

The Relevance of Basic Education as Propagated by Mahatma Gandhi in the Present Context of the Society

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Abstract: To understand a man is, so to speak, to dig deeper into the background of his life, with heart and mind open. In a similar way, to understand Mahatma Gandhi we will have to take a lot of troubles at our own insistence if we have a little good intention for making our lives variegated with knowledge, reality, and consciousness. The philosophy of Basic Education as propagated by Gandhiji may, in some ways, have some good effects serving as the panacea for the long-standing social diseases. Purging a society of its illnesses, ignorance and superstitions entails a greatly influential thing : Education, to be sure.

Keywords: Ideology, Basic Education, Financially Free, Ethical Value.



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➤ Introduction:

Of many a great man who walked and worked for the betterment and well-being of the society in various ways, educationists hog the special limelight. Educationists from east and west ---- Aristotle, Rousseau, Froebel, Montessori, Dewey, Tagore, Vivekananda, Aurobindo et al ---- tried their damndest to give the world the best education. They hit upon many sublime suggestions and theories to teach the world the best; they took out many gems from the storehouse of their wisdom make this earth more inhabitable and its children wiser and greater. Of these great educationists and philosophers, Mahatma Gandhi is the one who, in need of no introduction, tendered a yeoman service to his motherland for the steady development of her children in all respects, especially by preaching and propagating new system of education called 'Basic Education'. Side by side his political and social activities, he brooded over the implementation of the basic system of education for the future generation of the country. He was of the opinion that one could never prosper in life if he/she was not so groomed from the very beginning of his / her life. Fresh morning, in general, shows the day; exception may take place. Such was the way Gandhiji wanted and tried to live by.

➤ Gandhiji's Ideology:

After minutely going through some of Gandhi's writings, one can easily be enlightened of the fact that the Mahatma led a life diametrically different from others. Punctuality, simplicity, honesty and spirituality were the main yardsticks he longed to live up to in order to lead his life in a schematized way. This type of mind was made after being highly influenced and inspired by the

books of John Ruskin & Leo Tolstoy, while living for a long time in South Africa. At that very time, he also developed a special system of education which ultimately, in 1914, resulted in the foundation of 'Tolstoy Farm' where the children were imparted some basic knowledge about some important facts in life.

After getting back to India in 1915 forever, Gandhi sensed that Swaraj could not be achieved without education; proper education is the stepping stone to the wellbeing and reformation of society and its people. Thinking a lot as regards the implementation and development of education, Gandhi established a new system of education named 'basic education' in wardha in 1937. So, the programme is also called 'wardha scheme.' A committee was also formed after the name of its president Dr. Jackir Hossain : "The Jackir Hossain committee".

"By education I mean ", the Mahatma held in his definition of education, " the all round drawing out of the best in child and man --- body , mind and spirit" . The basic motto of his theory of education was to make a man sound---morally, socially and spiritually. It does not mean, according to him , that in spite of oneself, one will have to dedicate his valuable time to education; it is nothing but the wastage of time. One can excel in any job whatever one likes --- be it making an earthen pot or cutting the hair of others. The best can be fleshed out in any work which definitely depends on the worker or the doer. Being a doctor or an engineer or a teacher is not the ultimate end in our life ; excellence in anything says the last word.

Some of Gandhi's views on education, like his other views on social, political and economic facts , may be now felt illogical to some readers and critics of the modern day. Actually, Gandhi's theory of basic education was to make a student active physically, economically and morally. He gives less emphasis on the intellectual bent of mind of a student. In his views, a student should learn through working various types of work. Practical experience will give you a chance to observe everything very closely and minutely. A great way to obtain a true knowledge about anything you are interested in entails your personal engagement in it. In 1996, The Delor commission as well proclaimed four pillars of true education : 'Learning to know', 'Learning by doing', 'Learning to live together', and 'Learning to be'. Perhaps, the second theory, as I think fit, may come under the theory Gandhi wanted to propagate and practice himself.

Mahatma Gandhi had views on social, political and economic development of our country , and even education did not go out of his notice. He thought that to gain Swaraj education was extremely required, or else everything in vain. But, that what kind of education might be better for the children of India was a matter Gandhi had to rack his brains about. He, then, created a new system of education called Basic Education which would, he opined, be all-encompassing. But, only the academic development would not, as he put it, do the better for the society. Without economic thinking and improvement no society could prosper in proper measure. Social thriving must rely on both education and economics; ethics must also have a place in it. Gandhiji wished to marry economics to ethics through the proper guidance of education, one might say, the system of Basic Education. This type of thought of Gandhi is now largely discernible in Amartya Sen's famous economic theory --- Welfare Economics.

Gandhiji-propagated basic education deals with knowledge and reality. The students must work and learn simultaneously. This practical work would lead him to a proper learning. Self-reliance and self-dignity are the two cornerstones of moral and social development born out of self-confidence after the marriage of education and practical work. In basic education a student must have a chance of choosing what he or she prefers to do. Through handicrafts Gandhi wanted to propagate his system of basic education, as he never fully believed only in theory. Any work a man can do for his future living does not seem less important to Gandhiji. In anything, frankly speaking, one can excel. "Learning by doing" is one of the mottos proposed by Delor Commission Gandhiji highly valued.

The education Gandhiji engineered for the students up to the age of 12 to 14 displays some shortcomings as well, as Gandhiji did not suggest what a student would do after crossing the said age limit; which particular discipline they would follow is not prescribed in his basic education system. Moreover, the teachers appointed to impart education must have trained experience, otherwise the impartment of education through handicrafts will not be done well. The notion of forging a student economically self-capacitated, morally balanced and socially dignified would fall far short of expectations the Mahatma always tried to make us wise to. Both learning and earning should have been duet in their performance.

These days students are, by reason of various situations, being suicide -addicts only to ease too much stress, pressure and anxiety. The parents want their children to do what the former like most without caring a fig for what the latter themselves think about their future. Through the achievements of their children, the parents intend to relish the reflected glory. But Gandhiji created education has very little role for the parents to play, because the performance is properly and entirely done by the children themselves. No parental interference in, except for some cases such as observing the growth of moral and ethical values in them, the subject and profession they choose to orient themselves in.

➤ **Method of Education:**

I am not here to defend the Mahatma but to make others and myself sensible of the fact that the way Mr. Gandhi intended to walk on was fully variegated in type and method. Achieving self-control, maintaining punctuality, and worshipping truth, honesty and morality were the sole ends of his basic education. Acquiring the study of home science, drawing, general study of geography, history and recitation might, as he opined, inspire one to adopt the path to be on a sublime life. Creativity and culture are the two pillars of saving ourselves, which Gandhi laid strong emphasis on . But some of his aspects in this regard may not be relevant to some modern men, as Gandhi did not speak of what a student would do after crossing the stage of post basic education after the age of 14. Then he will have to come to the general stream. So, this system of basic education does not work much in the formation and development of a student's future life. One thing we can do the best is to enhance the stages of the basic education to a certain extent in order to make the candidates more and more conscious of these things.

We are extremely mistaken if we pay less importance to Gandhi's strenuous efforts to relieve the people of his motherland not only of the cruel jaws of the British bondage but also of ignorance, superstition, and blind faith through proper education. To be true, a man should be groomed from the very outset of his life on some basic things which will lead him to the higher position. Some of the basic things or facts are unavoidably essential for the full flowering of the future. But, some shortcomings in Gandhi's systematized basic education loom large in his proclamation of learning through mother tongue. Mother tongue is, no doubt, like mother's breast-milk. One can best express one's cherished thoughts in the language one is born and brought up in. But, English should be treated as both an official language of the country and an international one in order to keep abreast of what are happening in the world all over. The more we nurture our aversion to the language of the white skinned the more we get backward and remain underdeveloped in all respects. As well the mother tongue, one should, though it takes much time to capture another language essential and unavoidable for a steady development, make efforts to enrich oneself by having command over other ones in order to keep in contact with the sweet fruits of others' creations.

Another drawback which is highly discernible in Gandhi's theory of basic education is the lack of eminent teachers. Until and unless proper and eminent teachers are appointed to train the pupils who are taught under basic education, the pupils concerned will not be able to learn properly. But one thing Gandhi emphasized was that education must be compulsory, regular, and free of cost, which is still working in our present society.

Despite a few faults in the Gandhi-proposed basic education, we can never turn a blind eye to some felicitous suggestions he tried to incorporate into his theory of basic education. To make a student self-supported and economically strong in this developing country, to make him prone to activity-based learning, to make him morally and spiritually sound, we still must have a special eye for the reliance and relevance of the Gandhi-crafted basic education or Naitalim Siksha (New Education) in the present context of the society. Honestly speaking, to rid the society of its traditional or conventional education, Gandhiji proposed and tried to implement activity-based learning which is best exposed in the words of Gandhiji himself, "We have up to now concentrated on stuffing children's mind with all kinds of information, without even thinking of stimulating or developing them. Let us now cry halt and concentrate on educating the child properly through manual work; not as side activity but as prime means of intellectual activity". To quote John Dewey, in this respect, "Life is a by-product of activities, and education is born out of these activities". One thing, now-a-days, we must be cautious about is that the rate of suicides is gradually growing higher and higher. But the question arises: to what is this self-termination due to? Many facts are responsible for this. The one fact that we cannot avoid regarding this problem is the extreme pressure the parents of modern world put to their children. The parents, in most cases, cherish an inner desire to fulfill through the success and achievements of their children. One type of defense mechanism they live to indulge and wallow in. Thus do the children feel pressurized what to do, as they have no right to do what they like, rather they will have to succumb to what their parents have already thought about. This imposition ultimately results in self-death in various ways. At this critical juncture, for the solution to this problem we should turn our eyes to Gandhi's philosophy of education in which the students have sheer chance of doing whatever they like to. In anything they can excel.

➤ **Problem of Basic Education:**

To facilitate the basic education for the Learners, Gandhiji offered an almost stipulated suggestion that the text book would be designed for the teachers only so that the students could learn free-minded without any pressure by osmosis from them. Earning while learning and learning while earning was the motto Gandhiji proffered in order to make them less stressed psychologically and economically. That is the way he laid emphasis on the handicrafts chosen as the medium of education which the students could easily adopt for both the betterment of their self-dependence and artistic creations. As Gandhiji clearly opined, "The brain must be educated through hand". What was more important for Gandhiji was that no student should be put to additional mental stress. He would be given a chance to choose what to follow. No extra burden of theoretical education should be placed on their shoulders. Total learning would be through joy and happiness for the sake of both. Even in Gandhiji's system of education, the parents of the students need not interfere much in their children's lessons. Most of the learning would be done only at school through both theory and practice. Self-discipline and self-respect would be developed in the students not by pressure but by self-interest and self-eagerness.

➤ **Conclusion:**

Assessing all the demerits of Gandhi's system of basic education, we ought to, if we have a little good intention for forging the all round development of the country, move forward to pare the demerits and drawbacks and to make the great service of the greatest son of this country flower in full bloom, thereby making others aware of how this system of education could better be translated into reality. So, to make a student, at the present juncture of society, psychologically stable, socially humane and financially free without the uncalled-for interference in the choice of their children's future profession, the assessment and the paring of the demerits lying in the theory of basic education are to be done properly and logically with no sacrifice of honesty, punctuality, simplicity and morality of which Gandhiji was the yardstick.

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