



# EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF MAHATMA GANDHI WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CURRICULUM OF BASIC EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

M. K. Gandhi, the lovely and very good minded universal person, who was born in India in the modern age. He stressed on traditional spiritual attitude with the total development from education, which is related to modern age of the world with reference to India. Gandhi is the politician, the philosopher, the socialist and the educationist. He lives with the accumulation of Karmayoga and Gyanyoga. The thought of Gandhi on Education is the basic way of life for all. An attempt has been made to analyze the impact assessment of educational philosophy of Gandhiji, with special reference to curriculum of basic education. This study is primarily empirical as well as analytical in nature covering the areas of Gandhiji's educational philosophy such as view of life, historical background of basic education, meaning of basic education, main features of basic education and curriculum of basic education. This paper also tries to examine general merits and demerits of basic education and its relevance in modern society with the help of scientific outlook. He wanted a silent social revolution through basic education which does not stand for mere technique rather it stands for a new crafts-centered approach full of spirit and self realization which always seeks truth. Finally a critical evaluation is made on the basis of relevance of basic education in present times of Gandhian educational philosophy.

**KEYWORDS:** Educational Philosophy, Mahatma Gandhi, Basic Education, Basic Craft, Scientific outlook.

### Introduction:

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a man considered one of the great sages and prophets. He was held as another Buddha, another Jesus, Indians called him the 'Father of the Nation'. They showered their love, respect and devotion on him in an unprecedented measure. They thronged his way to have a glimpse of him, to hear one word from his lips. They applied on their foreheads the dust on the path he had trodden. For them, he was almost an incarnation of God, who had come to break the chains of their slavery. The whole world bowed to him in reverence. Even his opponents held him in great respect.

### Gandhiji's View of Life:

Gandhiji's philosophy of life has a deep spiritual basis and the two pillars of his thoughts were obviously 'Satya' and 'Ahimsa' – 'truth' and 'non-violence' – a happy combination of 'Karmayoga' and 'Gyanyoga':

- 1) **Realization of Truth:** A devout worshipper of truth, Gandhiji firmly believed that no religion is possible without truth. In his view, God is absolute truth. He said, 'I have no God to serve but truth..'
- 2) **Non-violence (Ahimsa):** Ahimsa is the only way, Gandhiji suggested, that can lead us to the ultimate destination of life. Satya and ahimsa are the two sides of the same coin.
- 3) **Realization of God:** Mahatma Gandhi believed in Ekeswarabad and thought that only through the medium of God, the manifestation of truth, love, life and knowledge if possible.
- 4) **Sarvodaya Society:** According to Gandhiji, completion of life is attained through the fulfillment of soul, and for this purpose a favorable society if needed. What he sought was a spiritual society set on the foundation of freedom, justice, equality, love, peace and non-violence.

### 5) Combination of karmayoga and Gyanyoga:

Gandhian philosophy is a fine blending of gyan and karma, knowledge and work. He said, 'By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man- body, mind and spirit. According to him, the purpose of life is to acquire spiritual knowledge to self-control and activity (Varkey, 2010; Malik, 2013).

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BASIC EDUCATION:

First, we shall discuss the historical background. The Government of India Act, 1935 came into force in 1937. According to the Act, Congress Ministries were formed in seven provinces in India. Prior to this Congress had been strongly pleading for free, compulsory and universal education. After having the power the Congress had to implement it in action. Gandhiji was the leading figure of the Indian political scene and he came forward to meet the situation. Gandhiji was fully conversant with the deplorable condition of education in the land. For improving this condition he advocated a scheme of primary education based on Indian traditional culture through the medium of mother tongue. But this required a huge sum of money which meant fresh taxation. The situation was further complicated as Mahatma Gandhi promised to introduce total prohibition which again meant the loss of a huge amount of revenue. Congress was committed to both 'prohibition and compulsion'. To end this dilemma Gandhiji put forward the proposal that the plan of mass education need not be held up for want of funds. Free and compulsory primary education could be given to every child if the process of schooling could be made self supporting by imparting education through a useful and productive craft. Gandhiji expressed his views on education through a series of articles in 'Harijan' in June 31, 1937, which later on developed into the Wardha Scheme of Basic Education. The views of Gandhiji created controversies in the academic circles. Therefore it was desirable to get the scheme examined by experts and educationists. Finally, Gandhiji placed his Basic Education System to the nation in the Wardha Conference in 1937.

### MEANING AND PHILOSOPHY OF BASIC EDUCATION :

The word 'Basic' is derived from the word 'base' which means the bottom or the foundation of a thing upon which the whole thing rests or is made to stand. Mahatma Gandhi wanted to make the foundation of the educational edifice strong. It is with this objective that he put forward this scheme. This scheme of education is based on the national culture and civilisation of India. It aims at making a child self-reliant by enabling him to use his acquired knowledge and skills in practical affairs of life. Basic education has close relationship with the basic needs and interest of the education as the child is the focal point of education. The central point of this scheme is some handicraft, whose teaching will enable the student to solve the problems of his livelihood and at the same time develop qualities of good citizenship. In Gandhiji's view, sound education must be rooted in the culture and life of the soil and therefore he strongly pleads for relating education to the environment.

Gandhiji's definition of education gives an insight into his philosophy of education. Now, what is education according to Gandhiji? By true education he means an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man, body, mind and spirit. For Gandhi mere literacy is not the end of education not even the beginning. It is only one of the means by which man and woman can be educated. Therefore, he attaches little value to literacy in his scheme of Education.

Gandhiji was a practical educational philosopher and an experimentalist to the core. His experiments with truth and education were the instrument for the realisation of his ideal in life. In several of his educational experiments he tried to translate his philosophy into achieving the reality of the evolution and establishment of an ideal society.

Gandhiji keenly wanted to create a new social order based on truth and non-violence. This can be brought about only through a silent social revolution. He believed that revolutionary change in the educational system can help to bring this silent social revolution. The scheme of Basic Education does not stand for mere technique, it stands for a new spirit and approach to all education.

### MAIN FEATURES OF THE BASIC EDUCATION :

The followings are the main features of the Basic Education-

- **Free and compulsory education :**

Gandhiji wanted education to be free and compulsory for all boys and girls between the ages of seven to fourteen. He evolved a scheme of education which would be in harmony with the culture and civilisation of the Indian people and which would solve the problem of mass education in a practical way.

- **Education through Craft:**

The basic idea of this scheme is to impart education through some craft or productive work. Craft work helps the child to acquire sensor and motor co-ordination and to appreciate the value of honest labour. Gandhiji was of the opinion that the method of training the mind through village handicraft from the beginning as the central focus would promote the real, disciplined development of the mind. The advantages of making craft as the centre of education as listed by the Zakir Hussain Committee are as follows-

- ,Psychologically, it is desirable, because it relieves the child from the tyranny of a purely academic and theoretical instruction against which its active nature is always making a healthy protest.,
- ,Secondly, the introduction of such practical productive work in education, to be participated in by all children of the nation will tend to break down the existing barriers of prejudice between manual and intellectual workers harmful alike for both.,
- ,Economically, carried out intelligently and efficiently, the

scheme will increase the productive capacity of our workers and will also enable them to utilise their leisure advantageously.,

- , From educational point of view, greater concreteness and reality can be given to the knowledge acquired by children through craft as knowledge will be related to life.,

- **Self supporting aspect of the Scheme:**

The self supporting aspect of the scheme may be interpreted in two ways-

- (a) Education that will help one to be self supporting in later life,
- (b) Education which in itself is self supporting.

The basic idea of Gandhiji was that if the craft chosen is taught efficiently or thoroughly, it would enable the school to pay the cost of salaries of teachers. At the same time his aim was to accord dignity of labour and ensure modest and honest and livelihood for the student after leaving school.

- **Medium of instruction:**

One of the resolutions that was adopted at the All India National Conference at Wardha was that education must be imparted through the mother tongue. In this connection, the Zakir Hussain Committee's observation was that the proper teaching of the mother tongue is the foundation of all education. Without the capacity to speak effectively and to read and to write correctly and lucidly, no one can develop precision of thought or clarity of ideas. Moreover, it is a means of introducing the child to the rich heritage of his people's ideas, emotions and aspirations.

- **Ideal of citizenship:**

Another important feature of the basic scheme is the ideal of citizenship which is implicit in it. It aimed at giving the citizens of the future a keen sense of personal growth, dignity and efficiency and social services in a cooperative community. The Zakir Hussain Committee envisaged that the new generation must at least have an opportunity of understanding their own problems and rights and obligations. A completely new system is necessary to secure the minimum of education for the intelligent exercise of the rights and duties of citizens.

- **Flexible-Curriculum-and-free-Environment:**

The flexibility of the curriculum and free environment for the child to perform according to his own capacity are another remarkable features of basic education. Under this scheme the teachers and students are free to work according to their interest and there is no compulsion for completing a prescribed portion due to fear of examinations. Necessary changes may be introduced in the curriculum if a situation demands. Thus, whatever the child learns according to his interest and capacity is permanently remembered by him. The teacher is also free to organise necessary environment for the development of the child.

### CURRICULUM OF BASIC EDUCATION

Wardha education conference in 1937 suggested the basic education for children between 7-14 years of age and curriculum has also been suggested accordingly. A large emphasis was given on general science for boys and on home science for girls. The following are the major subjects suggested in conference ‡

#### 1. Basic Craft :

Basic Craft has an important place in the curriculum. He wanted to impart education through the medium of craft. The Basic Crafts to be included in the curriculum are agriculture, spinning, weaving, cardboard, wood and metal work, carpentry, gardening, lather work, etc. The craft is to be selected as per the local condition and needs of the society.

**2. Mother tongue:**

Mother tongue occupies a unique place in his scheme of education. He was of the opinion that mother tongue but not English should be the medium of instruction in Indian schools. He favours mother tongue because the child grasps the content clearly and communicates his ideas and understanding effectively and naturally.

**3. Mathematics:**

Mathematics is to be taught to enable the pupils solve numerical and geometrical problems related to craft. It is inevitable for day-to-day life.

**4. Social Studies:**

Social sciences like History, Geography, Civics and Economics are to be included in the curriculum.

**5. General Science :**

Science subjects like Botany, Zoology, Chemistry, Astronomy and Physics are to be taught.

**6. Art, Music and Drawing :**

These subjects should find a place in curriculum to enable each pupil to express his creative and innovative ideas in practical and developed form.

**7. Domestic Science :**

For girls, Gandhiji prescribed a separate curriculum. He says that domestic science should be taught to girls to enable them acquire certain skills which would be very much necessary to a good house wife.

**8. Hindi for that area in which it is not the mother tongue.**

If you observe minutely the above curriculum you will find the following characteristics:

- i) English has not been included as a subject of study.
- ii) Although the medium of instruction is mother tongue, all students must learn Hindi language.
- iii) There is no place for religious and moral education in the curriculum
- iv) The craft chosen must not be taught mechanically, but systematically and scientifically keeping in view the social significance.

**MERITS OF BASIC EDUCATION :**

Now we are familiar with every aspect of Basic education. In order to have a better insight and a total view of the system it is necessary to make an objective analysis of them. First we shall discuss the merits of the system and these are:

The scheme is financially sound and acceptable in a poor country like India, where about half of the total illiterate people of the world reside. It is helpful for rapid expansion of elementary education with less burden on public exchequer.

- It is also economically productive as it is based on the principle of work. Work occupies the central place in basic education. The system is production oriented and helps in the programme of national economic reconstruction.
- The system was able to remove class and caste distinction. It helps to bring social solidarity and national integration.
- It also removes the barriers between the educated and the non-educated, between manual work and intellectual work, between the rich and the poor and village and the town.
- Basic education is activity-centred education. The child is not a

passive learner but an active participant in the learning process. It fosters learning by doing. Thus, instruction is not passive, and the child learns through a productive and useful craft.

- Basic education is child-centric. The child is the centre of activity. It primarily considered the constructive and creative instincts of children.
- Basic education is based on sound educational principle of correlation, where all educational activities are correlated to a basic craft. Correlation also takes place between physical environment, social environment and craft work.
- The system is based upon the cultural and social heritage of the land. As such, it inculcates social and moral values in the minds of the students.
- It is truly an education for the whole man. It aims at a harmonious development of the body, mind and soul.
- Basic education system recognises the dignity of labour.
- It recognises the importance of mother-tongue as the medium of instruction at the elementary stage.
- It inculcates democratic values like co-operation, responsibility, fellow-feeling in the minds of the students, which are essential for proper functioning of a democratic social order

**DEMERITS OR CAUSES OF FAILURE OF BASIC EDUCATION :**

Let us now examine the causes of the failure of Basic education in India: why it has failed to become a permanent and lasting feature of our educational system. After the independence Basic scheme of education made good progress for about a decade but gradually due to several difficulties it failed to make much headway. The causes may be summarised below-

- The self supporting aspect of Basic Education received severe criticism in the academic circle. Teachers, social leaders and educational administrators had shown an indifferent attitude towards it. It was argued that the scheme turns a school into a centre of small scale industry. Moreover, teachers had to depend upon the earnings of the students. This had a demoralising effect on teacher-pupil relationship.
- Too much emphasis on craft had led the neglect of liberal education. Very often the craft is not properly selected from the point of view of education and social significance and teaching through craft had become just a slogan.
- Another criticism levelled against Basic Education was that a single craft can and should not be the basis of the entire educational process. It may not help in the development of liberal education and thus would create an imbalance in the educational system between vocational and intellectual education.
- The method of correlation as technique of instruction was not stressed and sincerely followed. Correlation is no doubt a sound principle of education but correlation of the subjects through craft may appear to be sometimes unusual and time consuming.
- Basic Education is often regarded as inferior type of education meant for the poor villagers. It has nothing to do with the urban people, who usually sent their children to modern type of schools. The general public had no confidence in basic schools because of the degraded social value accorded to it. Thus Basic education failed to become an integral part of our national system of education.

- Basic Education can in no way help in the progress of modern scientific and technological development of the society, which was the need of the day. Rapid changes and modernisation of our society can only be possible through the application of modern science and technology in the fields and factories.
  - Lack of finance and the absence of sound administrative policy was also responsible for the failure of Basic Education. Practically there was no coordination between the official and non-official agencies engaged in the organisation and development of Basic education.
  - Teacher occupies the central position in Basic Education. Lack of adequate supply of efficient, trained and sincere teachers was one the most important cause for the failure of this scheme of education. Suitable orientation and training of teachers of basic schools was highly needed, which was rare. The majority of the teachers had no faith in this system.
  - The concept of Basic Education as an educational theory and practice is unique and unquestionable. But its implementation was far from satisfactory. The Education Commission 1964-66 fully recognised the importance of basic education and incorporated in its recommendations many of the fundamental features of basic education. Work experience, community living, social service, integration of academic knowledge with experience, vocationalisation of education, education for moral and spiritual values have been recommended by the Kothari Commission. As a step for modifying the secondary school curriculum, in Iswarbhai Patel Committee of 1977 had given a new terminology as Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW), which demarcated a distinct curricula area. The committee opines that education should be work-centred and socially useful and productive work must be given a central place in the curriculum at all stages of school education and all academic subjects should be related to it. All these changing concepts originated from Gandhiji's Basic Education. The unesco Commission on Education in its report known as , Learning to be,, has adopted the term , Basic Education,, for primary education and emphasised that , education must cease being confined within school house walls, and many forms of social and economic activity must be used for educational, purposes.,,
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Thus, it is quite justified to say that the fundamental principles of basic education are still valid and fruitful in the context of our present educational reform. They are relevant to be used as guiding principles of modern education. In fact, it needs to be reformed on modern lines then it may serve as one of the most interesting and fruitful techniques of instruction at elementary stage.

#### Conclusion :

Although the people of middle and upper class of the society underestimated the system of basic education but still undoubtedly Gandhiji demonstrated a new scientific outlook through this new educational planning (i.e., Nai Talim). In spite of various drawbacks, his socio-economical concern in it can never be neglected. The failure of it was caused by its mechanical application. It is not the fault of his theory.

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