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ISSN 2278-9529
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Education: A Gandhian Perspective

Shine Joseph
Christ University,
Bangalore.

Abstract:

For Gandhi, the goal of education is to help individuals to find a satisfying place for themselves in society. Good education should not only lead to a higher standard of living but also a higher standard of life. The motto of every educational institution has to be the achievement of learning and ennoblement of life. Gandhi advocated transformation of man, and for this transformation, one of his important tools was education. Truth, non-violence, service to the humanity and fearlessness were the goals of humanity and education was the means to achieve them. Starting from character building the Gandhian system of education was designed to bring knowledge and skills together to draw the best out of each individual.

Keywords: Education, Gandhi, Philosophy, Holistic Development, Social transformation

The ordinary meaning of education is knowledge of letters. To teach the students the three R's that are reading, writing and arithmetic is called primary education. But in Gandhian perspective character building must have the first priority in education and he called it primary education. Gandhi believed that transformation of man will happen only through education. This leads us to the following questions like, what is the real purpose of Education? What is the relevance of Gandhian concept of education? Why Gandhi give more importance to the notion of Swaraj and Swdesi? How can we use education as tool of character building and social transformation?

The paper is given emphasizes to analyze the 18th chapter of 'Hind Swaraj' which was written by M K Gandhi and find out the purpose and importance of Gandhian education and its different philosophical aspects. For this research the researcher uses the functionalist theory of Durkheim for the analysis. The functionalist theory focuses on the ways that universal education serves the needs of society. Durkheim (the founder of functionalist theory) identified the latent role of education as one of socializing people into society's mainstream. Durkheim found education to reflect underlying changes in society at large. As such, he used educational systems as an opening into society's organization and values, both past and present. We see the same ideology in Gandhian thought also. For Gandhi, the goal of education is to help individuals to find a satisfying place for themselves in society.

Gandhian educational concept raised silent protest against the social evils such as untouchability, child marriage, violence and dowry systems. As social reformer he supported

widow marriage also. For Gandhi, education is not merely to produce good individuals, but to turn out individuals who understand their social responsibilities as elements of the society in which they live. Any system of education that ignores this vital aspect is incomplete, ineffective and incapable of creating the conditions of a good society. “Gandhi is a pragmatist who emphasizes the practical aspects of education rather than its theoretical foundations. He argues that individual who are trained to participate in the attainment of social objectives help in the cultivation of social spirit” (Patil178). Gandhi strongly upholds the view that education must enrich human personality and integrate individuals as integral members of a dormant and dynamic society. Through education we need to inspire children to undertake self-development process to control the mind and direct it towards the higher dimensions of work and life, to achieve not just success, but consistent success and perfection, with bliss (Sunil 189).

Starting from character building the Gandhian system of education was designed to bring knowledge and skills together to draw the best out of each individual. It aims at inculcating the dignity of labour, self-respect, and self-reliance. It is always self-supporting. It enables the students to live a life of morality in the particular situation. Gandhi’s philosophy of education is comprehensive enough because he looks upon education as an instrument of socio-economic progress, material advancement, political evolution and moral development for individuals in the society (Gangrade190).

In the words of Gandhiji, “true education should result not in material power but in spiritual force” (Gandhi 183). We cannot understand Gandhi and his philosophical thoughts without the notion of Truth. For Gandhi Truth is God. According to the functionalist theory the purpose of education is to give a holistic formation to the children. Then only we can bring them in the main stream of the society. Durkheim the founder of functionalist theory says that education is thus “a continuous effort to impose on the child ways of seeing, feeling and acting at which he would not have arrived spontaneously” (Steve 2). When Gandhi refers to true education he is speaking of the need for a system of education that would enable us to understand the meaning of the quest for Truth. And at the same time seek to develop the whole man, body, mind and spirit. He considers this to be the ultimate goal of education, and insist that it would be a mistake to seek to cultivate the mind in isolation from the body and the spirit. It is true education which provides knowledge of God and self-realization. To achieve this aim we need faith in God. His concern with self-knowledge and self-identity was related to the knowledge of truth. And any violation of the self is a violation of Truth (Glyn 44).

According to Gandhi, true education has a role to achieve the immediate aims along with its ultimate aim. The development of personality was more significant than accumulation of intellectual tools and academic knowledge. For Gandhi the school is basically a community linked to social achievements. It should be an organized society itself which is engaged in some faithful activity contributing to the greater society. Students should learn in school how to live

together in a community on the basis of cooperation, truth and non-violence. He experimented to this idea in the Sevagram Ashram, where the community was created on the basis of cooperation and mutual help.

For Gandhi, mass education means learning by doing. It enlivens everyone to live with human dignity and secondly, it equips everyone to be equal to the task of achieving and disseminating the inherent essence of education, without allowing any segregation of caste, creed, race, religion, sex, and color etc., only then education becomes a true vehicle of mass awakening and mass consciousness.

Gandhi said, “The Swaraj of my/our dream recognizes no race, or religious distinctions. Not it is to be the monopoly of lettered persons, not yet of duty of men. Swaraj is to be for all, including the former, but emphatically including the maimed and the blind, the starving, toiling millions, a stout hearted, honest, sane illiterate man may well be the first servant of the nation” (Gandhi 110). According to the functionalist theory the system of education arises from the common beliefs of society’s members, it is a product of collective effort, not individual, thought. Thus, a system of education, being a product of the collectivity, necessarily embodies those values that are expressed by the conscious collective (Steve 4). We see this idea reflect in Gandhian thought also. Education is the need and right of the society.

When Gandhi introduces the Spinning wheel as a characteristic component of mass education he has a clearer vision of better socialization of the masses than perhaps any other practical social thinker of his time. “The main aspect of his education through the idea of Swarajis not merely independence but essentially emancipation of individuality in the form of social synchronization” (Glyn 48). The merging of man and man is what Gandhi fervently believes and practices in mass education that demands a certain sense of sacrifice. For him, manual training along with intellectual training accentuates social revolution. The unending struggle for mutual service is indeed the key point of the Gandhian pattern of mass education. This is what Gandhi strongly feels and considers to be a very important factor.

For Gandhi, the word Swaraj means self-rule and self-reliance. Gandhi firmly believed that the real education for the people of India was impossible through the medium of a foreign language. If we follow an alien language it will lead to the neglect of the indigenous culture of the nation. It will alienate students from their mother tongue. And it will cut them off from their roots in the cultural traditions of their country. Gandhi asks why we use English as the medium of instruction in India when other nations are able to employ their own language. He was always against the English education. His concern with self-knowledge and self-identity was related to the knowledge of truth. And any violation of the self is a violation of Truth. He believed that the English education imposed a moral and intellectual injury on India.

The role of education is to help the people to become responsible and useful citizens of tomorrow. Here the responsible and useful citizens are those who have spontaneous love, care and concern for others. Those people are always committed to their duties and to quality and excellence in work. We need to inspire children to undertake self-development process to control the mind and direct it towards the higher dimensions of work and life, to achieve not just success, but consistent success and perfection, with bliss.

Along with reading, writing and arithmetical skills, we have to strive to acquire conviction in the power of values and goodness and the powers of discrimination and strength to direct all our thoughts, actions and goals towards achieving consistent success along with peace and joy. For this we have to get established in self-development processes to inculcate higher values and ideals (Sunil 194). Gandhi saw education as the most proper vehicle to make conscious the masses in India into given ethical standards before they could be said to properly exercise the freedom which he sought for the country. Mass education cannot be seen merely as a process of providing literacy and helping the people to find a livelihood of some kind. Mass education is essentially rendering help to the rural and urban masses to help themselves on the one hand and transform this self-help into the timely service of others in the locality.

We see that mass education lies at the very base of Gandhian education because education for Gandhi cannot be defined except with reference to the upliftment of the deprived classes of any kind. Any educational effort will bear genuine fruits only if such a thing attempts to bring about social welfare. India being a country with around 80 percent rural population the aspect of social welfare as central to all educational concerns becomes most evident. Mass education has its basis on value education with a thorough moral basis (Joseph 78).

He defines not only the different levels of education but also teachers, text books and so on. Gandhi desired that adult education must touch the life of all the villagers at all points. That means education must touch economic, hygienic, social and political aspects of their life. He wanted to drive out illiteracy and ignorance from the masses by selected teachers and selected curriculum. Villagers should acquire some useful knowledge through adult education. It should help to improve the living standard of the villagers. Then only education can meet its goal in a proper sense.

Gandhi criticized the prevailing system of university education in which the students have no participation, involvement or any other activities. In the words of Gandhi, "Today the youth educated in our universities either run after Government jobs. The aim of university education should be to turnout true servants of the people who would live and die for the country's freedom" (Fernandez 323). For Gandhiji, a realistic system of education should integrate the needs of the individual nation together with that of the humanity as a whole. It should ensure harmonious development of body, mind and soul. It should mobilize the past

experience and cultural assets. And it should incorporate within its fold the needs of the present and possibilities of the unfolding future. They are of the view that a good system of higher education will provide the nation honest, cultured, and self-negating and duty bound citizens.

In order to be socially useful, higher education must be geared to the following principles:

Free employment and free to work,

Maximum production of the national wealth,

Maximum national self-sufficiency,

Use of peaceful, non-violent, and democratic methods in solving problems, and

Decentralization of economic and political power (Rajammal 98).

Gandhiji favored a university which would be an extension and continuation of the Basic Education proposed by Gandhiji himself.

He says, "Education of the heart could only be done through the living touch of a teacher. I have always felt that the true text book for the pupil is his teacher, because children take in much more and with less labour through their ears than through their eyes" (Fernandez 325). In the process of education, a teacher can play an important role. Education becomes effective and faithful only to the extent to which there is personal touch between the teacher and the taught. Durkheim writes, "teaching is merely a shortened version of the intellectual culture of the adult. Teachers inculcate the ideals and knowledge of society in their students" (Steve4). Here a teacher has a key role in molding the character of a child. Gandhiji anticipated a non-violence personality in the teacher. He should have devotion to duty, to the students, and to God. He has to play the role of a mother. One who cannot take the place of a mother cannot be a teacher (Dash 269). The child should never feel that he is being taught; rather he should feel that the school is his own home. All the schools should become the second home to the children. All children should come to the school with much interest and enthusiasm.

Gandhiji believed that the true textbook for the pupils is their teacher. He did not want to load the student with innumerable textbooks. He has clearly observed, "if I have my way, I would certainly destroy the majority of the present textbooks and encourage textbooks to be written which have a bearing on and correspondence with homelife, so that a boy as he learns may react upon his immediate surroundings" (Siddiqui 103). Gandhi gives more importance to the character building of the children than the textbook learning.

To understand in depth the role that Gandhi played in improving the position of women in society, it is essential to look at women's status, prevalent at that time. When Gandhi emerged on to the political scenario, social evils like child marriage and dowry system were extensive. Death of women in labor was a common phenomenon. The percentage of women with basic education was as low as two percent. Gandhi considered women as the mother of the race. He

opined that English education is meant for men, and women will not profit it. Therefore he found it necessary to educate the women by a new technique (Sonal 33).

Education is important for enabling women to uphold these natural rights and to attain true knowledge. Gandhi emphasized education as one of the means to enable women to assert their right and to achieve emancipation from male domination. He taught a great lesson of fearlessness, which is the solution of women's problems. For Gandhi fear is the first impediment. To eradicate this fear we need the true knowledge. Only through education we can attain this.

Gandhiji was an idealist to the core. He wished to save the education from the four walls of class room. He has stressed the dignity of man, and the significance of values in life like an idealistic thinker. He wanted the ideals of useful citizenship to be encouraged through education. He found the most important aim of education is the formation of a sound character and the cultivation of purity of heart. He regarded the school as a co-operative community where students can learn lessons of love, justice, cooperation, understanding, equality, and brotherhood. With these ideals in view, students will grow into citizens who will form a society known as Sarvodaya Samaj in which the aim is to attain a new humanism based on non-violence and truth. By education Gandhi means a holistic development of a child and a man. He has tried to change our education system from framed to flexible. He understood the fact that if we assume the abilities are flexible, then education becomes flexible and liberal. His aim of education is correlative to his ideas of life. Gandhi emphasizes, "this education ought to be for the people a kind of insurance against unemployment" (Basant Kumar 317). He never wanted the child to be mere bread earner instead he wanted him to learn while he earns and to earn while he learns.

Gandhiji, our great father of nation was a man who lived and taught according to the needs and time. His vision and thoughts have helped Independent India to develop into a solid progress. As a social reformer, Gandhi wanted education to be a powerful medium for social change and development. Gandhi was of the firm view that unless the individual changes take place the social development is impossible. Hence, he gave utmost importance to character building and reshaping of the attitudes and values. For him true education does not consist in literacy training, but in character building. The education which does not fulfill this essential objective is utterly worthless. During his speeches to the students on various occasions Gandhi emphatically declared, all your scholarship, all your study of Shakespeare and Words worth would be in vain, if at the same time you do not build your character, and attain mastery over your thoughts and actions. This concept of Gandhiji regarding the aims of education is undoubtedly admirable and worth following even today.

True education and violence are fundamentally opposed to each other and true education can be given through non-violence and this is the central idea of Gandhi's education scheme. He held the view that the students must be trained to think independently. The weakness of the

present educational system in India is its failure in enlightening the conscience of the children. Over emphasis is given in developing competence, while character formation is neglected. The deterioration of values and an increase in violence are due to the absence of a holistic approach in education. Our education system and our authorities must realize the true spirit and sense of Gandhi's concept of education. It must be value-oriented rather than profit oriented.

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