



Research Paper

Gandhian Educational Policy in Addressing Climate Change

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Abstract

Present day environmental crisis is mainly due to the progressive march of man towards more and more material comforts in life. The rapid development in science and technology gives speed to the industrialization which makes a reckless plundering of natural resources. The adverse effect of this development breaks down the ecological balance and leads to the climate change in general. The technology is used by man for his evil and narrow selfish interest which is prompted not by his need but by his greed. Human development has no meaning without moral values. It has an important role in the human life. It builds a strong foundation on which human society develops. Modern technology has developed in such an aggressive way that it has become its own enemy. The modern development has increased inequality in society. The rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. Unfortunately, human knowledge instead of being an instrument of peaceful world has become instrument of domination and exploitation. True education should promote the sense of morality, sound character and finally spiritual enlightenment. Education should provide both physical knowledge for living and spiritual knowledge for understanding the nature which sustains life. Morality is the basic foundation of education. Gandhi placed his faith in the power of 'Nai Talim' (Basic Education). Through this he visualized to restore the objectives of education and help to create a non-violent society. In this paper, discussion would be made on the role of Mahatma Gandhi's Basic Education in addressing global environmental crisis. Gandhi's educational theory puts greater emphasis on the complete and harmonious development of individual personality, so that everybody would be able to realize the element of goodness present in every man. Therefore, the goal of education, according to Gandhi, should be character-building.

Keywords: Environmental Crisis, Nai Talim, Spiritual Unity

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I. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi is considered as one of the greatest teacher of India, who has left his valuable imprint on us. His role has been imparted as a reformer of ancient thought to conform to the requirements of the modern world. In this paper, I want to explore the basic characteristics of education laid down by Gandhi and an attempt would be made to highlight its implications in addressing environmental crisis. This work is to find out a future direction to establish a new world order based on Gandhian philosophy and techniques to safeguard the environment, which will not hamper the prospects of future generations. Present day environmental crisis is mainly due to the progressive march of man towards more and more material comforts in life. The industrial mode of production gives us a serious threat to our environment. The rapid development in science and technology gives speed to the industrialization which makes a reckless plundering of natural resources. The adverse effect of this development breaks down the ecological balance. Science and technology which is supposed to be contain satisfactory answers to the problems of human society may face, ironically bring it to the brink of disaster. Science itself is not wrong but the applications of the scientific knowledge are being directed to the wrong way. Man is the part of society and his actions are influenced by the ideologies of his times. As the influence of the ideology of the period, the mode of production follows accordingly. The technology is used by man for his evil and narrow selfish interest which is prompted not by his need but by his greed. So at first we have to control ourselves in the age of development and progress. A radical change in our attitude of thinking is required today. There must be profound changes in the role of planetary eco-system. This will require a new philosophical or religious awareness of oneness of all life and interdependence of multiple manifestation of

nature. The cooperative principle is required in man-nature relationship. It should be rooted in the deepest motivation which springs from moral and spiritual values. As Gandhi says, "In nature, there is fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about it."¹ Nature has given us enormous wisdom. Now our duty is to receive this wisdom through the eco-system. The solution of the environmental problem lies in what Gandhi had suggested us for changing of our life style. Reversal in sense of values which encourage conspicuous and wasteful expenditure, small scale industries and technologies that helps the individual to live in harmony with nature.

Knowledge of Spiritual Unity

Education enlightens moral values in man, which gives emphasis on the complete and harmonious development of individual personality. Then everybody would be able to realize the elements of goodness present in every man. It will make the way to transcend the finite nature of man and finally to attain the state of spiritual unity of all. On the other way we also prove the same thing, because when we consider education as a means of attaining salvation and also as a means to liberation, we cannot differentiate it from spiritualism. Gandhi emphasized the need for living in intimate kinship with nature. He believed that no aspect of life could be considered to be of low or negligible significance. There is a spiritual unity in the animate world. He wanted to realize the identity with all life, even with such beings as crawl on earth. Reverence for life including birds, beasts, plants and trees characterize the ecological mood of teachings of Gandhi. Gandhi preached compassion for lower animals. He wrote that love demands the promotion and kindness to beasts. Our love consists in our getting off the necks of our dumb fellow-creatures.² Mahatma Gandhi realized that not only man must desist from exploiting man, but that he must desist from violence in any form, and therefore the exploitation of nature and natural resources. The resources of the earth should be used as God's gifts to the whole human race and used with due consideration for the needs of present and future generations. Gandhi anticipated the adverse effect of environmental degradation. He himself foresaw ecological crisis of modern industrial society. In his book *Hind Swaraj*, he invoked us regarding the bad effect of machinery on environment and in the society also. Hence he says, "The machine should not be allowed to cripple the limbs of man."³ He was very much aware of the exploitive nature of the current mood of development and prescribed an alternative perspective on development. In this sense we can call Gandhi as an early environmentalist. We need a sustainable society, which works in partnership with nature and conserve natural resources. In this context Gandhi's thought is relevant for the smooth global development. According to him, the man should be divine in nature, he must be non-violent, and we should use the natural resources, according to our needs. Perfect and meaningful existence lies in peaceful co-existence and universal cooperation with all beings. Loves, non-violence, satyagraha, truth, etc., are the basic principles of being happy and prosperous in life.

Education for Sustainability

Human development has no meaning without moral values. It has an important role in the human life. It builds a strong foundation on which human society develops. Modern technology has developed in such an aggressive way that it has become its own enemy. The modern development has increased inequality in society. The rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. Unfortunately, human knowledge instead of being an instrument of peaceful world has become instrument of domination and exploitation. True education should promote the sense of morality, sound character and finally spiritual enlightenment. Education should provide both physical knowledge for living and spiritual knowledge for understanding the nature which sustains life. Morality is the basic foundation of education. Gandhi placed his faith in the power of '*Nai Talim*' (Basic Education). Through this he visualized to restore the objectives of education and help to create a non-violent society. He realized the necessity of educational reconstruction for the general and political regeneration of his country. This education process should be in the mother tongue, through the medium of village-craft and should aim at self-reliance. Gandhi structured the educational process by saying, "Craft, art, health and education should all be integrated into one scheme. *Nai Talim* is a beautiful blend of all the four and covers the whole education of the individual from the time of conception to the moment of death. Therefore, I would not divide village uplift work into watertight compartment from the very beginning but undertake an activity which will combine all four. Instead of regarding craft and industry as different from education, I will regard the former as the medium of the latter."⁴ According to Gandhi education means "an all-round drawing out of the best in child

¹ Gandhi, M. K. *Young India*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, August 20, 1934.

² M. K. Gandhi, Letter to C. F. Andrews, 02.03.1921 (Quoted in Chattopadhyay, Tapan Kumar. *Man and Ecology in Marx and Gandhi*, Mitram, Kolkata-73, 2006, p-123.)

³ Gandhi, M. K. *Hind Swaraj*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1938. P.8.

⁴ Gandhi, M.K. *Village Industries*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p.19.

and man- body, mind and spirit.”⁵ As such, education becomes the basis of personality development in all dimensions—moral, mental, and emotional. Every individual is born with certain qualities which can be developed to the fullest extent for the benefit of individual and society by proper education. Gandhi’s educational theory puts greater emphasis on the complete and harmonious development of individual personality, so that everybody would be able to realize the elements of goodness present in every man. Therefore, the goal of education, according to Gandhi should be character-building; the development of strength, courage, virtue, the ability to forget oneself for working to great aims. All round development is possible only if education is combined knowledge with work, percept with example. Gandhi says, “I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, e.g., hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose etc. In other words an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing his intellect.”⁶ His intellectual education would include knowledge of mathematics and the various sciences and to be added by literature. Then it would give him a perfect well-balanced, all-round education, which will constitute an individual into a natural, harmonious whole. This is what is known as *Basic Education*.

The moral education is necessary to build up good character. Gandhi's concept of basic education is based on moral and ethical knowledge. Any education system that lacks these two cannot be termed as good. This lays down the philosophy of the basic education. The reason behind such a thought is that, without morality no student, in a real sense, can be considered to be healthy in mental and physical terms. A person who is not a moralist and who does not differentiate between right and wrong cannot rise to the essential level of a true student. On the other way we also prove the same thing, because when we consider education as a means of attaining salvation and also as a means to liberation, we cannot differentiate it from spiritualism.

Education must be through craft, not merely through books and abstractions. Only bookish knowledge is not enough to be a good citizen. Gandhi emphasized on practical aspect of education, which includes manual work. Therefore he recommends that a student is taught to use his knowledge and action harmoniously in learning some basic handicraft, e.g. carpentry, spinning, weaving or any other similar kind. So, he says, “You have to train the boys in one occupation or another. Round this special occupation you will train up his mind, his body, his hand-writing, his artistic sense, and so on. He will be master of the craft he learns.”⁷ This type of education will supply them intellectual background as well as the solution of problems arising out of such manual work. By doing so individual will develop interest in his work and will be able to give out his best. Then only the learner would enjoy the education, instead of bearing the burden of education. By this way “...students would be made physically efficient, intellectually alert, practically useful, and possessed of self-confidence.”⁸ The ultimate purpose behind Gandhi’s attempt was to make young men and women self-reliant in the economic field. All branches of knowledge and integrating them with manual work done by the students would fetch some income to them, which will be benefited for them as well as for the state. Gandhi conceived this method primarily for the villages. In other words, Gandhi’s educational philosophy was born out of his intense need to better the condition of rural India. As Kumarappa puts it, “Gandhiji saw that the only way of saving the nation at that juncture was to revive village economic life and to relate education to it. Education ... was to be based on village occupations. The child was to be trained to be a producer.”⁹

Gandhi’s theory is against the prevalent model of higher education because it alienates the student from society and stuffs him with largely irrelevant imported information. Such an education only gives instructions or makes man literate, but mere literacy is not education. According to Gandhi the education of the individual will find that the things that he learns are of actual use in life. Here learning means the application of our knowledge into the practical field. But unfortunately the higher education that is imparted today in all Indian universities is mere intellectual training unrelated to the real needs of the society and the individual. So he wrote, “I would therefore begin the child’s education by teaching it a useful handicraft....Only every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically as is done today but scientifically, i.e. the child should know the why and the wherefore of every process.”¹⁰ Even in the modern perspective, his idea of *buniyadi* or basic education is applicable and it does not clash with the concept of today's job-oriented or technical education.

This kind of education will help an individual to be confident. Then it will become the driving force of the individuals which will make them skilled in their own arts and they will choose their own destiny. The establishment of scientific and efficient cottage industries would eliminate the evils of industrialization and it

⁵Gandhi, M.K. *Harijan*. 31st July 1937.

⁶Gandhi, M.K. *Harijan*. 8th May 1937.

⁷Gandhi, M.K. *Harijan*. 18th September 1937.

⁸Datta, D.M. *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*. University of Calcutta, 1968. P.130.

⁹Gandhi, M. K. *Basic Education*. Bharatan Kumarappa, ed. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1951.P-iii.

¹⁰Gandhi, M.K. *Harijan*. 31st July 1937.

will prevent the decay of village culture and the lust for city-life. As Kumarappa puts it, Gandhi “was convinced that machine civilization ...brought enslavement and exploitation of vast sections of a nation and of industrially backward peoples.”¹¹ Gandhi’s educational ideals were thus meant to transform backward, illiterate, exploited, desperately poor peasants into self-confident and self-respecting citizens of a new community and nation. In that sense, Gandhi was the most practical of our major educational thinkers of this century. But the basic system of education is still in an experimental state in India. Gandhi’s dreams of making the villages self-reliant on the basis of some basic craft and agriculture remain mostly unrealized. Gandhian educational ideas, founded as they are on certain eternal principles, will not lose their fundamental relevance in the years to come. His education system are greatly emphasizing the culture of peace, sincere work, dedication to the cause of the nation, social minded, friendliness, right feelings, sustainable economic advancement, physical improvement and socio-cultural progress. He believed in the necessity of study, research and experiment without bias, to discover truth from all sources, ancient and modern, Eastern and Western. That is why Gandhi’s concept of Basic Education has far-reaching consequences in the modern ego-centric world. We have to apply Gandhi’s thought according to the present circumstances of our country and also as per the demands of our present time.

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¹¹Gandhi, M. K. *Basic Education*. Bharatan Kumarappa, ed. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1951, P-iv.