

Educational Ideals of Mahatma Gandhi: A Study of their Present Relevance

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Citation: Sharma, M. (2026). Educational Ideals of Mahatma Gandhi: A Study of their Present Relevance. International Journal of Education, Modern Management, Applied Science & Social Science, 08(02(I)), 130–133. [https://doi.org/10.62823/IJEMMASSS/8.2\(I\).8931](https://doi.org/10.62823/IJEMMASSS/8.2(I).8931)

ABSTRACT

As an educational philosopher and an experimentalist Gandhi wanted to make a new social order based on truth and non-violence. According to him, “truth shall set you free” and education helps one to reach the peak of self-realization. He wanted a social revolution through Basic Education; which does not stand for mere technique rather it stands for a new crafts-centered approach full of spirit and self-realization. This paper is primarily experimental as well as analytical in nature; Covering the broad areas of Gandhian Educational Philosophy such as Cultural Education, Curriculum of Education, Role of Teacher, Imparting Discipline, Women’s Education, Aims of Education, Adult Education, Basic Education etc. This paper also tries to examine general merits and demerits of Basic Education and its relevance in modern society with the help of scientific outlook.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Educational Philosophy, Basic Education, Cultural Education, Women’s Education, Adult Education, Scientific Outlook, Modern Society.

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi popularly known as the “Father of Nation” in India, was one of the most influential leaders of the 20th century. Born on October 2nd 1869, in Porbandar, Gujrat. He was the pre-eminent leader of the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India. He contributed immensely to India’s freedom and his life and works highly influenced Indian life. His ideas of nonviolence gained prominence in India and beyond. But the great man never established any school or college, nor did he write any book on education. He was not a teacher in the classical sense of the term. Nevertheless, the ideas that he advocated on education are treated as great lessons for the entire world.

Gandhi believed that education should contribute to the holistic development of an individual, including physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. He viewed education as a means of character building and self-reliance rather than merely acquiring literacy or vocational skills His educational philosophy, known as Nai Talim (Basic Education), emphasized learning through productive work, dignity of labor, and the integration of knowledge with practical experience. The study of Gandhi’s educational philosophy is particularly relevant in the contemporary era, where education faces challenges related to unemployment, moral decline, social inequality, and excessive emphasis on examination-oriented learning. Gandhi’s vision offers valuable insights for developing an education system that promotes human values, practical skills, and sustainable development.

Foundations of Gandhian Educational Thought

- **Truth (Satya)**

Truth is the highest principle and the ultimate goal of life. Gandhi Ji firmly believed that no religion is possible without truth. He was a devote worshipper of truth. In his view, God is absolute truth. He said, "I have no God to serve but truth".

- **Non-Violence (Ahimsa)**

Non-Violence is the most powerful means of achieving truth and justice. Gandhiji suggested, Ahimsa is the only way of life that can lead us to the ultimate destination of life. Satya and ahimsa are the two sides of the same coin.

- **Self-Realization**

The ultimate aim of human life is self-realization and spiritual development.

- **Sarvodaya Society**

According to Gandhiji, completion of life is attained through the fulfillment of soul, and for this purpose a favorable society is needed. What he sought was a spiritual society based on the foundation of freedom, justice, equality, love, peace and non-violence.

- **Simplicity**

A simple life promotes moral and spiritual growth.

- **Dignity of Labour**

All forms of honest work are noble and should be respected.

- **Self Reliance (Karma yoga and Gyan yoga)**

Gandhian Philosophy of life is a fine blending of 'Gyan' and 'karma', 'knowledge' and 'work'. He said, "By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit". According to him, purpose of life is acquiring spiritual knowledge to attain self-control

- **Service of Humanity**

Service to others is highest form of worship and social responsibilities.

The Educational Program Formulated by Gandhiji

- **Activity-oriented learning**

Gandhiji propounded activity-oriented learning. Weaving agricultural works, paper designing, metal works etc. should be introduced in syllabus. Handicraft is an important part of his educational system. Our Government of India launched a program called "Skill Development Program" which is based on these various ideas.

- **Simple Way of Teaching**

Beside these activities other subjects will be taught in a simple way-language, history, geography, mathematics, physical education, social science, civics. All these subjects should be introduced in the light of the social situation of the learners and he will be imparted education in connection with his life. Our school textbooks published from NCERT have lot of examples for explaining particular topics or lessons

- **Spiritual Development**

Gandhiji puts emphasis on the practice of music, dance, art and cultural and many other co-curricular activities. These activities should develop respect toward all religions and communal harmony.

- **Moral Development**

Moral Development of child in his or her early life should be inspired to respect elders. He will learn the lessons on honesty, simplicity, prayer, meditation etc.

- **Physical Health Development**

Through physical exercise he/she will learn the lesson of self-defense, healthy mind lives in healthy body so it is important that children should concentrate on their physical health for their healthy life.

- **Women's Education**

There is a saying "If you are educating a boy, you are educating an individual. But if you are educating a girl, you are educating a family". For the progress of any nation or country, women education is essential and very important issue. So, the girl should be given enough scope for their educational development. He advocated an experimental co-education system where side by side, home science will be introduced for the girls.

- **Learning by doing**

Basic Education is totally activity oriented. Present education system in our country is discussing about activity-oriented learning and some of the corporate schools are following it.

- **Mother tongue as a Medium of Instruction**

Mother tongue will be our medium for education system. English learning will be totally rejected and Hindi should be learned as a national language

- **Idea of Discipline**

According to Mahatma Gandhi, discipline should not be imposed from outside. In his view, discipline grows in human mind out of self-control. So, he sought for a favorable classroom condition for the development of such discipline from within.

- **Learning with Earning**

An important feature of basic education is learning with earning. Now a days unemployment is a serious problem throughout the world. Ultimate solution of this problem is learning with earning. The Gandhian scheme makes it possible.

Aims of Education

Gandhiji's educational philosophy has obviously a thorough social route. Education can be attained through social progress. He wanted an activity-oriented education which can prompt his countrymen to work, an educational system that will ensure individual and social progress at the same time. Basic education suggested by Gandhi has the following aims:

- Self-realization
- Self-reliance
- Character building
- Vocational Education
- All-Round development of personality
- Dignity of labour
- Development of citizenship
- Social Service
- Cultural Development
- National Integration and Peace

For, Gandhi the ultimate aim of education was not merely literacy or acquisition of education but the holistic development of an individual leading to self-realization, social responsibility, and service to humanity.

Basic Education: Meaning and Philosophy

The concept of basic education was discussed Wardha Conference in 1937 where it was accepted that true education means an all-round development of any human being and drawing out of the best in child and man, body, mind and spirit.

Gandhiji said "Basic Education is not a technique; it is a way of life. It aims at integrated all round development of personality of the individual and also building up of a society on truth, justice and non-violence".

Basic Education Proposals

- Free universal and compulsory education should be provided for all boys and girls between the age 7-14 years.

- Craft oriented education.
- Mother tongue should be medium of instruction.
- The social and scientific implication of the selected craft must be taught.
- All the subjects to be taught were to be integrally associated with the selected craft.
- Spinning and weaving, wood work, leather work, kitchen, gardening, agriculture and fishery were suggested in basic education.

Benefits of Basic Education

The concept of basic education is helpful for rapid expansion of elementary education; it helps the developing states of our country because it has a realistic financial aspect. Basic education activity-oriented education based on learning by doing principle an individual acquires the practical knowledge. It is child-centric, it considers the creative and constructive sense of children as well as dignity of labour. This education approach is based on the principle of correlation. Correlation also takes place between physical environment, social environment and craft work. One major objective of basic education is harmonious development of body mind and spirit.

Conclusion

It has been very often discussed as to why Gandhiji's basic educational plan was not successful, but in the present context we can say that there is influence of that plan on our educational policies. Present government of India very recently launched many programmes like 'Make in India'. Skill development Programme, Udaan Scheme- to provide requisite skills to youth of India and enable their sustained growth. All these programmes reflect Gandhi's suggested curriculum in basic education plan. Although the people of middle and upper class of Indian society underestimated the system of basic education but in spite of various drawbacks, his socio-economical concerns bear relevance even today. Gandhiji actually demonstrated a new scientific outlook through his new educational planning (Nai Talim). It is not the fault of his theory of basic education, but the half hearted and mere mechanical application which was responsible for its failure. In the present context, Indian education system requires lots of focus on basic education plan and proper implementation for all round development of individuals and society.

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