

Gandhian Concept of Education: A journey of Perspectives & Implementations

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Abstract: Gandhian philosophy and concept of education is the scheme of education for the free and modern India. It can be called as the first blueprint of national education system based on the vocationalisation of education connected with value-based mass education. It called for the integration of school with community to enable a child becoming social-oriented, cooperative and self-reliant. It is epoch-making because it was envisioned as per the need of the hour traversing the different path from the British Education system. The present study explores the philosophies of Gandhian Education in the light of Naturalism, Idealism, Pragmatism and its journey of relevance right from the first National Education Policy 1968 of India to the National Education Policy 2021 which aims at equipping its 962 million world's largest working population by 2030 with 21st Century skills along with the Agenda for Sustainable Development to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

The 2nd October, 2021 "Gandhi in Me Pledge" @pledge.mygov.in witnessed the overwhelming response by the people of India in taking pledge to resolute to follow discipline and practice righteousness in every aspect of life'. Over the years when the world is replete with crass commercialism, territorial wars, religious fanaticism, terrorism, Gandhiji has ceased to be a political leader who brought freedom to India. He has rather become an idea, a thought and a way of life to change the world to live with peace and harmony with others and the self. When a human being becomes an idea, he/she invariably influences all aspects of life. Gandhian philosophy of education has surpassed time and space. It was the need of the hour in the pre-independence era, it is the need of the hour in the third decade of 21st century. The Father of Nation had once said that we should effect a change in ourself in the same way as we want the world to effect a change.

Education has been defined and conceptualized veritably since human beings started rationalizing it in the perspectives of the time and era. When the onus was on the healthy body and healthy mind in 384 B.C., Aristotle defined it as 'sound mind in sound body'. The broader concept of education emphasizes it as a life-long process beyond the four walls of the classes. "It is a modification of behaviour and experience from different means of a source of education". It helps an individual to cope and adjust and adapt to the changing environment. When Nelson Mandela was fighting against Apartheid, he defined it as "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can change the world". Education in Mr. Mandela's time was a 'weapon' to 'change the world' and can be read as the termination of 'apartheid'. Vivekanand's concept of education is the 'manifestation of the divine perfection' existing within man. It is the divinity talked about in spiritual term. Education is the outcome of both formal and informal methods. Thus, education basically is the experiences gained throughout the life and their applications in making life meaningful & constructive to harmonize with the self, society and nation at large. The progressive aspects of society, culture, spirituality, politics & economy is the byproduct of education. So, when Gandhiji defines education, it reflects the gamut of education 'By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man--body, mind and spirit'. The concept is time immemorial to all time to come. Gandhian concept of education is pragmatic and multidimensional because it came from the experiences he had undergone in his life. The compilation of his writings on education has been done and edited by Bharatan Kumarappan comprising Basic Education (1951) and Towards New Education (1953). They are in the forms of speeches, letters, extracts from books etc. combined together to produce a coherent philosophy of education as a whole. His notion 'education for life, education through life and education throughout life'. It is a blend of Idealism, Pragmatism and Naturalism". (Attempt shall be made to explain the three aspects in Indian context and their practical applications in the rubrics of education both formal & informal in villages to semi - urban, urban and metros and the Education Policies of the Nation. It will also outline how education can help us to live a meaningful and constructive life against the challenges of day-to-day life.)

Idealism : Idealism is the core of Gandhian concept of education. Naturalism & pragmatism help it to translate the philosophy into practice. The ideal truth, non-violence and moral values are means to achieve the ultimate truth of self-realization. This philosophical approach incorporates the true reality and things that are to be worth knowing. False and misleading knowledge are to be discarded. Beauty, truth and justice are enduring & everlasting. They should be consciously rationalized to be imbibed and put to practice. Moral and spiritual education should be the integral part of the education system and should be dealt with the values in humanities, social sciences, art and literature. They should exercise upon the physical, spiritual, intellectual, moral, social and aesthetic aspects of life. Idea & the Ideal are the two broader aspects of idealism. "Idea means true and testified knowledge. An idealist does not consider material values. He is a person who idolizes 'mind and the self' (Educational system. Blogspot.com "Implication of Idealism in Educational System, A Narration on Education, Monday Sep 12, 2011)

When Gandhiji talks about Character building, Culture, All-round development and Cultivation of Higher Values of Life, the Idealism is at the forefront. Character-building is the inculcation of moral values of courage, righteousness, self-restraint and service to humanity. Cultural education and 'vocational education' go side by side. For all round development, the '3H's – the hand, heart and head of the child should be trained. The Gandhian philosophy of education comes closer to Dewey, Tagore, Pestalozzi and the progressive educationists. Gandhi ji advocates the practice of Self-restraint, self-realization, self-insight and self-analysis to establish a right 'balance between individual development and social harmony, spiritual and material outlook and physical and

intellectual development of an individual as the aim of education' (ibid) The ultimate aim of education according to Gandhi ji is ' to realize God'. This is the self-realization. This is Absolute Idealism that means 'complete and self-realized'. This is the merger of 'finite' into 'infinite'.

Pragmatism: Pragmatism literally means a theory or belief in terms of success in practical application. It is addressing problems logically and practically. In Gandhian philosophy, there is a reconciliation of practical and spiritual values. The Wardha scheme of education called 'Nai Talim' is the pragmatic aspects of education. Like Dewey, Gandhiji believed that the truth can be experimentally verified and curriculum should be activity-based. In his book "My Experiment with Truth" there are two types of truth—'relative truth' and 'absolute truth'. Relative truth is subject to experimentation and modification. The absolute truth God and it is final. The acquisition of knowledge by a child himself will help him to solve problems in future by himself only. The Project Method suggested by him is based on socialized activity in social setting. The basic craft method, learning handicrafts, is selected in terms of community craft. Thus, it will establish a social relationship with the community too. The knowledge acquired through activity-based learning will be utilized in understanding and controlling the social environment leading to the inculcation of social responsibilities. It paves the way for Sarvodaya means 'upliftment for all'. Teaching should be creative and productive activities. Training of senses, mental and physical development should be more focused in the frame work of curriculum. Correlation must be practiced in the teaching method and learning experiences. Syllabus must be vocational- oriented and each child should earn while he learns and vice-versa.

Naturalism : Naturalism came as a revolt against the traditional concept of education. The traditional concept gave very little freedom to a child bringing suffocation and aversion to learning. To a Naturalist, education should be imparted according to the nature of the child and in natural conditions to bring about natural developments at its best. The child should be encouraged to discover things on his own. This is a play-way method. This is what Montessori method is all about. Teaching and learning should be joyous, creative and spontaneous activities. The growth-process should be natural without any imposition and outside interference. The interest and aptitudes of the children should determine the educational program. However, the Naturalists believe in things as they are. They believe in actual things, in the materialistic world and deny the existence of spiritual world. The material world is the real world. It is governed by the system of nature. Man, who is the creation of the material world, must submit to it. Society needs an individual but individual does not need a society. The society restricts but the individual does not want any restrictions. Man is born good but the society corrupts him. So, the child should receive education according to the laws of nature, in natural surroundings on his own like Rousseau's Emile. These are the concepts of Physical Naturalists called Instinctivists.

On the other hand, Darwin and Lamarck are the Biological Naturalists who propagated the concept that man is the highest form of living organism in the evolutionary process. He has to struggle and survive as 'the fittest'. According to the biological naturalism, self- preservation is the first law of nature. Life is 'dynamic, ever-changing and ever-developing phenomenon. It is necessary that man must adjust himself to the changing pattern of life. Education must be 'for a change rather than for a stability'. This is why, education should be 'systematic, evolutionary and inter-related'. The French philosopher and Nobel Laureate Henri Bergson as a naturalist opines that 'man is endowed with life- force, elan vital, will-to-power, will-to -live, a creative impulse'. The biological nature of man consists of impulses, instincts and emotions, tendencies and propensities. The biological school lays great emphasis upon 'intelligence' which helps a child to deal with the experiences of life and help him to adjust to his environment. So, the real education stresses upon the 'modifications and trainings of the instincts and emotions. This view is accepted to modern educators. Only that knowledge is true which is derived by science. The child occupies the central position in the educative process so education should be child-centered. (Naturalism: Meaning, Principles and Contribution by Malik Shawal 'yourarticlelibrary.com)

The Naturalism in Gandhi's concept of education is more 'child-centered' than the 'craft-centered' of pragmatism. He believes that a child is good by nature. The harmonious development of a child is most important and can be brought about when he/she (the child) is given complete freedom. Restrictions in the form of time-table and syllabus as practiced .in traditional education would stunt the natural growth of children. The text -books without catering to the new concept of education and scientific-temper, should not be prescribed. However, he never minimized the importance of the text-books. Like Rousseau he believed that a child should be put to learning in the surroundings of nature, away from the restricted social atmosphere.

The Journey

Based on the recommendation of the Kothari Commission, the first National Policy on Education 1968 outlined the frameworks of Indian education system on the core issues of national integration, economic and cultural development and the expansion of the educational opportunities and quality of education at different stages with the onus on the development of science and technology and the cultivation of social and moral values. These were the needs of the hour after the much- awaited freedom of India. It followed the ideals of Vocational Education, "We recommend that work experience should be introduced as an integral part of all India education – general or vocational. We define work experience as participation in Productive work in school, in the home, in a workshop, on a farm, in a factory or in any other productive situation" (Report of the Educational Commission 1964-66, (Kothari Commission), (New Delhi, Ministry of Education, Government of India,1966) p. 7. Unfortunately this 'learning by doing' remained confined in the Report Card of School in the column of SUPW (Socially Useful Productive Work).However, education to develop the four aspects of personality – body, mind heart and spirit of Gandhian thoughts was carried out in the Education Policy. Teaching through mother tongue or regional language of Gandhi ji too was the part to the ' three-language formula' of this Education Policy along with the emphasis on values.

The 1986 National Policy on Education called for " special emphasis on the removal of disparities and to equalize educational opportunities" especially for Indian women, Schedule Tribes and the Schedule Caste communities. To achieve the social integration of Gandhiji, the policy called for providing scholarships and recruitment of SC & ST teachers. The child-centered approach in primary education was introduced for the first time along with 'Rural Universities model based on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi to promote social and economic development at the grassroot level in rural India." (National Education Policy 1986, National Informatic Centre. Pp 38-45)

1992 Modification of 1986 National Policy on Education only envisaged the conduct of Common Entrance Examination on all India basis and state level for admission to Technical and Professional degrees programs. It can be read as vocationalisation of education in the form of specialized education.

The National Education Policy 2020

Robotics, machine learning and artificial intelligence are the integral part of 21st century learning. The much-awaited New Education Policy 2020 has many constituents of Gandhian educational philosophy (Nai Talim) and the cores of Idealism, Pragmatism and Naturalism. The paradigm shifted from bookish knowledge and rote learning to 'holistic, integrated, inclusive, enjoyable and engaging' (Section 4 NEP-2020). "The emphasis upon the deeper learning from content-based to competency-based learnings by students (NEP- 4.6/7) and the acquiring the 21st Century Skills such as ability to process and test the ideas, creative, independent and critical thinking in problem solving, vocational skills, ability to understand ethics, human and constitutional values and their social impacts, empathy, adapting to change, co-relating the ideas to gain a better insights, building leadership skills, working with teams (OECD, UNESCO Working Papers on the Future of Learning NEP 2020) are the focus areas of the Gandhian concepts of education. "The Key overall thrust of the curriculum and pedagogy reform across all stages will be to move the education system towards real understanding and learning how to learn... The goal will be to create a holistic and well-rounded individual equipped with key 21st Century-Skills" reads the NEP-2020 document. This is the direction Gandhi ji wanted the education system leading towards. The classrooms are turning into students-centered from the century-old teachers-centered and the project-based, enquiry-based and case- based learnings are the application of knowledge-based learning called experiential learning (NEP-2020) and its intended outcomes are the 'craft-centered learnings' advocated by the Father of Nation almost a century ago. These were the integral parts of Wardha -Scheme of Education.

Early education in Mother Tongue, free, compulsory and universal education within the age group of 7 to 14 , basic education to help students to develop self-sufficiency were the essentials of Gandhian concepts of education. The 5+3+3+4 scheme of school education and the free and compulsory education to the age group of 6 to 14 of the NEP are the shadows of Gandhian Principles. Gandhiji's historic speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatam House, London on October 20,1931 had a scathing attack on the decline of education system under the British is worth quoting here " I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British Administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished." The British had destroyed the age-old tradition of the knowledge creation, transfer the new model to the next generation and its applications in the welfare of the people. Gandhi ji visualised it as 'delinking Indians from their history, culture and heritage' The new National Education Policy focuses upon linking Indians to their glorious past heritage. The educational policies of 1968,1986 and 1992 made efforts to bring reforms in the curricula, pedagogy and assessment propagated by Gandhi ji. However, it lost in the rat race for more marks and craze for English medium school.

Gandhi's heart of education was knowledge, skills and a personality to walk ahead in life with self-assurance, dignity and the spirit of adventure. His article in Young India (August 1,1921) underlined the defects in the erstwhile education system on three rubrics. First, it ignored the native culture being exclusively based on foreign culture; second, it emphasized the brain ignoring heart and hand and third it asserted that real education was impossible except in English medium. He advocated the acquisition of skills, character integrated with internationalization of moral, ethical, humanistic and constitutional values. The fundamental principles to guide the education system of today, the NEP-2020 has envisaged that the medium of instructions will be multilingual, mother tongue or local language, regional language up to Grade 5 but 'preferably till Grade 8 and beyond' both in Public and Private schools and teachings would be bilingual without any compulsion (4.11). Vocational and constitutional skills have been made as the integral part of curriculum. Hands-on learning, arts and sports-integrated education, story-telling based pedagogy and exploration of relationships among different subjects in the form of learning through internalization and experiences of this new education policies (4.7) have direct bearings from Gandhian concepts. Knowledge to the Mahatma was an application. Students must be inculcated in with moral and ethical reasonings through their experiences in life from, family, school and society to think independently. It will help them to decide about the 'moral dimensions of life and society'. The constitutional values of society such as equality, pluralism and justice would help students to 'act in a responsible manner by respecting others irrespective of caste, creed, gender, ethnicity, ability, economic status, local context and geographical regions' (p.62 P. Leadership: A handbook for Learning in School)

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Learning is the modern approach to learning which is the part of 21st century skill. It has replaced the traditional concept of learning through application of the concepts. It can be read as the extended concept of the Gandhian concept. The ultimate effect of education, in all its form and nuances, upon the 'mind body and spirit' shall be universal and beyond the periphery of time and space.

The journey of Gandhian philosophy of education will continue its journey to witness its unfolding and execution of the epoch-making principles. The ultimate effect of education, in all its form and nuances, upon the 'mind body and spirit' shall be universal and beyond the periphery of time and space. It has been conceived as a key to Sarvodaya , has achieved Sarvodaya and will indisputably lead to Sarvodaya.

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