

Gandhi's Concept on Education and Its Relevance in the Present Day

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The Purpose of Education

I have been involved in the university system for more than 30 years. I used to interact with a large number of under-graduate students in the colleges and universities. I used to go to the colleges and universities to address students as a Vice Chancellor. Society has always been criticizing and doubting the purpose of education. What is the purpose of education in society? Dr. Radhakrishnan in his address today discussed the relevance of Gandhism and Buddhism in the cyber age. I used to talk in my lectures about the dehumanizing and alienating aspects of education. I used to tell students, particularly high-school and college-age students, about the dehumanizing aspect of the established types of education being offered.

In my lectures, I used to give an example of a highly educated brother and his almost illiterate brother. When something unpleasant happens, such as a fire or a bus accident, in the immediate vicinity of this illiterate brother and the highly sophisticated and educated brother, the moment the illiterate brother hears about this accident, he will run to that place as a sort of reflex action. The educated brother, he will ponder the situation and remark, "I will not go at any cost." He will even try to prevent his illiterate brother from going to that place and offering help to the victim. He will say, "Don't go there as there will be problems." The educated brother probably will not go to that place: He will wait to find out what happened the next day: Probably he will send a condolence message to the family of victim, or if he is one of the highly educated and sophisticated types of people, he will send a condolence message through the newspapers. That is an example of the type of education we are offering. Today, I will concentrate my remarks on Gandhi's views on education, with particular reference to India, and I will touch on some aspects of the Buddhist view on education.

This alienation, this dehumanization aspect of the established types of education is happening in India because we do not understand Gandhi's views on education. Dr. Radhakrishnan has also made passing remarks

on the tension being created among the educated youth because of the established types of education and the over domination of science and technology. It is not the over domination of science, but it is probably the misinterpretation of science and technology that is the underlying cause for much of the tension.

We have heard about several of the educational reports contained in the UNESCO Report on Education that examines the different types of tension that are being created in educated individuals. The tension that exists between tradition and modernity is a very significant tension. This tension between tradition and modernity is not a new thing. Right from the start of the industrial revolution, this tension between tradition and modernity has been there. Not only in education, but also in the Arts, Literature, and our day-to-day dress, these tensions exist. Then there is the tension between materialism and spirituality, or you can call it the tension between science and religion. There is also a tension in the area of development, for example our view about long-term development and our short-term requirements. There is a feeling that science and technology can solve our problems immediately, and naturally, we resort to immediate, short-term solutions, neglecting the long-term views on development, thus, naturally causing concern in realms of the environment, ecology, and other areas.

If modern education is creating tension between these areas of concern, we definitely need to build consensus because of the way in which education is imparted. When people ask me about the purpose of education, or to define education, I refer to what Mahatma Gandhi said several decades ago. He said, "... education for life, education through life, and education throughout life."

Gandhi's Views on Education

These were the words he used. When I was working in the university in Kerala and I saw the different types of disturbances occurring on campuses. I used to say that literally we have taken life out of education. Everybody is doubting the purpose of education. Education is for life, life in its entirety and then education through life. This is not happening at all today. Education is only being provided through our so-called lectures and in the laboratory. Education throughout life is not happening at all. Of course, we are trying to supplement this education by using artificial means. Education throughout life: As teachers, we can say that once we get the qualifications, once we get our degree, we stop our education and do away with further study. I think nowadays we have several different types of education, whatever adjective we put before the word edu-

cation, it is a different discipline altogether. This definition of Mahatma Gandhi would comprise everything that can be conceived under education. Education for life, education through life, and education throughout life. That the concept of life has been taken away from education is precisely the reason for the dehumanizing, alienating aspect of education.

I used to say that literally lives are taken away from the campuses because of the physical clashes among the members of the student body. This is happening in India. Hence, when we give life in its entirety as part of education, Gandhiji's views on education are realized, and this act of instilling life into the education process is the solution for any kind of educational development for this country. I have just mentioned some random thoughts on his views of education and how these views are relevant for any society, any country for that matter.

To bring about a change in society, which is really a stupendous task, especially in a country where considerable disparities in income persist and ignorance and illiteracy widen the gulf between the elite and the masses. In a developing society like India, each one adopted a planned approach towards development, where education becomes a key agent of socio-economic reform. As the famous education commission of 1964–66, the Radhakrishnan Commission, observed; “for achieving change on a grand scale the only effective instrument is education. Education does initiate changes in social institutions and sub-systems, and this affects the social situation of the country.”

Gandhi's Scheme of Education

In the Gandhian constructive program, the most important element is ‘*Nai Talim*,’ or the new education, which in the words of Acharya Kripalani, “... is the coping stone of Gandhi's social and political edifice.”

Gandhiji regarded his scheme of education as spearheading the silent social revolution and expected it to provide a healthy relationship between the city and the village, which would go a long way in eradicating the poisoned relationship between the classes. This view was affirmed by various other scholars and thinkers in the field of education.

Zakir Hussain once commented on Gandhi's views on education. He wrote, “... Gandhi socially considered the introduction of such practical productive work in education to be participated in by all.” The children of the nation will tend to break down the existing barriers of prejudice between manual and intellectual workers and harmful elites to both. Such is the social significance of the so-called new educational concept of Gandhi, but it does not entail any sacrifice of the individual goal of

education or its social goal. Gandhiji had said, "by education, I mean an overall all around drawing out of the best in child and man, in body, mind, and spirit." This concept of education serves both goals at the same time. The application of Gandhi's concept of education was first suggested for children between the ages of 7 and 14. This is called basic education. This was later on extended to all the stages. Gandhi felt that it should include the education of everybody, at every stage of life; including the university stage. The Sarvodaya thinkers accepted the whole idea underlying the new educational concept of Gandhi, including its social and individual aims.

Gandhi laid the foundation of a scheme of national education that was suited to our needs, requirements, genius, and aspirations for the future. It is left up to us to perfect it and extend it to cover the entire field of education. In this process, adjustment and adaptation may be necessary, but these actions must be undertaken in the spirit of the total philosophy of Gandhi, that is, for the individual and the society. Whatever may be its merits and demerits, we should not forget that education to Gandhi meant inspiring the children with a new ideology based upon personal purity and unselfish service, resulting in the creation of a society based upon truth and love. This is precisely the Buddha's concept also.

Basic education stands for a new outlook, a new approach. The fountainhead of all the conflicts in the world is that knowledge has been separated from work. They have been separated in thoughts by a faulty psychology. They have been separated in life by a faulty sociology. They have been assigned different market values by faulty economics. One of the basic principles of education is that work and knowledge must never be separated. Separation of learning from labor results in social injustices. In dynamic societies, education has to equip individuals with the skills and attitudes necessary for them to adapt to changing conditions, and for constructive participation in the task of social change. This is possible only through the adoption of a suitable educational system.

Gandhi believed that education should be intimately related with human experience, "... what better book can be there than the book of humanity?" he asked. The convergence of ideas and action was the key note of his approach, which was national in scope, as he wanted to present an alternative to the system introduced by the British colonial system. He stressed that the educational system must be one in which the highest development of mind and soul is possible and which instills courage and self-reliance in the individual, while at the same time, helping them cultivate the highest intellectual scientific, moral, and ethical accomplishments. Gandhiji aimed at developing a society, "a socially

conscious 'man' dedicated to truth and nonviolence." His educational scheme was nationalist in setting, idealist in nature and pragmatic on one hand while social in purpose and spiritual in intent on the other hand. It was also an essential instrument for materializing his dream of *Sarvodaya Samaj*, in which the vertical and horizontal distance between people is reduced to a minimum. Gandhi formulated his scheme of basic education in the context of poverty, illiteracy, backwardness, frustration, and the degeneration of our masses, resulting from the disruption of traditional social institutions and the destruction of the small-scale cottage industry.

He says that we must draw out the best in adult and child, as I mentioned earlier. This radical scheme was geared up, checking the progressive decay of our villages, reviving the village economy, laying the foundations of a just social order, in which there is no unnatural division between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' and everybody is assured of achieving acceptable standards. The basic educational scheme was an essential ingredient of Gandhi's plan to eliminate the rural-urban divide and redress the structural and socio-economic imbalances that were about in Indian society. Gandhi also addressed the issue of free education. By free education, Gandhi did not mean an education fully supported and subsidized by the state or other outside agencies. Instead, he implied a system that had the maximum possible capacity of self-support from the people's work experience, which is both an instrument of education and a source of income. The Gandhian system was free in another sense also: It did not regard formal, full-time schooling of the pupil as essential. He had very specific views about secondary and higher education. There is a feeling that Gandhi was against research, higher education, etc.

He had very specific ideas about research, higher education and the accumulation of knowledge. In Gandhi's scheme, higher education performed the essential function of providing training and properly motivating human power for national needs and there was an urgent need for the purposive expansion of such education. I would like to conclude with a quote from Gandhi. He declared, "... under my scheme, there will be more and better libraries, more and better research institutes. Under, it we should have an army of chemists, engineers, and other experts who will be the real servants of the nation and answer the varied and growing requirements of the people who are becoming increasingly conscious of their rights and wants."

Several critics say that Gandhi was only concerned with primary and basic education. This was not true. He had very specific views of higher

education. Of course, I have a few more points to cover, which I will take them up with you later during the discussion session.