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Mahatma Gandhi and Basic Education

By

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Abstract- The present system of education has not been able to give right direction to the youths and it does not provide them affluent opportunities for their all round development to make them self reliant. Now-a-days the students are passing examinations and earning their degrees with first or higher divisions, but most of them are unable to become self reliant and incapable to face the challenges. So to overcome this condition there is a need of such education which was predicted by Mahatma Gandhi like ‘Basic Education’ or ‘Nai-Talim’. Gandhi realized that the basic education was an essential component to the structural and socio-economic imbalances that were badly affected. It was the treatment for all the ills and evils of the society in India. His idea on basic education not only changed the educational system of India but also led a social revolution. This paper aims to understand and review the principles of Gandhiji on basic education which are assessed from his several writings. Some important features of Gandhiji’s basic education are also described comparing present system of education.

Keywords: *Mahatma Gandhi, Basic Education, Nail Talim, Handicrafts, Social Change*

Introduction:

Education is the process of acquisition of knowledge, skills, beliefs and moral habits. The main aim of education is to make the people better and to let them develop their own skills and confidence which are needed for their life. It reduces the challenges faced by individuals in their life and helps them to learn how to earn. The more knowledge one gains, the more opportunities open for the individuals to achieve better possibilities in career and in personal growth. It opens the mind for different situations, which help to solve problems of life effectively and to think critically about the world. Basic education is the most empowering force in the world which creates knowledge, builds confidence and opens the door of opportunity eliminating all obstacles (Wikipedia). For children, it is their key to open the door to a better life. A child gets the first education from his own family, learns from the own environment and gather learning experiences from the school. It is a social process which occurs only in social environment and without it no one can acquire experiences. The role of basic education is to socialise individuals and to keep society smooth and stable. It teaches a child to observe, understand and realize. It teaches to act decently, to be creative, to develop skills and to learn more things about life so that when the child grows up, he/she uses the basic education to build a better quality of life. However, the modern educational system of India is incapable to achieve humanitarian and peaceful social life. The present system of education is unable to contribute much to the individual as well as social development. In order to bring some social changes, proper and quality education is very much required for all. In this context, Mahatma Gandhi’s scheme of basic education is

an alternative measure to establish a new social order. Gandhiji's principle on basic education would be able to inspire the whole world with his ideas of truth, nonviolence, peace and love. His idea on handicraft is very important as it represents the culture and tradition of any country. It promotes the heritage of a country through the use of indigenous materials. Anyone can spend their free time to learn the various techniques related to handicrafts and can earn money by utilising the skills. It preserves traditional knowledge and talents. It encourages self-employment which is the best method to fight against current unemployment situations.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- Understand and review Gandhiji's principle of basic education.
- Highlight some important features of Gandhiji's basic education and its relevance with present world.

Methodology

Some journals and e-contents relating to Gandhiji's model of basic education are studied. Several books on education are reviewed and some of Gandhiji's own writings are referred to find the significance of his ideas on basic education.

Basic Education according to Mahatma Gandhi

At Round Table Conference in London (1931) Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, also known as Mahatma Gandhi pointed out the ineffectiveness of the primary education system of India and the low percentage of literacy rate among Indian people. He blamed the policy of the British Government responsible for the pathetic situation in the field of mass education. Gandhiji described the main defects of the system of education as, "I am fully convinced that present system of education is not only wasteful but positively harmful. They would pick up evil habits. English has created a permanent bar between the highly educated few and the uneducated many." He further said, "let us now cry a halt and concentrate on educating the child properly through manual work not as a side activity but as a prime means of intellectual activity" (Maheswari). Mahatma Gandhi proposed his scheme of Basic Education (Nai Talim) in a well formulated approach to education in 1937 in his news paper 'Harijan'. In order to discuss different aspects of the scheme of education, an All India education conference was held in Wardha on 22nd and 23rd October, 1937. The conference is called Wardha Educational Conference and Gandhiji himself presided over the conference. After serious discussions, the following four resolutions were passed in the conference (Maheswari).

- 1) Free and compulsory education is to be provided for seven years on a nation-wide scale.
- 2) Mother tongue should be the medium of instruction.
- 3) The process of education throughout this period should have some manual and productive work and ability should be developed to engage them with handicraft work according to the environment of the child.
- 4) The proposed system of education would gradually be able to generate remuneration of the teachers.

Basic education or Nai Talim was based on the fundamental principle of "learning by doing". Gandhiji believed on action and hence his concepts of basic education can be classified as activity method or practical method. It was mainly a method of co-relation between book learning and doing activity through craft like gardening, weaving, spinning, carpentry, etc. According to him, a realistic scheme of education must be closely integrated with the physical and social environment of the student (Gandhi). He said, "It is called the new method of education, for it is not a foreign importation or imposition, but is consistent with the environment in India which is predominantly made up of villages. It believes in establishing equilibrium between the body, the mind and the spirit of which man is made. It is

unlike the Western type which is predominantly militarist, in which the mind and the body are the primary care of education to the subordination of the spirit. This is best done when education is given through handicrafts. The other specialty is that it is designed to be wholly self-supporting. It does not, therefore, demand an expenditure of millions on education.” (Harijan, 11-5-1947, p.147).

Some important features of Gandhiji’s Basic Education

According to Gandhiji and his philosophy, the important features of basic education may be listed as below.

- 1. Free and compulsory education for all-** Gandhiji wanted the basic education should be free and compulsory for all boys and girls between the ages of seven to fourteen. According to Gandhiji, “I am a firm believer in the principle of free and compulsory primary education for India. I also hold that we shall realize this only by teaching the children a useful vocation and utilizing it as a means for cultivating their mental, physical and spiritual faculties. Let no one consider these economic calculations in connection with education as sordid or out of place. There is nothing essentially sordid about economic calculations.” (Harijan, 9-10-1937, p. 292)
- 2. Mother tongue as medium of instruction-** Gandhiji, believed that the medium of basic education should be the mother tongue. Strong mother tongue foundation leads to a much better understanding of the curriculum as well as a more positive attitude towards school. Language and mother tongue play an important role in the development of personal, social and cultural identity of a child. Children with a strong foundation in mother tongue can have deeper understanding of the curriculum and develop confidence to tackle any situation. When children develop their mother tongue, they will develop other essential skills, love towards mother tongue and incline towards motherland.
- 3. Craft centred education-** Gandhiji emphasised on craft-centred education which had great importance in Indian scenario. In Indian scenario, craft would make education self-supportive as it is not possible to educate all citizens and provide them government jobs. So, the craft centred education would help to provide employment opportunity to all citizens and make them self-sufficient. According to Gandhiji, the method of training the mind through village handicraft from the beginning would develop disciplined mind. Such practical productive work in education would to break down the existing barriers of discrimination between manual and intellectual workers. The scheme would increase the productive capacity and utilise their leisure profitably also (Maheswari). According to Gandhiji (Prabhu) “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.” (Harijan, 10-11-1946, p. 394).
- 4. Development of creativity and critical thinking-** Gandhiji emphasised on the principle of 'learning by doing' which stimulates the individual's mind to think creatively and critically. His great emphasis on work-culture to the students from initial stage was to enable the students to start producing while learning. So, his primary aim of basic education was to utilise head, heart and hand rather than concentrating on reading or writing only. In July 1937, Gandhiji wrote in the Harijan, “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 handicraft and enabling it to produce from 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.” (Harijan, 31-7-1937, p.197)

5. **Emphasis on collaborative learning-** True education is a lifelong process which helps in cultivating the spirit of co-operation, tolerance, collaboration and a sense of responsibility. All these qualities are required for the development of human personality which can create the pleasant balance between the individuals and social aim of education. Gandhiji always emphasised on collaborative learning. Craft work helps a child to acquire collaborative learning skills and to realize the value of honest labour.
6. **Importance on moral education-** Gandhiji thought that the peace is essential for human life which can be attained through education. Peace can be attained only through morality and ethics. According to him, education must be based on ethics and morality. Gandhiji advised to all students to consider morality and honesty as essential parts of their education. He said, "Our system of education leads to the development of the mind, body and soul. The ordinary system cares only for the mind." (Harijan, 9-11-1947, p. 401). "I attach far more importance to the cultural aspect of education than to the literary." (Harijan, 5-5-1946, p. 120)
7. **Emphasis on character building-** Education is the most powerful weapon which helps to build genuine characters of a student. The goal of education should consist of character-building. The character-building includes the moral, intellectual and social behaviour of a student under all circumstances. A student should develop personality, compassion, kindness, fair-mindedness and the spirit of dedication by virtue of education. Gandhiji said, "When it is remembered that the primary aim of all education is, or should be, the moulding of the character of pupils, a teacher who has a character to keep need not lose heart." (Harijan, 1-2-1933, p. 3).
8. **Development of self reliance and patriotism-** The main purpose of basic education was to achieve an integral development of children and to create a sense of patriotism through practice of handicraft. Gandhiji desired that the basic education system should be self-supporting for every child by learning a craft or occupational skill for livelihood. He wanted education to ensure employment. He told "My Nai Talim is not dependent on money. The running expenses should come from the educational process itself. Whatever the criticisms may be, I know that the only education is that which is 'self-supporting'." (Harijan, 2-3-1947, p.48). He also said, "The teachers earn what they take. It stands for the art of living. Therefore, both the teacher and the pupil have to produce in the very act of teaching and learning. It enriches life from the commencement. It makes the nation independent of the search for employment". (Harijan, 11-5-1947, p. 145).
9. **Development of faith on Truth & Non-violence-** Gandhiji was always considered that non-violence is an important and essential part of education. Truth & Non-violence was the fundamental formula of Gandhiji's philosophy. Basic education too was also based upon the principle of truth and Non-violence. As he said "I want to see God face to face. God, I know, is Truth. For me the only certain means of knowing God is non-violence-*ahimsa*-love. I live for India's freedom and would die for it, because it is part of Truth. Only a free India can worship the true God. But my patriotism is not exclusive; it is calculated not only not to hurt any other nation, but to benefit all in the true sense of the word. India's freedom as conceived by me can never be a menace to the world" (Young India, 3-4-1924, p. 109).
10. **Awareness on Social Services-** Students should be involved in different community services to develop responsibility and create awareness on social services. Education must be based on social good, welfare for all and must uplift the human aspect. The basic education by Gandhi aimed at encouraging the spirit of service and self-sacrifice. Addressing the college students once he said (Shah) "Your education, if it is a vital thing, must shed its fragrance in your surroundings. You must devote a certain portion of your time daily to serving the people around in a practical manner. You must therefore, be prepared to take the spade, the broomstick and the basket. You must become voluntary scavengers of this holy place. That would be the richest part of your education, not learning by heart literary thesis." Mahatma Gandhi was a true social

worker fighting against the evils of society. He always said, if we want to do social work, we should start it by ourselves.

11. **Sensitise on Cleanliness and Untouchability-** Students should be sensitised on merits and demerits of cleanliness and the evils of untouchability. Gandhiji had been opposing untouchability and caste system from very beginning and putting relentless efforts to eradicate. He was arguing that Brahmins and untouchables were equal in his eyes. He was publicly rejecting the notion of high and low caste feeling. At the age of twelve, Gandhiji had disagreed his mother's warnings on not to touch an untouchable who used to clean their latrines in their house. He tried his best to break the centuries-old caste system and to remove the mark of untouchability from Hinduism. Gandhiji described (Prabhu) on his conception on Samagra Gramaseva in Harijan (17-3-1946, p.42) that "I will inculcate in them the importance of hygiene and sanitation, and when they come and ask me for a sweeper, I will tell them: "I will be your sweeper and I will train you all in the job."

Conclusions

Basic education is related to the basic needs and interest of the education for the development of a child. The aim of Gandhiji's basic education was to educate the students on crafts which would enable them to solve the problems of their livelihood and at the same time develop qualities of good citizenship. In Gandhiji's view, sound education must be rooted through the culture and moral value also. At present various educational committees are emphasising to make education job oriented and productive for self-employment. With the serious problem of educated unemployment situation among young men and women, the present educational system should be reformed on the spirit of Gandhiji's concept of basic education. Gandhiji's idea of basic education is valid and fruitful which may also be used as guiding principles in the present scenario. The modern education system needs to be reformed at elementary stage keeping in view of the moral value and employability features of the Gandhiji's basic education.

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