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Gandhian Philosophy of Education: A Holistic Vision for Human Development

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Abstract

Teachers play a crucial role beyond academics, fostering students' holistic development as mentors, facilitators, emotional supporters, ethical guides, and innovators. This paper examines the evolving responsibilities of educators in shaping students' critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility. It explores theoretical perspectives, including constructivist, humanistic, and socio-emotional learning theories, to understand this transformation. Key strategies for enhancing teacher effectiveness include integrating life skills education, strengthening teacher-student relationships, leveraging technology, and promoting professional development. However, educators face challenges such as excessive workload, lack of mentorship training, resistance to change, and emotional burnout. To address these, institutional support, continuous teacher training, and policy interventions are essential. The paper emphasizes the need for structured teacher empowerment policies, including professional development, reduced administrative burdens, and well-being programs. Future research should focus on empirical studies assessing the impact of these strategies and exploring AI-based teacher support systems. By investing in teacher development, education can become more comprehensive and student-centered, preparing learners for both academic and life challenges.

Keywords: *Teacher's multifaceted role, holistic student development, mentorship in education, teacher training.*

Introduction

Education cannot be defined in one single definition. The meaning of education changes person to person and that concept of education becomes a person's own philosophy of education. Philosophy is a truth of a person regarding any object or subject which derives at the end of his thought process through life experiences of his own. It is a process, content and search for the same.

Gandhiji was a man of experiment. He tested every aspect of his life through various experiments and verified them on thinking and meditation bases. Whenever Gandhiji got any thought, he tried to understand it first by himself then he put it into reality as an experiment and after the verification he suggested it to others.

Gandhiji initially approached life with an economic lens and soon realized that the root of social injustice, poverty, and moral degradation lay in an unbalanced and colonial model of education. In response, he developed an educational philosophy grounded in Indian culture and rural reality, known as Nai Talim or Basic Education. He believed education must be an instrument of holistic human development and not merely a tool for employment.

Gandhiji started his path of life with economic thoughts when he was being put in society. He found that socialism is the base of everything. Moreover, truth and non-violence are his major weapons. The solution to each problem of human life is education. Gandhiji had many ethics in his life, and he was strictly connected with the eleven vows in his real life such as truth, non-violence, secularism, possessiveness, celibacy, untouchability, self-reliance and ageusia; all these are reflected in his philosophy of education. When Gandhiji realized that education is at the base of society, economy and nation, then he was inspired to think on education and put into experiments for creative work.

However, while Gandhian philosophy of education has been extensively discussed in historical and philosophical literature, there remains a noticeable gap in connecting it to contemporary educational challenges. Today's globalized, digitalized, and consumption-driven education system often overlooks the values of simplicity, dignity of labour, moral reasoning, and community engagement—principles central to Gandhiji's vision. The dominance of rote learning, the growing mental health crisis among students, the disconnect between education and livelihood, and

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environmental degradation raise pressing questions: Can Gandhiji's educational ideas still offer viable alternatives or insights? How can his philosophy be reinterpreted to address the 21st-century educational dilemmas?

This conceptual analysis is therefore necessary—not to idealize Gandhi, but to critically re-examine his philosophy in light of current educational demands. It aims to explore the relevance of his principles, practices, and pedagogical methods as possible responses to today's challenges of sustainability, inclusivity, peace education, and value-based learning. Such a reflection is timely and essential in an era where the soul of education is increasingly being reduced to quantifiable outputs and market demands.

GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION

“Gandhian philosophy of education is naturalistic in its setting, idealistic in its aims and pragmatic in its method and program of work.” _ Dr. M. S. Patel. Sadhu (2008) elaborates on how Gandhian philosophy blends multiple traditions—naturalism, idealism, and pragmatism—for holistic education. Gandhiji harmonized naturalism, idealism, and pragmatism (Richards, 1991), linking them with the Indian socio-cultural context (Dave, 2013).

Idealists emphasize the idealistic aspect more than the realistic while naturalists and realists stress the realistic forms of education. Gandhiji's philosophy of education aims at harmonizing all these contradictory viewpoints. For him both character formation and manual skill were important. His plan of education gave importance to physical, moral, aesthetic and religious education along with the teaching of mathematics and library skills. In addition to this he stressed that handwriting should be neat and clean.

Naturalism

Gandhiji's educational philosophy gives due recognition to biological naturalism because it lays stress on man's complete development. He laid more stress on the child's environment; at the same time he did not neglect discipline.

Idealism

There is no denying that he was always an idealist because he always was a religious individual. He felt that the aim of man's life was realization of God, and that is why he stressed the importance of moral and religious education. He attached the greatest importance to the child's interest and inclinations.

Pragmatism

Despite his inclination towards idealism, Gandhiji always attended to the practical

and pragmatic aspect of education. That is why he titled his autobiography '*My Experiments with Truth*'. He accepted no truth as absolute. For him, God was the only absolute entity. In keeping with the pragmatic tradition, he also believed that the child should gather for himself all the knowledge from the environment and select from it that which he could put to use later in life. Like Dewey, Gandhi ji also felt that the child should learn through actual work. Besides, he also agreed with Dewey that education should seek to establish democratic values in life. According to Sadhu (2008), Gandhian education blends idealism with pragmatism. In short, Gandhiji wanted to relate education to life as far as possible. Philosophical view of Gandhiji regarding education is being clarified under the following labels.

Means of Education

“By education I mean an all-round development, drawing out of the best in the child-man body, mind and spirit. Literacy is neither the end of education nor even the beginning. It is one of the means by which men and women can be educated. Literacy in itself is not education. True education is that which draws out and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical facilities of

children” (Gandhi, 1999). These are the own words of Bapu, which describes his own meaning of education.

Gandhiji's meaning of education rejects the concept of formal education of reading, writing and arithmetic. His meaning of education focuses on the productive efforts of a child to bring out their own creativity in work. (Behera, n.d.), emphasizes that Gandhiji saw education as the path to self-sufficiency. Education brings out the best of what is already present in a child through comprehensive development. Gandhian education has been characterized as encompassing the head, heart and hands, which means the all-round development of a child. Here, the hand indicates the development of the psychomotor domain, the head indicates cognitive development, and the heart indicates spiritual skill development of a child.

According to Gandhiji, comprehensive development of a child through education makes him independent or self-dependent in all terms. Self-reliance of children provides freedom from all kinds of weaknesses and leads to self-realization, by this society and the nation are being developed sequentially.

Gandhiji's view of education was structured in a socialist manner, as he

wanted to see every Indian cultured and well educated. To fulfil the purpose, Gandhiji has formed a few key aims of education which can be derived from his writing. The aims of education by Gandhiji give more clarity to the views of Gandhian education, in which he tried to put education at the base of society.

Principles of Education

For the betterment of Indian education, Gandhiji's thinking was in the direction to bring changes in the education system of India under British rule, apart from their clerical education for the Indian people. He had suggested certain principles to fulfil the purpose of true education derived from his philosophy. His principles emphasized moral values over rote literacy (Sharma, 2000). I have described the core principles with illustrative explanation as follows.

Literacy is Not Education

One child observes his father lie to someone for his own benefit and another child observes his father accepting his mistake in front of everyone; in which illustration do you find the message of true education being conveyed?

Education Through Productive Work

Richards (1991) explores Gandhi's educational pragmatism and Deweyan parallels in advocating experiential

learning. The concept of 'work' is very much focused in the Gandhian educational philosophy as 'learning by doing' is the best way to be educated and in addition if a child can get something as benefit, then it will be grateful in the process of being educated.

Education for Independence

Education never allows people to be slaves to anyone or to have prejudiced thoughts. Education itself is the freedom of a person from everything, from everyone.

Education in Mother Tongue

A mother is equivalent to a hundred teachers for her child. Mother tongue also has such unique importance in a student's life; basic education should be in the soul language of a child that he can express himself completely without any hesitation and in further can improve with other languages.

A staunch votary of mother tongue as the medium of education, Gandhiji said, 'I must cling to my mother tongue as to my mother's breast in spite of its shortcomings. It alone can give me the life of giving milk.' (Gandhi Ashram Sevagram, 2013).

Creation of Moral Human

Education gives understanding between right and wrong, which makes a person good or not good, so education provides a

sense of responsibility towards the value of morality. A small step to create a moral human being.

Aims of Education

The aims of Gandhian education are not only theoretical content but the experimental results of his own. Thus, Gandhian aims of education can be said to be the final product of Gandhiji's thought after different experiments done on their own and from live experiences of life took place around him. Gandhi's main motto of education is to form such democratic socialist society which should be co-operative and free from class discrimination. Socialist aspect can be easily seen in the Gandhian aim of education delivered from his literature; his key educational aims - complete development, character-building, self-realization, self-reliance, and social utility - were based on practical experiments (Gandhi, 1999; Mashruwala, 1951).

Complete Development

Gandhiji's idea of complete development is a personality of a child with co-operation of four dimensions such as mind, soul, body and heart. Development of one or two dimensions is not complete development of personality, development of each dimension should be in an equal manner and true education in proper

manner provides scope for the same. Complete Development through education brings self-reliance as well as self-realization to man and fulfill the motto of education to make democratic socialist society.

As previously mentioned, total development consists of development of all domains of the child such as psychomotor, cognitive, spiritual and emotional, one of the achievements of true education.

Character Buildup

Another aim of education is to build up a person's clean character according to Bapu. In character, Gandhiji addresses the importance of thoughts, word and deed, non-violence and truth (Sharma, 2000). He impressed upon people that the cultural aspect of education was far more important than its literacy aspect; because it is through the cultural aspect that the child learns conduct and ideas and develops these characters and ideals. He felt that the words educand and 'bramhachari' should be treated as synonyms. And, it is the most important part of a student's character according to Gandhiji. Experiments on character buildup can be read in his autobiography.

Secondly, character formation as an aim of education depends on the good character

of teachers, principals and parents as well. Because other means of education are observation and life experiences. Thus, education must have the aim of good character formation which brings self-respect and confidence to a person in society.

Self-realization

According to Gandhiji, the last truth of existence is the knowledge of God or self-realization. Gandhiji gives more importance to self-realization as an aim of education. The ultimate end of all knowledge is God realization is self-realization which has been considered to be the idea of education (Dave, 2013).

In the words of Gandhiji, “self-realization is in itself an all comprehensive ideal.” He also agreed that spiritual growth includes physical and mental, individual and social development. Metaphysical philosophy of Gandhiji can be seen in his self-realization aim of education. Self-realization brings self-reliance in a person as an important aim of education according to Gandhian philosophy.

Self-reliance

Generally, self-reliance or independence is being considered as earning money but Gandhiji’s view of self-reliance means total independence, economical, sociological and mental as well. Self-

reliance of a person is an ability to be free from everything. A person must be self-reliant socially, economically and mentally at the end of education.

Thus, self-reliance is an achievement which can be gained after the education of a person. A person cannot be helpful to others when himself is in dependence. An independent person can be helpful to others which means self-reliance of a person is a base of independent society and nation. Self-reliance education develops a person's ability to earn for himself and be helpful to others. Social self-reliance gives importance to self-effort and provides mental independence of thoughts, ideas, logic and imagination of their own.

Social Utility

Gandhiji said, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service of others.” This source details Gandhi’s emphasis on *Sarvodaya*—welfare for all—through education that promotes selfless service (Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal, n.d.). True education takes a person beyond selfishness. Such education is not worth having which cannot be utilized in real life and as per Gandhiji the true education connects people, does not separate them. In his words, ‘My duty is service of God and therefore service of humanity.’ His concept of God realization is nothing but

to live for others and that makes a person a social animal who can serve humanity. Social utility is not a forced act but a sense of responsibility comes through true education in a person's life.

Cultural Development

According to Gandhiji education works to protect and prevent cultural ideas and values of society which can be possible only through people of society. Desiring behavioral changes in children is important in education. Good behavior indicates the respective cultural development of a child as an aim of education. Culture and values in a person should be developed through education in such a way that a child can respect cultural heritage and his cultural values can be seen through his thoughts, language, and behavior in society.

Curriculum

Overall development requires all the possible subjects to be included in curriculum along with all the activities to fulfill Gandhian aims of education. He suggested a seven years' curriculum program. The only condition is the curriculum must be obtained through productive labor work (here, in terms of 'shram'). In his curriculum there are no boundaries with subjects but selected subjects must relate with work as learning by doing process. Gandhiji's *Nai Talim*

proposed a curriculum centered on productive work (Gandhi Ashram Sevagram, 2013).

Gandhiji apparently believed that the best learning is learning by doing and that experiences of learning teach the best lessons of life (Shreyas Foundation, 2023). According to Gandhiji curriculum should be framed in such a way that it helps to develop all the dimensions of a person to fulfill all the aims of education. Here we can take the example of Sabarmati Ashram where every person was allotted with distinctive work. It was designed to harmonize manual labor with academic content (Behera, n.d.).

As Vocational education Gandhi suggested some subjects such as farming, gardening, fishing, leather work, carpentry, pottery, spinning-weaving, Home Science and other industrial works as per local situation. To develop socialism, he suggested daily, quarterly, annually and occasionally activities. Language as mother tongue, mathematics, and sociology (history, geography, civics, economics) are basic subjects suggested by him. He suggested subjects like Life Science, Botany, Zoology, Chemistry, Medicine and Saga of great personalities and scientists. To develop social science knowledge in education drawing, music

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and other arts including physical education (games and exercises) also suggested in his curriculum ideas. He encouraged locally relevant vocational subjects (Shreyas Foundation, 2023).

Relevance of Gandhian Curriculum in the Context of Modern Educational Landscape

Gandhiji's curriculum emphasized holistic development through manual labour, value-based education, and contextual learning deeply rooted in rural life. However, to evaluate its relevance today, it is essential to consider the implications of technological advancements, changing socio-economic conditions, and policy shifts like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

NEP 2020's focus on experiential and competency-based learning, vocational education from early grades, and the integration of life skills mirrors many of Gandhi's original ideas. Yet, Gandhian education must be re-contextualized—not simply revived. For example, in a technology-driven world, digital literacy is essential. This does not contradict Gandhian principles if digital tools are used responsibly, to empower learners and promote community service, creativity, and self-sufficiency rather than passive consumption. Likewise, the increasing

socio-economic divide calls for a curriculum that fosters empathy, cooperation, and local problem-solving—key features of Gandhiji's Basic Education (Nai Talim).

Therefore, Gandhian curriculum ideas remain profoundly relevant if we reinterpret them to address contemporary needs—infusing them with technology, sustainability education, and a stronger global-local perspective.

Teaching Method

There is always a need for a proper teaching method to implement the curriculum plan successfully. 'Correlational teaching method' was suggested by Gandhiji. The technique of mind development by keeping the village industry at the centre from the beginning develops the mind and strengthens the powers of a person. "Gandhiji suggested *correlational* and *activity-based* methods, rejecting rote textbook learning" (Sharma, 2000). Correlational education has the importance of social, physical and industrial environments. For teachers, he suggested being an observer and using available resources to educate children. He was against textbook-based narration. He suggested the education with incorporation of nature and such activities in which demands come close to nature means life

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education through life. The method should suggest formal education with informal education.

His method is briefly introduced in his words but contemporary teachers are not able to cope up with this teaching method. Professionally people are not used to accepting such education without a degree certificate in real life.

Adapting Gandhian Teaching Methods to Contemporary Contexts

Gandhian pedagogy was centered around learning by doing, integration of productive work into the classroom, and nurturing moral and social consciousness through everyday experiences. While conceptually powerful, these methods face practical challenges in today's rigid and standardized schooling system—limited classroom time, lack of skilled teachers, and overemphasis on exams and marks. To overcome this, innovative adaptations are needed. For instance, project-based learning (PBL) can serve as a modern parallel to Gandhiji's "work-centric" approach. A weaving activity or gardening project could be linked to math, science, and environmental studies while fostering collaboration and reflection.

Moreover, digital tools like virtual labs, augmented reality, or community apps can be leveraged to simulate experiential

learning when physical resources are unavailable. Teacher education must also be reoriented to train educators not just in subject matter, but in facilitating hands-on, integrated, and socially relevant learning. Through such adaptations, Gandhian teaching methods can evolve into a viable framework for value-rich, learner-centered education in today's diverse and dynamic learning environments.

Conclusion

As the core idea of this study on Gandhian education philosophy, two major aspects can be seen that are 'Humanism' and 'Socialism'. A person is being made for society to serve humanity in the free world. Gandhian education philosophy has a very good impact on oral/written form but it is very difficult to apply as it is in the Indian contemporary education system. Peace and value education and hand on training of today's education have a glance at Gandhian education philosophy, but today's world of technology demands more additions in education to develop competitive modern citizens of the nation.

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