

## **Module 3 : Mahatma Gandhi**

### **Section 9 : Basic Education**

Gandhi has attempted to explore a system of education which is called basic education. This system of education is in conformity with his philosophy of life and values. He does not view education in the sense of formal literacy. Literacy, he holds, is not the end or even the beginning of education. It is only one of the means whereby a man or woman can be educated. He takes education in a broad perspective and brings forth its two basic objectives, acquisition of knowledge and a sense of freedom. Knowledge begins with questioning or healthy inquisitiveness. This is the prerequisite for any kind of learning. Further inquisitiveness should be associated with a sense of humility and not with any imprudence knowledge which includes training of some kind acquired with inquisitiveness and humility is necessary for service of the society or humanity at large. Further Gandhi in his philosophy of education endorses the view that education liberates a person. By liberation he means freedom from all servitude. Gandhi mentions two kinds of servitude such as slavery to domination from outside and slavery to one's own artificial needs. By this he emphasizes the importance of moral freedom and simple living. The pursuit of these ideals constitutes the objectives of education.

Gandhi takes education as a lifelong process and does not limit it to formal schooling or acquiring degrees. It stands for an all round and integral development of the human personality. It encompassed the physical, intellectual and spiritual faculties of the individual and their harmonious development. He writes, "Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all three is required for making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education."<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi was critical of the system of education prevalent at his time as that was only degree-oriented but not life-oriented. Education which aims at producing only white-collar snobs is no education at all. True education must not overlook any aspect of man's being or any area of human development.

<sup>12</sup> The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, Op. Cit., P. 419.

Gandhi's basic education is a breakthrough in the prevalent and traditional system of education. He holds the view that a child's education should begin with the teaching of a useful craft to enable him to produce something right from the beginning of his study and training. He further insists that it should be taught scientifically so that the child should know the why and wherefore of every process. Gandhi's emphasis on Craft-centred education had great importance in Indian scenario. In a populous and poor country craft would make education self-supportive. In India it is not possible to educate all citizens and provide them government jobs. In Indian scenario vocational education will be of great help to provide employment opportunity to all citizens and make them self-sufficient. Gandhi links education with socio-economic development of the community. If education does not cater to the needs of the society, then such education would be wasteful.

Gandhi's emphasis on craft and vocational education is not because of its productive utility only but because of an ideology that he holds very dear. He insists on dignity of labour and thinks that vocation-oriented education can promote this ideal among the students. This education would incorporate an attitude in the mind of the students to look upon manual work and intellectual work on equal term. This will usher in a revolutionary change in our work-culture and mental attitude as well. Further education imparted through handicraft will bring a harmonious development of hand, head and heart. For craft-centered education would also involve intelligent planning, theoretical soundness and proper evaluation. Such education can also establish an intimate relation between the teacher and taught, for in the act of teaching and learning they work together to produce something. In the process the teacher inculcates the art of living in the student.

Character-building is another important objective of basic education. A student should be impressed upon the values of simple and honest living and hard work. Besides the emotional impulses the child should be taken care of through mental training. Fellow-feeling, mutual sharing, love sympathy, compassion etc. should be generated in the mind of the child during his formative period. That will help him to cultivate moral values like discipline, integrity, purity of character etc. in his later life. Gandhi lays utmost emphasis on moral development to be one of the primary objectives of education.

The purpose of education is to inculcate a sense of social responsibility in the individual. Any system of effective education must be aimed at achieving social goals. Gandhi seems to be a visionary in this respect. Basic education insists on the cultivation of a high sense of social consciousness. The purpose of learning moral behavior is to regulate one's conduct in society. For morality is a social obligation and moral behavior is an essential requirement for a peaceful and harmonious living in society. Education

can create a healthy social spirit in the individual which ultimately helps to improve the quality of life in the society. Gandhi reconciles individual freedom with social responsibility to a most satisfactory degree in his system of basic education.

Gandhi postulates an ideal republic based on justice, non-violence and equality. The purpose of basic education is the gradual approximation of that ideal society. A society with self-reliance and well-balanced citizens with a high sense of moral values no doubt can progress successively for the gradual realization of an ideal republic in the long run. An ideal society will emerge with ideal citizens. Education plays a significant role to prepare children to be ideal citizens. Basic education aims to make them self-dependent and impress upon them their rights and responsibilities.

Gandhi has also hinted at the curriculum method of teaching, medium of instruction on various occasions. Scholars discussing Gandhi's philosophy of education have systematized his views on different aspects of basic education. Critical evaluation has been made to assess the theoretical and practical implications of basic education. Gandhi's emphasis on craft-oriented study, character-building and nourishing an ideal social order seems to be the basic objective of his policy of education. Scholars and educationists have applauded the program and policy of basic education.

Critics bring out different drawbacks of basic education. Basic education is primarily vocation-oriented and it gives much emphasis on productive work. But productivity is not necessarily creativity. Rather it neglects the creative spirit potent in the child. This system of education appears archaic and may not have relevance in the changing situation. When the socio-economic situation is undergoing rapid change under the influence of science and technology emphasis on basic education may drive society backward. At present goods of various types are manufactured by skilled workless and the indigenous products of the students cannot reach that standard. So it is doubtful that all educational institutions would run self-sufficiently. Further a craft-centered education cannot always be man-centered and in this process man may be treated as means but not an end. In an age of industrialization and technological sophistication it is doubtful how far the Gandhian model will be socially needful.

Of course, Gandhi is not opposed to modernity and scientific research. But any scheme of education or development, as the case may be, cannot rule out Gandhi's ideals. For he always gives emphasis on sustainable development, eco-friendly environment and a non-exploitative economic system. He insists on a humane, just and equitable social order in accordance with his values of life. Keeping all these ideals intact, changes or reformations can be brought in his theories to suit to the changing situations. Gandhi's system of education was a landmark for it meant to shape a society of his dream. It had important link with his social ideals and philosophy of life. Gandhi will not be opposed to any new experiment if that would usher better social system and improve the quality of life.

## **Conclusion**

Gandhi's social and political thought has a wide dimension. Gandhi has expressed his thoughts on many issues of contemporary society. He may not be a consistent system builder but has some insightful vision on many issues which have important bearing on social life. Again there are many other ideas and relevant issues which have not been taken up for discussion. Further the topics which have been taken up in this work admit wide range for consideration. Any topic-may it be Sarvodaya, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Nationalism etc. – can be a subject matter for an intensive research. Here I have just tried to give some preliminary idea about some important issues of Gandhi's political thought.

For understanding or for a proper evaluation of Gandhi's thought one should consider the historical situation and also the social compulsions of the time that helped in the formation of his ideas. When he returned to India his immediate concern was to end the colonial rule and make India politically independent. He also wanted to reorganize the pluralistic Indian society giving priority to economic development. His line of approach helped to build a cohesive force to fight for India's independence. He could unite the rural people and involved them in India's freedom struggle. He also fought against many social evils and in the process incurred the displeasure of the orthodox people. But he tried to awaken the people and raise their moral sensitivity to remove many evils like caste discrimination, Untouchability, subjugation of women etc. from Indian society.

Gandhi was a reformist as well as a revolutionary. But his method of revolution was something new in human history. Despite all the drawbacks of Satyagraha it opened new horizons to fight against injustice

and social evil. It created a new culture of political activism in the world. His trusteeship and basic education may be very impracticable ideals in its real form. But the sprits behind these ideas have far reaching consequence. His ideal republic sometimes sounds utopian but his vision of a classless society and concern for an ideal social system cannot be overlooked. Gandhi's vision of a stateless society presents his anarchist model. But for all practical purposes he preferred a decentralized, non-violent, democratic socialistic state. His emphasis on gramaswaraj(self-sufficient villages) has a great significance as there are more than five lakhs village in this country. Gandhi was no doubt against industrialization and technology. So he is treated as anti-modern by his critics. But the truth is- he was against that form of technology or industrialization which gives rise to colonialism, exploitation and wide economic gap. He was a socialist at the core of his belief and a great champion of sustainable development and eco-friendly environment. His contention was that there should be that sort of technology which will not endanger the future existence of humanity nor will divide the society into haves and have-nots.

Gandhi is very often misunderstood for intermingling religion and politics. But in fact he deviated from their traditional meaning and stipulated new meaning to religion and politics. For him religion represents the cardinal values and politics stands for reorganizing the social structure on the basis of justice. So he linked religion and politics in their revised meanings. But he was never theocratic, communal or anti-secular. On the contrary he was a great votary of liberalism and secularism. He only tried to blend politics with ethics.

It is true that there are many inconsistencies and drawbacks in some of his ideas and ideals and that is because he is not a system builder or an academic thinker. Sometimes he is also guided by utopian dreams and impracticable ideas. But despite all these limitations he was a great votary of civilizational values and champion of peace and non-violence. People all over the world hold him in high esteem and consider him to be the spokesman for the conscience of all mankind. He has outgrown all boundaries and is not restricted to any country or culture.

### **Possible Questions**

1. Discuss Gandiji's view on Sarvodaya?
2. Critically evaluate the concept of Non-Violence in Gandhi's philosophy and bring out its implication in our life.
3. Explain Gandhi's view on Education?
4. Examine Gandhi's view of Truth and bring out its relevance in modern times.
5. Is Gandhi's thought is relevant today?