

Educational Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi

Dr. Goutam Patra
Principal (WBSES)
gtmpatra21@gmail.com

Mahatma Gandhi believed that people have no idea about the true education because the value of education is assessed from the economic point of view. The parents provide their sons and daughters such type of education which enable them to earn money. But this is not the main objective of true education. The main objective of education should be the development of character. The nature of true education is defined as the formation of character.

‘ 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 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’.¹

Education Is not mere Literacy:

The pall Mall gazette, a well known journal in England narrates the nature of true education as it has given emphasis on acquiring good habits and the main function of teachers is not to teach the alphabet but to inculcate humanity.² Aristotle once rightly remarked that virtue can not be learnt by reading big volumes and virtue can be learnt by doing good deeds? Mere literacy is not education. True education is to face the challenges of life. Parents should provide such education and teachers should discharge their duties accordingly. Parents, Teachers and students all should recognize that mere literacy is not education .³

Education as Training: ‘Now I have read a great deal in the prison. I have reading Emerson, Ruskin and Mazzini. I have also been reading the *Upanishadas*. All confirm the view that education does not mean a knowledge of letters but it means character building, it means a knowledge of duty. Our own word literally means ‘training’. If this be true view and it is to my mind the only true view, you are receiving the best education—training—possible’

Education as Service:

Mahatma Gandhi opined that true education lies in serving others. ‘A great deal of religious obligations on us are fulfilled when we nurse the sick. He was not worried about the bookish learning so long as the students performed their duties and observed solemn ethical conduct. To him carrying out the fundamentals of ethics is duty. He told, ‘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.’⁴

Education as Laying strong Foundation:

Mahatma Gandhi considered education as the foundation of life. The ordinary meaning of education is a knowledge of letters. To teach boys reading, writing, and arithmetic is called primary education. He gave example of a peasant who earns his bread honestly but 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 rule of morality. But he cannot write his own name. What is the need of giving him a knowledge of letters.

He should not be made discontented with his cottage. He will not need such an education. He believed that a man 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. One who is truly educated 'whose intellect is clear, cold, logic engine with all 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 she of him. 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.'⁵

Education as Liberation ' 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 proved short- lived. The other kind of liberation is for all time.....the ultimate moksha.' ⁶

Education as assimilation:

Mahatma Gandhi expressed his opinion that It is the duty of students to assimilate whatever they have learnt. They should have religious and moral instructions 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.’⁷

Overcoming Fear:

‘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?’⁸

Learning vs. courage:

‘Let them (students) realize that learning without courage is like a waxen statue beautiful to look at but bound to melt at the least touch of a hot substance.’⁹

Education as Contemplation:

Mahatma Gandhi opined that education should contemplate the whole life. Mere memorizing and bookish knowledge is not education. He had no faith in the so-called system of education which produced ‘men of learning without the backbone of character.’¹⁰

True Education of the Child:

Mahatma Gandhi believed that true education does not mean a knowledge of the alphabet. Knowledge of alphabet is only a means to education. But true education implies a child's learning how to put his mind and all his senses to good use. He believed that a child who 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 true, while rejecting the bad and the untrue.'¹¹

Education and Culture

Culture is the refinement of feelings. Education makes a man cultured. Cultural progress achieved through education makes a society and nation healthy. '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 consciously imbibe culture from its family, in our country at any rate. Present-day education and culture have no connection with each other.'¹²

Development of Body, mind and Spirit:

'The English word 'education' etymologically means 'drawing out'. That means to bring out the best of the latent talents. Development of a certain thing does not mean the change its kind or quality, but it is to bring out the latent qualities .Hence 'education' means 'unfoldment'.

True education is something different. Man is made of three constituents, the body, mind, and spirit. True education leads the development of all these constituents. Spiritual development causes the development of soul force and will force. True education is that which leads to '*moksha*'.

The maximum development of body, mind and spirit is main objectives of true education. Physical development is realized when all organs of the body function effectively and become active at will. Filling a lot of information does not indicate the real development of mind. Well educated mind always serves in the desired manner and shows positive and adoptive health behaviour. Spiritual development brings enlightenment and enable learners for self realization.

“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 mind too, because it does not mean that the mind has developed if we have filled it with a lot of information. We can not 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 everyday? 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 pick-axe, 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 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 the modern curricula do not impart physical education in this sense.

This 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 sepulcher. Inside it there is only a corpse eaten up or being eaten by insects.” 13

Making the Right Choice

Mahatma Gandhi wanted to make a revolutionary change in the existing system of education. He suggested that this revolutionary change would be possible when hands on activities were given more emphasis. It would be miss

interpretation only if mind is given importance in the process of development. Development of hands and feet is not less important. Right type of education helps to think correctly and to discriminate between right and wrong , good and bad and to assimilate needs and for its right choice.

According to him, 'Our education has got to be revolutionized. The brain must be educated through the hand. If I were a poet, I could write poetry on the possibilities of the five fingers. Why should we think that the mind is everything and the hands and feet nothing? Those who do not train their hands go through the ordinary rut of education, lack 'music' in their life. All their faculties are not trained. Mere book knowledge does not interest the child's mind begins to wander. The hand does the things it ought not to do, the eye sees the things it ought not to see, the ear hears the things it ought not to hear, and they do not do , see, or hear, respectively, what they ought to. They are not taught to make the right choice and so their education often proves their ruin. An education which does not teach us to discriminate between good and bad, to assimilate the one and eschew the other is a misnomer.¹⁴

Making the Whole Man

Mahatma Gandhi believed that the true economics of education lies in this fact that making of whole man is possible through the harmonious development of body, heart and soul. He gave emphasis on the training of all organs of body and it is the quickest way intellectual development. He categorically emphasizes on the harmonious development of body and mind with corresponding awakening of the soul. According to him,

‘Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for the making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education... 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 words an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provide the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be 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 *paripassu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole. According to this theory, therefore, it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piecemeal or independently of one another.’¹⁵

Education of the hand

Mahatma Gandhi advocated the education of the hand. Training of hands is the source of skill development. So a socially useful productive handicraft is the heart of Basic Education.

Training of hands habituates man to think critically and creatively. Man becomes a creator of through the education of hand. He said, ‘Literary education should follow the education of the hand –the one gift that visibly distinguishes man from beast.’¹⁶

Self-supporting School

Mahatma Gandhi introduced craft centric education to make the schools self-supported. Thus learning of a productive craft followed by the related subject knowledge is the beginning of education. He says, ‘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 only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education. I would therefore begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handcraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. Thus every school can be made self-supporting, the condition being that the state takes over the manufactures of these schools.'¹⁷

Knowledge of Self

True education is the knowledge of the atman or true self. It is the knowledge of God and Truth. The study of literature, the study of sciences and the study of art have the same goal of knowledge of the self. Mahatma Gandhi says,

'True education is that which helps us to know the atman , our true self, God and Truth. To acquire this knowledge, some persons may feel the study of literature, some for a study of physical sciences and some other for art. But every branch of knowledge should have as its goal knowledge of the self. That is so in the ashram.'¹⁸

Strengthening of character

Real education does not mean packing the brain with so many facts and figures, It does not mean in passing examinations by reading numerous books. Real education is the developing of character. Without developing of character the pursuance of non-violence is impossible. Formation of character is the foundation of life. He says, "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 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 non-violence you will find that without character it will prove a profitless study."¹⁹

Culture as the Foundation

Mahatma Gandhi gave importance on the cultural aspect of education. He opined that the inner development of a person is reflected in his conduct. Ancient tradition and culture help in the formation of personal behaviour. The foundation of education is thus a glorious culture of nation. He says,

‘I attach far more importance to the cultural aspect of education than to the literacy. Culture is the foundation, the primary thing the girls ought to get from here. It should show in the smallest detail of your conduct and personal behavior, how you sit, how you walk, how you dress, etc., so that anybody might be able to see at a glance that you are the products of this institution. Inner culture must be reflected in your speech, the way in which treat visitors and guests, and behave towards one another and your teachers and elders.’²⁰

Education for a New World

Education is the way of creating a new world order based on Truth, tolerance, peace, non-violence and global harmony. He says, ‘Education must be of a new type for the sake of the creation of a new world.’³⁰ A new world based on mutual cooperation, mutual understanding can be created through the introduction of production oriented education. Students while engaged in productive work will be able to learn self-sufficiency, dignity of labour, mutual co-operation, social awareness, mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence of all living beings.

Nationalism

The main object of education is to bring national consciousness. A sense of oneness, is grown through the education. True education enables students to

serve for the progress of their own country. They do not look for their self-interest. National interest is given priority. National feeling is created through national type of education. According to him,

“Education is just means. If it is not accompanied by truthfulness, firmness, patience and other virtues, it remains sterile, and sometimes does harm instead of good. The object of education is not to be able to earn money, but to improve oneself and to serve the country. If this object is not realized, it must be taken that the money spent on education has been wasted.²¹

Public Good

Education is applied for the public good. The villagers apply the new invention of science and technology in the field of agriculture and cottage industry. Thus the development of village economy enhanced. Mahatma Gandhi says,

“Knowledge is justified only when it is put to good use and employed in the public cause. Otherwise, as we pointed out once earlier and as everyone will readily admit, it is like poison.²²

Service of Humanity:

Education is a tool that changes in the attitude of learners for the service of humanity. Self-less service, dedication to the welfare of humanity, personal ethics all the values can be imparted through the education. Mahatma Gandhi said that the students receive education not for their own benefit but for the service of their mother land.

“Their end was not to get more than a decent livelihood or how to shine in life, but to serve humanity in order to serve the mother land. The education they received ought not to be

prostituted to the base use of earning livelihood, it ought to be used to promote moral growth.²³

Purity of personal Life

Absolute purity of heart is the end of education. True education is for the purity of personal life. In the 'Gurukul' system of education the word student was termed as *brahmachari*. The *brahmachari* led a religious life and gain purity of heart . Personal ethics defined by the Vedas led them to form a good moral character. According to Mahatma Gandhi,

"Purity of personal life is the one indispensable condition for building a sound education. ...And I hope you know what the word *brahmachari* means. It means searcher after God. All our learning or recitation of the Vedas, correct knowledge of Sanskrit, Latin, Greek and what not will avail us nothing if they do not enable us to cultivate absolute purity of heart. The end of all knowledge must be building of character.²⁴

Quest for Truth:

True education helps to know the Atman, the true self, God and truth. This knowledge is gained by the study of literature, sciences and art. But every branch of knowledge should have as its goal, knowledge of the self. Devotion to duty and the spirit of service are necessary for proper development. According to Mahatma Gandhi,

"The first necessarily brings about development of the intellect. In doing any piece of work, however small, we should be inspired by a holy aim and , while doing it , we should try to understand the purpose which it will serve and the scientific method of doing it. There is a science of every type of work---whether it be cooking, sanitation, carpentry or spinning. Everybody who does his work with the attitude of a student knows its science or discovers it."

National character:

Mahatma Gandhi believed that true education develops national character. Courage, strength, virtue, working ability all these qualities are grown by the Basic education. These qualities help to form a strong character of the individual and the society will be built on the strong foundation. The nation will be developed maintaining healthy relation with the states if the individual character is developed. He says,

‘ I would try to develop courage, strength, virtue, the ability to forget oneself in working towards great aims. This is more important than literacy, academic learning is only a means to this greater end. I would feel that if we succeed in building the character of the individual, society will take care of itself. But in a nation where character is developed in all individuals, there can be no conflict between the dictates of one’s own conscience and those of the state.’²⁵

Self control :

Mahatma Gandhi considered education as self-control. He opined that education would lead a life of self-control. In a letter to Bhogilal he expressed his opinion.

‘True education is development. One Should, therefore, go in for such kind of education as will bring it about. It need not be of one fixed type. Hence it is not necessary to say anything on that subject. One should lead a life of self-control.’²⁶

Humility:

Mahatma Gandhi did not give emphasis on passing of examination or obtaining degree. He emphasized on learning to be properly used through humility. True education enables individual to achieve humility and service to others. In a

Speech at Dayaagram jethamal college, Korachi he emphasized on achieving humility of students.

‘With this introduction I would like to tell the students, boys and girls, that humility is the primary thing to be acquired. One who is not humble can not put one’s learning to proper use. What does it matter if he has obtained double first class or has stood first? One does not achieve everything by just passing an examination. It is possible that it may help in securing a good job or a good marriage alliance . But, if learning is to be put to proper use, if it is to be used only for the of service, one should acquire more and more humility every day. No service is possible without it.’²⁷

Development of Independent Thinking:

In a speech at Lahore Mahatma Gandhi advised students to acquire independent thinking and opined that learning is not for sensuous pleasures. Education liberates man and saves darkness, sensuous pleasure and false behaviour.

‘At present the minds of the students become dull there. They can only imitate. Instead of this, they must acquire the power of independent thinking. We are born into this world not for indulging in sensuous activities but for sacrifice, for restraint. We acquire learning not for sensuous pleasures and for earning but for *mukti*. Education is considered necessary to save ourselves from darkness, sensuous pleasures and capricious behavior.’²⁸

Nai Talim:

Mahatma Gandhi proposed a new blend of education . *Nai Talim* is a beautiful blend of Craft, art, health and education. According to him,

‘ Craft, art, health and education should all be integrated into one scheme. *Nai Talim* is a beautiful blend of all the four and covers the whole education of the individual from the time of

conception to the moment of death..... Instead of regarding craft and industry as different from education, I will regard the former as the medium for the latter.'40

Reference:

1. Gandhi M.K, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, Ahmedabad, Navajiban Publishing House, 1938, (P-32-33)
2. M. K. Gandhi, *True Education*, p. 38
3. Indian Opinion. 18 May 1907 (CW6. PP. 484-85)
4. Letter to Manilal Gandhi, 25 March, 1909 (CW9, P. 208)
5. Letter to Ramdas Gandhi (The Making of the Mahatma. P.97)
6. Hind Swaraj, Chapter xviii, 21 November, 1909(CW 10. PP.54-55)
7. Speech to students, Ahmedabad, 18 November 1926(CW 18, P.471)
8. Speech to Students in Bombay, 14 February, 1915(CW13, P.23)
9. Speech at students meeting, Agra, 23 November 1920 (CW19, P16)
10. Young India , 12 July, 1928, P. 236
11. Interview with W. W. Hall , October 1928 (CW37, P. 320)
12. Navajivan, 2 June 1929 (CW41, P.6)
13. Letter to Premabehn Kantak, 5 January, 1931 (CW 45, PP. 63-64)
14. Navjiban Education Supplement, 28 February 1926(CW30, pp. 58-59)
15. Discussion with teacher Trainees, Harijan,18 February, 1939(CW68, pp. 372-73)
16. Harijan, 8 May 1937 ,p. 104
17. Harijan, 8 March 1935, p. 28
18. Harijan, 8 May 1937, p. 104
19. Harijan, 10 July 1932 (CW 50,P.182)
20. Speech at meeting of students, Marseilles , Young India, 1 October 1931 (CW 47,P.422)
20. Speech at Kasturba Balika Ashram,20 April 1946 (CW 84, p.36)
21. Harijan, 1947, p. 494
22. Indian Opinion, 9 March 1907(CW6, p. 361)
23. Speech at Voorhee's college, vellore, 30 August 1927 (CW, pp.422-23)
24. From a microfilm of the Gujrati: M . M. U./II, 10 July 1932 (CW 50, p.182)

- 25. Remarks of mankind, 1932, pp. 104-05
- 26. Letter to Bhogilal, 20 February 1933 (CW53, p, 366)
- 27. Speech at Dayaagram jethamal college, korachi,10 july 1934 (CW58 , p.164)
- 28. 39. Speech at students' meeting, Lahore, 13 july 1934 (CW58,P. 183)