



## MAHATMA GANDHI AND EDUCATION

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### Introduction

**Education** is very important for an individual's success in life. Education provides pupils teaching skills that prepare them physically, mentally and socially for the world of work in later life. Education is generally seen as the foundation of society which brings economic wealth, social prosperity and political stability. Education helps in maintaining a healthy society which prepares health care professionals, educated health care consumers and maintaining healthy population. Education is major aspect of development of any modern society since if there is a deficit of educated people then society will stop its further progress. Government should pay serious attention to education and support it economically and morally all over the country.

**Education** involves gathering of knowledge in whatever aspects. It helps a person to draw the best out of their mind and spirit. Education plays a vital role in the personal growth and the social development among all of us. It imparts us with all the power and necessities in making a noticeable mark in any of the field. In all in all, it is one's education which decides what one can make out in their life. With the high urgency of education among all people, many of the nations have already come up with their ideas in maximizing the literacy among all.

**Education** is usually understood as a course of study to acquire a body of knowledge or skills undertaken to enhance one's ability. The more liberal definitions of education, where it is understood as development and refinement of one's personality, without necessarily an eye to economic advantage, have been out of use for long, and one finds only scattered instances of the practice of education with such aims.

**Education** in its broadest, general sense is the means through which the aims and habits of a group of people lives on from one generation to the next. Generally, it occurs through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts. In its narrow, technical sense, education is the formal process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills, customs and values from one generation to another, e.g., instruction in schools.

**Education** is a broad concept, referring to all the experiences in which students can learn something :

- **Instruction** refers to the intentional facilitating of learning toward identified objectives, delivered either by an instructor or other forms.



- **Teaching** refers to the actions of a real live instructor designed to impart learning to the student.
- **Teaching** refers to learning with a view toward preparing learners with specific knowledge, skills, or abilities that can be applied immediately upon completion.

### **Education and World Thinkers**

In modern times, we make use of a number of progressive methods of teaching and a variety of audio-visual aids, to make classroom teaching effective and attractive. But upto the seventeenth century, there was no systematic organization or arrangement for imparting education to children. Schools in those days were very few and those that existed, were the terror of pupils and the slaughter-houses of mind. They followed no methods and used no aids. Every teacher had his own methods to follow. Severe punishments were given to pupils and all types of rods, canes and sticks were used for this purpose. The early educators, if any, 'had confined their education to the training of the governing classes of the community and until the time of Comenius, it was only idealistic. There were many who could hazard the suggestion that all in their childhood be instructed in learning in their native tongue'. During the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a number of educationists were born who, in fact, revolutionized education. Rousseau, Froebel, Montessori and Dewey are the most prominent among these.

### **Gandhiji's Life History**

Mahatma Gandhi was born as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi on October 2, 1869 at Porbandar, located in the present day state of Gujarat. His father Karamchand Gandhi was the Diwan (Prime Minister) of Porbandar. Gandhi's mother Putlibai was a pious lady and under her tutelage Gandhi imbibed various principles of Hinduism at an early age.

In 1883, all of 13 and still in high school, Gandhi was married to Kasturbai as per the prevailing Hindu customs. For a person of such extraordinary visionary zeal and resilience, Mahatma Gandhi was by and large an average student in school and was of a shy disposition. After completing his college education, at his family's insistence Gandhi left for England on September 4, 1888 to study law at University College, London. During his tenure in London, Mohandas Gandhi strictly observed abstinence from meat and alcohol as per his mother's wishes.

Upon completion of his law degree in 1891, Gandhi returned to India and tried to set up a legal practice but could not achieve any success. In 1893, when an Indian firm in South Africa offered him the post of legal adviser Gandhi was only too happy to oblige and he set sail for South Africa. This decision alone changed the life of Gandhi, and with that, the destiny of an entire nation. As he descended in South Africa, Gandhi was left appalled at the rampant racial discrimination against Indians and blacks by the European whites.

Soon Gandhi found himself at the receiving end of such abuse and he vowed to take up the cudgels on behalf of the Indian community. He organized the expatriate



Indians and protested against the injustices meted out by the African government. After years of disobedience and non-violent protests, the South African government finally conceded to Gandhi's demands and an agreement to this effect was signed in 1914. A battle was won, but Gandhi realized the war that was to be waged against the British awaits his arrival in India. He returned to India the next year.

After reaching India, Gandhi traveled across the length and breadth of the country to witness firsthand the atrocities of the British regime. He soon founded the Satyagraha Ashram and successfully employed the principles of Satyagraha in uniting the peasants of Kheda and Champaran against the government. After this victory Gandhi was bestowed the title of Bapu and Mahatma and his fame spread far and wide.

In 1921, Mahatma Gandhi called for the non-cooperation movement against the British Government with the sole object of attaining Swaraj or independence for India. Even though the movement achieved roaring success all over the country, the incident of mob violence in Chauri Chaura, Uttar Pradesh forced Gandhi to call off the mass disobedience movement. Consequent to this, Mahatma Gandhi took a hiatus from active politics and instead indulged in social reforms.

The year 1930 saw Gandhi's return to the fore of Indian freedom movement and on March 12, 1930 he launched the historic Dandi March to protest against the tax on salt. The Dandi March soon metamorphosed into a huge civil disobedience movement. The Second World War broke out in 1939 and as the British might began to wane, Gandhi called for the Quit India movement on August 8, 1942. Post World War, the Labour Party came to power in England and the new government assured the Indian leadership of imminent independence.

The Cabinet Mission sent by the British government proposed for the bifurcation of India along communal lines which Gandhi vehemently protested. But eventually he had to relent and on the eve of independence thousands lost their lives in communal riots. Gandhi urged for communal harmony and worked tirelessly to promote unity among the Hindus and Muslims. But Mahatma's act of benevolence angered Hindu fundamentalists and on January 13, 1948 he was assassinated by Hindu fanatic Nathu ram Godse.

### **Gandhi's Thoughts on Education**

Written way back in 1916, Gandhi's Hind Swaraj, which is a critique of the then much hailed "modernism", has a chapter on Education. Very unambiguously, he explains his strong views on the system of education introduced into India by the British. He himself was a beneficiary of this system but he claims that he had to unlearn what he learned from this western education in order to fulfill his dharma.

In order to appreciate his views – which will appear outlandish to us, as it did to his readers then – we too, will have to, like Gandhi, liberate our mind from the conditioning that it has been subjected to by the legacy of four centuries of colonization. This is what he had this to say about the western concept of education (Gandhi's



quotes in bold italics followed by my limited efforts to understand/interpret his views).

Mahatma Gandhi believed that education is very important for development and well of individuals as well as of a society. He also had very specific views about methods of education. For example he believed in education that aims at overall development of individual rather than just learning of facts and figures relating to different subjects. At the same time he did not favour religious instructions as a part of formal education system of a nation. He believed that imparting of religious education should be left to religious organization. He favoured making education job oriented. He believed that the education system should prepare individuals to take up useful jobs in the society.

He was opposed to use of punishment in schools. Also he was against making young children learn alphabets mechanically. He said that language is an art burdening young children with such mechanical learning, which appears quite meaningless to them tends to create an aversion towards language.

There is no clear evidence to show that any ideas of Gandhi about education system have been implemented in India or anywhere else directly as his ideas. However, indirectly ideas of Gandhi have resulted in education receiving high priority in India, and in making education system more progressive as compared to practices in the past.

#### **Gandhiji's Thoughts - Relevance to Present Scenario**

The relevance of Gandhiji's views on education in free India will never dwindle but will only increase as the years go by since even after 65 years of freedom from foreign rule, India has not been able to realize even a tenth of his dream.

Gandhian vision about education in modern India was iconoclastic. Gandhiji was so revolutionary in his outlook that he even advocated the abolition of formal educational institutions. He once said that it was superstition to suppose that knowledge could be obtained only by going to Schools and Colleges. "The world produced brilliant students before Schools and Colleges came into being. There is nothing so ennobling or lasting as self-study. I do not wish to decry Schools and Colleges as such. They have their use, but we are making altogether too much of them. They are but one of the many means of gaining knowledge", he pointed out.

This iconoclastic vision about educational institutions is quite relevant to the present context in India. More and more people are thronging at the gates of colleges and returning disappointed. All applicants cannot be accommodated. And the number of applicants seeking higher learning is bound to increase by leaps and bounds in the decades to come. No amount of money expended on higher educational institutions will ever suffice. Self-study, study from nature and life's experiences, wherever possible, through an open-learning system-open schools and universities will be the solution to this problem in the 21st century. Such a system alone can meet the rising demand for higher education in countries such as India with very huge population.

#### **Conclusion**

To sum up, a review of Gandhian thoughts on education and the situation in



the present and future decades will enable us to draw some basic lessons beneficial to the next centuries. They are :

1. Craft of vocation - centred education at the primary and secondary levels is a must in the place of the present literary type of liberal education started in the colonial period. But craft or vocation is only the means to an end, the end being the building of citizens with character and courage of convictions since the individual was the one supreme consideration to Gandhiji.
2. Education while serving to build citizenry with character should also make the citizens aware of the need for reconciling the claims of the individual with those of the society. "Extreme individualism means the negation of community and of all claims upon independence".
3. While Primary and Secondary education with emphasis on vocational training and character building must be state-aided, higher education must be left to private initiative and based on the needs of the nation as a whole. Education must also aim at creating those conditions conducive to the promotion of such productions and production of such goods that will help fulfill the basic needs of the nation removal of poverty, provision of employment and healthy living conditions and a general atmosphere where everyone will have enough for his need but not for his greed, all will live in peace.
4. An educated person is one who is aware of his rights as well as his responsibilities; one is willing to fight for his as well as others basic human rights for the common good of society; one who conscientiously works for the creation of living conditions where every citizen has equal rights and no one tries to destroy general peace and healthy environment for amassing wealth for himself and his family.
5. Education should never be denied to anyone who has the mental equipment for it even when he does not have the physical and economic means to attain it.
6. Men and Women must have equal opportunity for education and they must be free to pursue courses of instruction in which they are especially interested for the sake of the betterment of society.
7. Education must always be an ennobling experience that helps men and women to discover the best in them and use all their capabilities for the sake of others in society, especially those who are less fortunate than themselves in social, economic and natural capabilities.
8. There ought to be emphasis in the curricula of education at all levels on human



dignity, dignity of labour, equality of all human beings, human rights and responsibilities, equality between men and women, freedom from morally unsupportable activities, freedom from actions that destroy nature, and a strict adherence to non-violence and truth.

9. Education must be supported by private initiative.

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10. Specialized technical education should be supported by government and industry whenever such education had definite use for specific government projects and industrial activities beneficial to society.

11. Vast amount of the so-called education in the arts, given in our colleges, is sheer waste and has resulted in unemployment among the educated classes. This type of education has destroyed the health, both mental and physical of those who have gone through it.

12. The products of education in free India should meet the requirements of the country. They should by strenuous efforts, emancipate themselves from the educational, economic, social and political bondage, imposed by centuries of foreign domination.

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