



Mahatma Gandhi's Contribution to Education

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ABSTRACT

On economic, political and military grounds, India was of first rate importance to the British and education was the instrument by which they sought to maintain and strengthen their domination by experimenting with a unique model of educating an elite through a foreign language. However, contrary to the popular belief, English education was not forced on the Indians. Rich Indian citizens had actively come forward in setting up the system as the only way to modernize their society. So much time was spent in mastering English language by the Indian School boys that the main purpose of education was missed. The premium on rote learning and examinations was so high, that the growth of inquisitiveness and an experimental bent of mind, so necessary for economic development, were not cultivated. But more important was an invisible and quite change in attitudes and values of viewing education as a social welfare activity for girls and an investment for boys. As an outcome, the system concentrated on a centralized and uniform higher education.

Keywords: British, education, Indians, citizens, economic development, attitudes

India's recorded and unrecorded culture and civilization are rare features in the course of world history. Today, along with modernization, it is very much a part of our living culture, at every level of the society, as well as a documented testimony to the greatest strength of education, which catapulted the Indian Civilisation to its zenith. Perhaps few other cultures and civilizations have produced such courageous, saintly and visionary role models such as Radhakrishnan, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Mira Bai, Rani of Jhansi, Netaji Subas Chandra Bose, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sant Kabir, Sant Ram Das, Mahatma Gandhi, to name a few.

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His Contributions: Gandhiji's model was not only holistic and practical, it was highly decentralized and integrated, with a demonstrated capacity to motivate the entire community and place responsibility and accountability at the community level versus the State. To highlight just a few of his contributions.

An Investment in Human Capital: On economic, political and military grounds, India was of first rate importance to the British and education was the instrument by which they sought to maintain and strengthen their domination by experimenting with a unique model of educating an elite through a foreign language. However, contrary to the popular belief, English education was not forced on the Indians. Rich Indian citizens had actively come forward in setting up the system as the only way to modernize their society. So much time was spent in mastering English language by the Indian School boys that the main purpose of education was missed. The premium on rote learning and examinations was so high, that the growth of inquisitiveness and an experimental bent of mind, so necessary for economic development, were not cultivated. But more important was an invisible and quite change in attitudes and values of viewing education as a social welfare activity for girls and an investment for boys. As an outcome, the system concentrated on a centralized and uniform higher education.

Since, the system of education had little use for the masses, there were inadequate facilities for children aged between 6-11 years as well as poor enrolment. In many ways the situation hurt the girls more than the boys. Gandhiji, who viewed education as an investment in human capital, warned against this system because it disorganized villagers, made them helpless and paralyzed and steadily sunk them into poverty, unemployment and despair (Gandhiji, 1937). Instead, productive skills were the focus of his Nai Talim (Basic Education), providing food, shelter and clothing as the three basic essentials for human survival and security.

Given the impact of radical changes in Societies the world over, brought about by the Industrial Revolution, Gandhiji's Philosophy of education was based on his findings derived from scientific research of theories of economic, political and child development (both Western and Oriental), and his successful experiments in South Africa. One of those radical changes was the removal of manufacture from households into factories and shops. The work done at home offered lifelong educational, socialization, communication and vocational benefits to the family members. It kept unemployment and crime rates low. The spirit of cooperation and respect prevailed, which is what Gandhiji tried to revive in his model.

Concrete Definition to Aims, Goals and Objectives of Education : If education is the foundation of all growth and progress, then aims, goals and objectives are the four interconnected and most significant components that gives direction to educational outcomes through the curricular content, syllabus and evaluations. These four components are highly influenced by four interconnected foundation blocks namely, epistemology (the nature of knowledge), society/culture, the individual, and learning theories (Zais, 1976). But since aims, goals, and

objectives, collectively as a component of curriculum provide direction and focus for the entire education programme, they are particularly sensitive to these four fundamental forces. It was Gandhiji, who in 1937 first recognized the interconnectedness of the eight curricular forces and questioned the futility of the British education system. Based on his wisdom and successful experiments with education in South Africa, he put forth a Basic Education Plan which had the merit of achieving one aim of peace and freedom, for which all mankind yearns today. Also, recognizing the futility of a centralized plan and control in implementing programmes, he also outlined a comprehensive but decentralized model to be implemented by the village Republics. The vital objective of his model was to develop productive and social skills among the masses. To the centre, remained the overall responsibilities of coordinating and guiding the work of the states so that national policies could evolve from the grassroots.

Compared to the English Medium Schools, the Children in Basic Schools were more active, cheerful, self-reliant, with well-developed power of self-expression. They were found to be acquiring habits of co-operative work and social prejudices were breaking down.

Five other equally significant contributions to education include (1) an age appropriate and realistic curriculum focusing on social, productive and academic skills, (2) a highly adequate and effective teacher training programme, (3) keeping the financing of education at bay so that the local community could raise and manage the finance judiciously, simultaneously providing for international standards in education; (4) leaving little or no scope for adult illiteracy, unemployment or child labour; and (5) provide for international standards in health and manageable levels of population, again by placing the responsibility and accountability at the hands of the local community. All this and much more he achieved through his model.

The Eclectic Model: The second focus of the paper is Gandhiji's proposed and tested alternative for human security which is tangible, attainable, inexpensive, indigenous and sustainable and an insulation against poverty, inequality and its allied problems. Since a compartmentalized approach does not address the cause, Gandhiji's alternative was most comprehensive and integrated to address the cause. His eclectic model was proposed to serve as a guideline for formulating a new policy. Its implementation, management and finances were to be entirely vested with the panchayats and local bodies. The six main features of his eclectic model incorporating his philosophy, approach and strategy are : 1. Basic Philosophy, 2. Aims and Goals, 3. The Five Stages, 4. Programme of Work, 5. Implementation Strategy, 6. Standard of Attainment.

The Basic Philosophy

- (a) True education is all-round development of the faculties, best attained through action. It bases itself on the fact that knowledge and understanding develop in relation to

problems set right by action. Information thrust on the mind only burdens the memory and causes intellectual indigestion, casting learning into oblivion.

- (b) Education must be concrete and inter connected, not abstract or given in isolated sections. Concrete education allows the learner to manipulate problems or sets of problems and study their relationships, character and artistic sense. It allows the mind, heart, hand and eyes to work simultaneously in a correlated manner, resulting in a harmonious and well-balanced personality.
- (c) Education must be imparted in the child's mother tongue and organically connected with the child's Social and Cultural environment.

Aims and Goals

- (a) All boys and girls in India should grow up to seek truth and peace.
- (b) All children should grow up as citizens in a new social order, based on Co-operative work and with the understanding of their rights, responsibilities and obligations in such a society.
- (c) Every individual child should have full opportunity for the balanced and harmonious development of all his/her faculties and should acquire the capacity for self-reliance in every aspect of a clean, healthy and cultured life, together with an understanding of the social, political and moral implications of such a life.
- (d) Each individual must develop "a scientific attitude of mind". It means a clean intellectual curiosity to know the "how" and "why" of things; the patience detachment to test all phenomena, all ideas and all traditions by the standards of truth; the courage and power to think for oneself; the intellectual and moral authority to abide by all the facts.

The Five Stages

- (a) *Adult Education* - involvement of educated parents (with productive skills) and the community for a happy, healthy, clean and self-reliant life. An educated adult's participation is closely connected to the success of pre-school, primary and secondary education.
- (b) *Pre-School Education* - for children under-7, both boys and girls, to develop their faculties conducted by School teachers in cooperation with the parents and the community. It includes physical nurture, medical care, personal cleanliness and health, community cleanliness and health, self-help, social training, creative activities in work and play for the acquisition of basic concepts, speech training, development of mathematical sense, nature study, art and music and spiritual development.

- (c) *Primary Education* - education for self-sufficiency, of eight years duration for children in the age group of 7-15, with the same subjects and curricular contents for both boys and girls, irrespective of their caste or class.
- (d) *Secondary Education* - education through self-sufficiency or vocational education of four years duration, with the same curricular contents for adolescent boys and girls in the age group of 15-18, irrespective of their caste or class. It must provide for a great range of productive activities to support the community and provide the basis for sound and well-organized knowledge.
- (e) *Tertiary Education* - it should either lead to the responsibilities of adult family life or some form of professional training in the university.

Programme of Work There are five fundamental activities around which the programme of work for adult education, pre-school education, primary education and secondary education are recommended.

- (a) Clean and Healthy Living to focus on personal and social habits and attitudes of health, cleanliness and hygiene towards self and community; practical skills to carry out all types of proper cleaning and sanitation work efficiently.
- (b) Self-Reliance to focus on economic self-support for its own sake and for character training.
- (c) Productive Basic Crafts to focus on three most suited crafts for children by age for developing intelligence and general knowledge. The three basic crafts are the main centre of correlation for the "core subjects" of language, mathematics, general science and social science.
- (d) Citizenship in Community to focus on developing habits and attitudes of cooperation and neighbourliness at home, at school and in the community.
- (e) Recreational and Cultural Activities to focus on games, dance, music, drama, festivals relating to social, religious, historical and national significance.

Implementation Strategy

- (a) The *Panchayat Samitis* and local bodies along with the teachers must decide the objectives, curriculum and syllabus. However, it must be according to age and developmental norms, as well as gender sensitive.
- (b) The curriculum materials and activities must be indigenous, inexpensive using common objects of ordinary Indian life and people.
- (c) The text books must be written by renowned teachers themselves from the child's view point both from the level of concepts and language.

- (d) Practical and theoretical training should be given to the teachers, on the needs of the villages, in the villages itself. Use the same teachers for adult education as it saves on planning and capital outlay.
- (e) The latest instructional technologies must be utilized for imparting training.

Standard of Attainment Literacy is neither the beginning nor the end of life. The purpose of evaluation is to measure the extent to which objectives have been achieved. Since, the current examination system is insignificant, seven standards of achievement were proposed such as capacity to appreciate true art, responsible citizenship, self-reliance, clean and healthy living, self-sufficiency, sufficient mastery over tool subject and acquaintance with fundamental scientific, mathematical and mechanical principles.

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