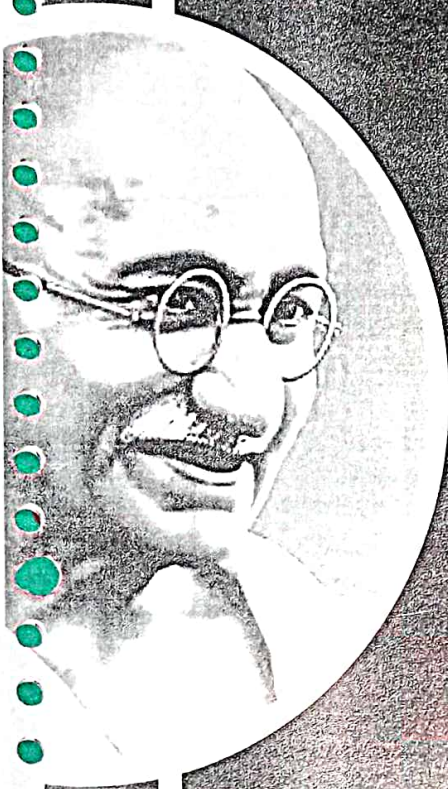


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UGC Sponsored
One Day National Interdisciplinary Seminar
On

RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN THOUGHTS AT PRESENT ERA

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Mahatma Gandhi and his concept of education

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Gandhi developed the satyagraha a new non-violent way to redress wrongs. In 1930, Gandhi proclaimed a new campaign of civil disobedience in protest at a tax on salt, leading thousands on a 'March to the Sea' to symbolically make their own salt from seawater.

In 1931, Gandhi attended the Round Table Conference in London, as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress, but resigned from the party in 1934 in protest at its use of non-violence as a political expedient. He was replaced as leader by Jawaharlal Nehru.

It was not until the early years of this century, when he was in his middle thirties, that he became so opposed to English education that he could write about 'the rottenness of this education' and that 'to give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them ... that, by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation'.

He was enraged that he had to speak of Home Rule or Independence in what was clearly a foreign tongue, that he could not practice in court in his mother tongue, that all official documents were in English as were all the best newspapers and that education was carried out in English for the chosen few. He did not blame the colonial powers for this. He saw that it was quite logical that they would want elite of native Indians to become like their rulers in both manners and values. In this way, the Empire could be consolidated. Gandhi blamed his fellow Indians for the situation.

Later in his life he was to declare that 'real freedom will come only when we free ourselves of the domination of Western education, Western culture and Western way of living which have been ingrained in us. Gandhi had not only rejected colonial education but also put forward a radical alternative.

First of all, Gandhi absolutely opposed to modern machinery. In his collected works, he refers to machinery as having impoverished India, so the internal market should furnish locally produced hand woven goods. However, he notes that where cloth mills were not introduced in India, in places such as Bengal, the original hand-weaving occupation was thriving. Where they did have mills e.g. in Bombay, he felt that the workers there had become slaves. He was shocked by the conditions of the women working in the mills of Bombay and made the point that before they were introduced these women were not starving. He maintained that 'if the machinery craze grows in our country, it will become an unhappy land'.

So doing, we shall save our eyes and money and support swadeshi and so shall we attain Home Rule'. Within this context of the need for a machine-less society, Gandhi developed his

ideas on education. The core of his proposal was the introduction of productive handicrafts in the school curriculum. The idea was not simply to introduce handicrafts as a compulsory school subject, but to make the learning of a craft the centre piece of the entire teaching programme. Knowledge of the production processes involved in crafts, such as spinning, weaving, leather-work, pottery, metal-work, basket-making and bookbinding, had been the monopoly of specific caste groups in the lowest stratum of the traditional social hierarchy. Many of them belonged to the category of 'untouchables'. India's own tradition of education as well as the colonial education system had emphasized skills such as literacy and acquisition of knowledge of which the upper castes had a monopoly. Gandhi's proposal intended to stand the education system on its head. The social philosophy and the curriculum of what he called 'basic education'.

Firstly, a poor society such as India simply could not afford to provide education for all children unless the schools could generate resources from within. Secondly, the more financially independent the schools were, the more politically independent they could be. Above all else, Gandhi valued self-sufficiency and autonomy. These were vital for his vision of an independent India made up of autonomous village communities to survive. It was the combination of swaraj and swadeshi related to the education system.

A state system of education within an independent India would have been a complete contradiction as far as Gandhi was concerned. He was also of the opinion that manual work should not be seen as something inferior to mental work. He felt that the work of the craftsman or labourer should be the ideal model for the 'good life'. Therefore it should be carrying out education of the whole person – mind, body and spirit.

The teacher is in the part of the school's daily curriculum. Gandhi wanted to free the Indian teacher from interference from outside, particularly government or state bureaucracy. Under colonial rule, the teacher had a prescribed job to do that was based on what the authorities wanted the children to learn. Textbooks were mandatory so that Gandhi found that 'the living word of the teacher has very little value. A teacher who teaches from textbooks does not impart originality to his pupils'.

Gandhi's plan, on the other hand, implied the end of the teacher's subservience to the prescribed textbook and the curriculum. It presented a concept of learning that simply could not be fully implemented with the help of textbooks. Of equal, if not more importance, was the freedom it gave the teacher in matters of curriculum. It denied the state the power to decide what teachers taught and what they did in the classroom. It gave autonomy to the teacher but it was, above all, a libertarian approach to schooling that transferred power from the state to the village.

Therefore Gandhi's basic education was an embodiment of his perception of an ideal society consisting of small, self-reliant communities with his ideal citizen being an industrious, self-respecting and generous individual living in a small co operative community.

For informal educators, we can draw out a number of useful pointers. First, Gandhi's insistence on autonomy and self-regulation is reflected in the ethos of informal education. Gandhi's

conception of basic education was concerned with learning that was generated within everyday life which is the basis on which informal educators work. It was also an education focused on the individual but reliant on cooperation between individuals.

There is also a familiar picture of the relationships between educators and students/learners: A teacher who establishes rapport with the taught, becomes one with them, learns more from them than he teaches them. He who learns nothing from his disciples is worthless.

In this way, a true teacher regards himself as a continuous learner of his students. If you will teach your pupils with this attitude, you will benefit much from them. Lastly, it was an education that aimed at educating the whole person, rather than concentrating on one aspect. It was a highly moral activity.

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