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## GANDHI VIEWS ON EDUCATION IN THEIR OWN PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** Education is continues process which goes on whether school keeps or not. People learn anything before they enter into the school followed by continuity outside the schoolroom. They keep on learning even if the formal education comes to an end. Even during the hours of formal schooling ,the students learn much outside, which doesn't constitute a part of the planned curriculum. The student secures a great deal of education form the church, political discussion and also form Magazines, Newspapers, Radio and Television which are employed as a means of educating. Gandhi was undeniably one of the greatest proponents of modern education in India and his scheme of education sought to further the moral, individual, social, political and economic progress of man. His scheme of education aimed at the truthful and non-violent way of life and the ultimate goal of self- realization. His methods were simple and practical and this was evident in his scheme of education.

**Keywords:** Curriculum, Plato's Republic, Harmonious, Gandhi Philosophy, Materialism, Sarvodaya.

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**Introduction:** Education is one of the most defining features in the life of an individual. It enables one to acquire literacy, to analyze the situations with logic and wisdom and also use it greatly for individual as well as social development. Education, in this context, is more a way of life, a crucial instrument in character-building, which enables us to determine the course of our thoughts and actions and also achieve goals and ideals of life. It is this logic to which Gandhi attached greater importance. He was undeniably one of the greatest proponents of modern education in India and his scheme of education sought to further the moral, individual, social, political and economic progress of man. His scheme of education aimed at the truthful and non-violent way of life and the ultimate goal of self- realization. His methods were simple and practical and this was evident in his scheme of education.

### **Aims and Objectives:**

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- Gandhi's philosophy and aim of education
- Gandhi's efforts towards imparting basic and higher education
- the relevance attached to moral and spiritual development
- the significance of education as imparted to different sections of society

**Gandhi's Philosophy and Aim of Education:** Gandhi was a firm believer in the essential unity of man and all lives. His faith in God, truth and non-violence enabled him to lead a much disciplined life and attain a spirit of moral superiority in all his actions. He envisioned a society free of exploitation and injustice and a social structure based on moral and equitable principles. His steadfast reliance on his principles all through his life, even under adverse circumstances made it possible for him to translate his ideals into practice. In his work on the Educational Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, M.S.Patel aptly summarises Gandhi's philosophy of education in these words: 'with the object of realizing his ideal of a spiritual society as a stepping-stone to the realisation on God or truth, Gandhiji evolved an educational system as a dynamic side of his philosophy. There is a unity running through his concrete schemes and plans, making them a complete system of philosophy' (p.16).

What did Gandhi mean by true education if we were to understand his philosophy of education? Writing in *Harijan*, 1937, Gandhi explained as to what he understood by education: '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 woman can be educated'. Gandhi was more concerned with what the education has to offer to the individual in terms of development and not its tools and subjects. To him, education is also an 'awakening of the soul', and 'strengthening the inner voice'. True education, as he opined, brings about a harmonious functioning of the body, heart, mind and soul and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties. He felt that an undue emphasis on any one of these factors not only negates the basic principles of education but also retards the development of the self.

The above views of Gandhi coincide with 'bread and butter' scheme and aim of education, wherein education is put to use to acquire basic necessities of life. The fulfillment of basic needs obviously translates into aiming for higher ideals in life devoid of materialism. This scheme would act as an insurance against unemployment, wherein the individuals lead a self-supporting life, or turn to hereditary occupations. Learning while earning or vice versa is one of the basic components of the self-supporting system.

Gandhi attached much importance to the cultural aspect of education, wherein the inner culture must be reflected in one's speech and conduct towards others. Thus it is not an intellectual work but the quality of the soul. There is no room for pride, prejudice, vanity or falsehood in this culture. Gandhi successfully experimented with this scheme during his stay at Phoenix and Tolstoy Farms in South Africa. He himself directly supervised the education of children in the farms, and their all-round development. He laid greater emphasis on hand, heart and head than on reading, writing and arithmetic. Further, 'modulation of voice is as necessary as the training of the hand. Physical drill, handicrafts, drawing and music should go hand in hand in order to draw the best out of boys and girls and create in them a real interest in their tuition'. He played a great role in imparting such education and training to the young inmates of the Farms and shouldered the responsibility of training them via compulsory physical training through musical drill.

**Education and Personality Development:** The ultimate aim of education is character development, which is a sure stepping stone to nation-building. Gandhi propounded that one of the most essential qualities towards this end is the purity of personal life, which is 'an indispensable condition for building a sound education'. He rendered the recitation of Vedas, Sanskrit, Latin or Greek as irrelevant 'if they do not enable us to cultivate absolute purity of heart'. The end of all knowledge, according to him, must be building up of character. This formation of personal and spiritual character constitutes the part of his concept of holistic education. Gandhi himself serves as a fine example of this concept, constantly attempting to emerge as a better human being. As Mukalel observes, 'Not only had Gandhi a concrete conception of such a personality but also he possessed a personality of the kind he wanted others to develop (p.198). To quote him again, the Gandhian conception of personality is a holistic personality in which every aspect, attitude and aptitude is given a balanced development and his concept of education puts the highest importance on the formation of the individual's personality which will be capable of subsuming the highest and ultimate ideals of human life (p.198).

**Character-Building:** The Gandhian vision of education, as mentioned earlier, has character-building as one of its aims. It is the education that guides and enables an individual to develop into a better human being and provides direction in the diverse aspects of human development. Gandhi made several references to religion as the sole guide from which he drew various examples to mould his attitude and views. Similarly, education, he felt, is the right medium in directing the formation of character. Altruism and other centredness constitute some of the pillars of human character. This is ingrained in the concept of service to others, including community service and service to the needy and deprived sections. Thus, he deemed that the development of inner nature was a necessary element in character.

#### **Basic Education:**

**Wardha Conference on Basic Education, 1937:** Gandhi envisaged a social order devoid of exploitation and the one based on non- violence, truth and a morally upright one. This was scheme of Swaraj, wherein

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education has a primary role in determining the future of the younger generation. Gandhi's ideas on education, called the Basic National Education scheme, which he had been voicing in Harijan for many years, have been put forward in the All India National Education Conference in Wardha on 22<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1937. His ideas were a departure from the orthodox thinking and were revolutionary in those prevalent times. His questions revealed the concern he had regarding the education system: (1) English was the medium of instruction, creating huge gap between the highly educated and the many uneducated. Emphasis should be laid on mother-tongue as medium of instruction (2) absence of vocational training and manual training (3) wasteful expenditure on primary education with little or no result. Gandhi proposed the extension of primary education for atleast seven years, introducing of profit-yielding vocation, introduction of spinning, carding, dyeing, tailoring, toy-making, book-binding and paper making, making the State Universities look after the arena of education and making them examining and self-supporting bodies. Gandhi dealt with both primary and higher education in his proposals and insisted on rooting out exploitation and following non-violence.

**Nai Talim/ New Education:** Gandhi displayed a keen sense for change in the education pattern and discussed at length as to the genesis and implementation schemes. He referred to it as the synthesis between vocation and education as he had viewed it. In this context, he reiterated the necessity of both vocational and literary training; he realised the importance of literary training through vocational training for it would then cease to be drudgery and also literary training would have a new content and new usefulness. Gandhi did not assign primary importance to the English language but insisted on learning one's own language first, thus stressing the need to impart education in one's mother-tongue. He had enormous reservations regarding English education and opined that 'to give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them'. He was also of the opinion that the English-knowing Indians have not hesitated to cheat and strike terror into people (Hind Swaraj, 1908, ch. 18).

**Experiments in Education:** Gandhi's experiments with education began during his stay in South Africa. John Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' made a profound impact on Gandhi. He was deeply impressed by the concepts of the good of all and that the life of a labour is the life worth living. He radically translated his impressions towards living a simple life and thus started the Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm with community living as one its basic principles. The Farms soon converted into little villages with many of the inmates following an ethically right and self-supporting community living, with the reduction of material requirements. Gandhi himself took up the training and educating of the boys and girls, who belonged to different communities.

**Champaran Schools:** Champaran, the land of indigo plantations, presented the dismal state of living and abject poverty and ignorance. While the workers led a pathetic life, their children too were engaged in work for a pittance. The villages were afflicted by unhealthy and unhygienic conditions. Gandhi undertook the onerous task of transforming them through a group of committed workers. He opened primary schools in six villages and instructed the teachers to impart lessons in hygiene and health, moral habits and good manners, apart from teaching of language and numerals. The volunteers imparted self-help programmes, launched medical drive to treat ailments, improved health and surroundings, and constantly endeavoured to sensitise the villagers about good living conditions. Gandhi's efforts towards transforming the rural areas serve as an example of the true purpose of education.

**Gujarat Vidyapith:** The 'National University of Gujarat' or Gujarat Vidyapith, as is popularly known, was established in 1920 and serves as a perfect example of a National University as visualised by Gandhi. It was a protest against British injustice, and a vindication of national honour. As Gandhi said, 'it draws its inspiration from the national ideals of a united India'. It aimed at the 'unique ideal of achieving a united India shedding all the caste and communal differences' (Mukalel, p.101). With a highly value-oriented education as its base, the university became the centre of Indian vedic culture and education, and fostered the students as Satyagrahis in the process of attaining Swaraj and future nation-building. Gandhi himself taught the students and explained the significance of all religions. Gandhi envisioned the university as a symbol of nationalist ideas and wanted other universities to emulate the Vidyapith.

**Message to The Students:** Gandhi's 'Message to the Students' envisions their role in nation-building and service to society. Time and again, Gandhi apprised them of their constructive role in determining the future of a society based on the principles of truth, non-violence, moral and human values. He considered fearlessness as the most fundamental quality without which the goals of Swaraj and Swadeshi remain unfulfilled. He campaigned for spirituality as the highest virtue in this materialistic civilisation and society and taught the students virtues of such values. Love for motherland, mankind and mother-tongue are crucial elements that need to be fostered. Gandhi advised the students to get rid of the infatuation with the English language and not let the Western culture and standards encroach upon their life.

One of the most scintillating examples of Gandhi's teachings to the students includes their service to villages. He wanted them to penetrate into villages and find an unlimited scope for service, research and true knowledge and realise the importance of a rural civilisation. 'It cannot and should not be replaced with urban civilisation. Instead of memorizing their lessons during vacations, the students should reconstruct their life, and pass everyday of their vacation in villages surrounding their colleges and high schools'. Gandhi believed in the sanctity of rural life and was against any form of urban civilisation overtaking the former completely. He drew up model code for students and advised them to take part in the Constructive Programme. Finally, it is apt to conclude with what he expected from the students in their national service. A student, Gandhi said, 'must be the embodiment of simple-living and high thinking. He must be discipline-incarnate. His pleasure should be derived from his studies. What can be a greater pleasure than that a student marches from knowledge to more knowledge?' (Harijan, 17-8-1947).

**Summary:** Gandhi's concept of education is highly relevant to this day. He had clearly voiced the concerns of the deteriorating education system, about the necessity of craft-centred training, building up of character, issues of unemployment, student unrest and relevant message to the students. To this day, many of these issues have remained unaddressed, inspite of several educational reforms. Akin to the issue of politics, Gandhi did not annul the relation between religion and education. Rather, it was a constructive means to inculcate cultural and moral values as prescribed in various texts and the best way to practice the virtues. With the moral and spiritual values taking a backseat, the educational standards as envisioned by Gandhi have been taking a downward slide. The only plausible answer seems to be a national regeneration of the Gandhian values that would highly unburden the system from its inherent contradictions.

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