



Gandhiji views on Basic Education

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Abstract: Gandhiji elaborately discussed and expressed his views on basic education in the paper 'Harijan'. Gandhiji believed the ancient aphorism, "education is that which liberates".

He called Nai Talim for the integration of crafts, art, health and education. He did not regard craft and industry as different from education. Persistent questioning and healthy inquisitiveness are the first requisite for acquiring learning of any kind. Inquisitiveness should be tempered by humility and respectful regard to teacher. Education must be of a new type for the sake of the creation of a new world. The learning teachers with good character can draw well inherent out of the students. A balanced intellect presupposes a harmonious growth of body, mind and soul. The ordinary system cares for the mind only. The teacher and student have to produce in the very act of teaching and learning. It makes the nation independent of the search for employment.

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Analysis

"Education is that which liberates", is as true today as it was before. Knowledge includes all training that is useful for the service of mankind and liberation means freedom from all manner of servitude even in the present life.¹ Persistent questioning and healthy inquisitiveness are the first requisite for acquiring learning of any kind. Inquisitiveness should be tempered by humility and respectful regard for the teacher. It must not degenerate into impudence.² Education must be of a new type for the sake of the

creation of a new world.³ Every one of us has good inherent in the soul, it needs to be drawn out by the teachers, and only those teachers can perform this sacred function whose own character is unsullied, who are always ready to learn and to grow from perfection to perfection.⁴

Useful manual labour, intelligently performed is the means par excellence for developing the intellect. A balanced intellect presupposes a harmonious growth of body, mind and soul. An intellect that is developed through the medium of socially useful labour will be an instrument for service and will not



easily be led astray or fall into devious paths.⁵

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. Gandhiji did not regard craft and industry as different from education.⁶

Our system of (Basic) education leads to the development of the mind, body and soul. The ordinary system cares only for the mind.⁷ The teachers earn what they take. It stands for the art of living. Therefore, both the teacher and the pupil have to produce in the very act of teaching and learning. It enriches life from the commencement. It makes the nation independent of the search from employment.⁸ It is popularly and correctly described as education through handicrafts. This is part of the truth. The root of this new education goes much deeper.⁹

The largest part of our time is devoted to labour for earning our bread, our children must from their infancy be taught the dignity of such labour. Our children should not be so taught as to despise labour.¹⁰

Literary education should follow the education of the hand – the one gift that visibly distinguishes man from beast.¹¹

Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the

heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for the making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education. Gandhiji hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, eg., hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. in other words an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provide the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be poor lop-sided affair.¹²

Education means an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education. I would therefore begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. Thus every school can be made self-supporting, the condition being that the State takes over the manufactures of these schools. Only every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically as is done today but scientifically, i.e., the child should know the way and the wherefore of every process. The signs of the alphabet may be taught later when the pupil has learnt to distinguish wheat from the chaff and when he



has somewhat developed his or her tastes. This is a revolutionary proposal, but it saves immense labour and enables a student to acquire in one year what he may take much longer to learn. This means all round economy. Of course the pupil learns mathematics whilst he is learning his handicraft.¹³

When it is remembered that the primary aim of all education is, or should be, the moulding of the character of pupils, a teacher who has a character to keep need not lose heart.¹⁴

Gandhiji was a firm believer in the principle of free and compulsory primary education for India. I also hold that we shall realize this only by teaching the children a useful vocation and utilizing it as a means for cultivating their mental, physical and spiritual faculties. Let no one consider these economic calculations in connection with education as sordid or out of place. There is nothing essentially sordid about economic calculations.¹⁵

If we want to impart education best suited to the needs of villagers, we should take the *Vidyaith* to the villagers. We should convert it into a training school in order that we might be able to give practical training to teachers in terms of the needs of villagers.¹⁶

What kind of vocations are the fittest for being taught to children in urban schools? There is no hard and

fast rule about it. But Gandhiji's reply is clear.¹⁷

The basic education is meant to transform village children into model villagers. It is principally designed for them. The inspiration for it has come from the villagers. The utterly false idea that intelligence can be developed only through book-reading should give place to the truth that the quickest development of the mind can be achieved by artisan's work being learnt in a scientific manner. True development of the mind commences immediately the apprentice is taught at every step why a particular manipulation of the hand or a tool is required. The problem of the unemployment of students can be solved without difficulty, if they will rank themselves among the common laborers.¹⁸

Let students realize that learning without courage is like a waxen statue beautiful to look at but bound to melt at the least touch of a hot substance.¹⁹ Music should form part of the syllabus of primary education. I heartily endorse this proposition. The modulation of the voice is as necessary as the training of the hand.²⁰

A wise parent allows the children to make mistakes. It is good for them once in a while to burn their fingers.²¹ English is today admittedly the world language. Gandhiji would therefore accord it a place as a second, optional language, not in the



school, but in the university course. Gandhiji felt that it is mental slavery to feel that we can not do without English. He never subscribed to that defeatist creed. ²²Gandhiji does not believe that the State can concern itself or cope with religious education. Gandhiji believe that religious education must be the sole concern of religious associations. Do not mix up religion and ethics. Gandhiji believe that fundamental ethics is common to all religions. Teaching of fundamental ethics is undoubtedly a function of the State. ²³

Real education has to draw out the best from the boys and girls to be educated. This can never be done by packing ill-assorted and unwanted information into the heads of the pupils. It becomes a dead weight crushing all originality in them and turning them into mere automata.²⁴ In Gandhiji's opinion we have to give the villagers village arithmetic, village geography, village history, and the literary knowledge that they must use daily, i.e., reading and writing letters, etc, They will treasure such knowledge and pass on to the other stages. They have no use for books which give them nothing of daily use.²⁵

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