, political and economic perspective. In order to transform this dream into reality right understanding of education is a pre-requisite in the modern era.

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