

Role of Mahatma Gandhi in Higher Education

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Education is a lifelong process. Through this process a human being learns till his last breath and acquires knowledge, the most important of which, according to Socrates is, how the best to live. For Gandhi education is to accord a dimension to man's all-round development. Hence, in short, to make one's life prosperous and worthy. It is education that brings a human being out of the state of ambiguity, ignorance and perplexity that are, according to Gautama Buddha, the main causes of distress and uproar in life. Education inspires the man to follow those values, which are eternal and welfareistic, and thus on the strength of them to extend the peace to rise. Furthermore, on the one hand it controls the damage caused by mistakes, which besides being natural, are more or less committed knowingly or unknowingly by every human being, and on other it helps in developing the existing knowledge of man up to the highest level. Not only this, education increases the power of argument in man and broadens his understanding. In addition, it develops virtues in him and leads him towards the reality and truthfulness, which are the fundamentals to achieve prosperity and peace.

Moreover, education is not a situation of the status quo. It is a state of dynamism. It is full of activeness and continuity. That is why; by awakening the man and developing virtues in him, education as an effective, important and the best means plays the vital role in achieving peace on the one hand and to make it certain on the other. In this regard, if the one ventures to say that the pathway to peace goes through the avenues of education, it will not be inappropriate mental

development of a person. In course of time, education has to develop a person in all respects in order to enable him to become self-reliant. To become self-dependant or for his all-round development, it is necessary that he should have moral upliftment in addition to his physical or intellectual development.

It is absolutely necessary that he should not only be able to earn his bread, but should be able to fulfill the obligations of his family and in carving the path of his progress, should ultimately be able to achieve his goal in life. A young man or woman may pass the Graduate or the Post-graduate examination with first division or may further acquire the M. Phil. or Ph.D. degree, but still he/she does not become self-dependant and is not able to channelize his/her future along successful lines by worrying about his/her day-to-day problems. In such a case, will the education received by him/her or the degrees acquired by him/her be regarded as meaningful? In my opinion such an education or degree is useless. This reality can be perceived not only in India but in other countries also. Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi statement that education does not mean getting literary knowledge is true even in the context of the world. Today, due to an increasing population, there is a lot of competition for getting admission in colleges and universities. This is more true in the case of higher education. Everyone wants to go in for graduation, post-graduation, M. Phil or a Ph.D. degree. A person, who has spent a major, precious part of his life in obtaining a degree or passing through any level of higher education and who has not received any

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guidance for the future or is unable to make himself self-dependant, should he be considered educated? The answer would be in the negative. This is what is happening. It appears that education today has failed in giving any direction. It is a fact that our system of education has been defective for the last many decades. Even after independence, our leaders have not taken such steps as they should have to reform our defective educational system. Since independence and till now, many committees and commissions have been formed, but how much improvement has been made in the sphere of education? Not much.

People like Dr. Radhakrishnan and Dr. Zakir Hussain, well-known educationists on national and international levels, have been the Presidents of our country. It is an anomaly that education has not been able to give right direction to our youths, or to provide them opportunities for their all-round development or to make them self-dependant. The number of students for higher education increases every year and is still growing further. If we do not awaken at the right time and bring changes in our defective educational system according to the view-points of Mahatma Gandhi, the situation would become so serious that we would not be able to manage it. Mahatma Gandhi, an advocate of a solid foundation for human beings was firm on giving free and compulsory elementary education to all. In Harijan of 9 October, 1937, he wrote that he was firmly in favour of the principle of free and compulsory education for India. He further wrote that at this level along with the training in any trade, their physical, mental and spiritual potentialities also be developed. Under present circumstances, I would like to add further that arrangements should be made for free and compulsory education to all up to the secondary level without any discrimination of lineage, gender, creed, caste or sub-caste. The

government should do this. I firmly believe that if Mahatma Gandhi had been with us today, he would have held the same opinion. Imparting of physical and mental training for the growth of good physique and mind and moral education for the formation of character and good conduct on the elementary and the secondary levels should be the priority.

Besides, students should have technical knowledge according to their interest at these levels so that it may enable them to become self-dependant in future. This type of education imparted at the secondary level will incorporate four kinds of education, viz. technical, physical-mental, moral and general according to syllabus]. After having received this secondary education, students would certainly become self-dependant and would be able to choose the career they would like to follow. Each and every student should have a definite aim before he enters the field of higher education; otherwise it is meaningless to pursue higher education. There is a general thinking today that they would decide what they would do after having passed B.A. or M.A. or acquired some other degree. That is sheer waste of time and money and they would not achieve anything except groping in the dark. They will have a clear-direction only when the system of education at the secondary level is managed on the lines I have briefly discussed. Regarding this, it can be further said that a student should primarily pursue his studies at the graduate level on the basis of the elementary technical education he/she receives at the secondary level along with the other three. It is the requirement of the nation and is important at the international level as well.

Indian culture is one of most vibrant cultures in the world and rural culture forms its backbone. Some people tend to pitch urban and rural culture in a hierarchical form. This is incorrect. The urban culture may be functional to an industrial context.

So is the rural culture to the context of rural development. Thankfully, a good proportion of India population lives in the rural areas; which means that urbanization has yet consumed its souls i.e. rural India, despite some signs of the disconcerting air of their urban brethren rubbing on to the rural populace. Admittedly, technology is rapidly changing our life styles, and one has to factor in the in the impact of this change on rural India as well. Although, the windfalls of applying appropriate technology in the rural areas, especially in agriculture and allied fields, are heartening, total submission to modernization is not desirable and has to be avoided at any cost. This can be done right from the formative years of children, when they have just begun acquiring knowledge. Culture, Commerce and Development.

It is commonly believed, in development circles, that social and cultural in rural India has been slow. Well, conversely, it can be argued that this resistance to completely succumb to this technological change by rural India is what has preserved our identity and held us together to pursue a culture-sensitive approach to development, there is a need to better understand cultural diversity and how it affects/ marks on the process of development. If one looks back into the pages of our history, one would find that, invariably, culture has been the platform for all socio-economic development. Our traditional practices, derived from scores of cultures which are traditionally distinct yet significantly transcending, have been central to economic growth, as indeed that of our civilization. The (traditional) practices provide a stimulus to trade and commerce, which in turn patronize culture. Hundreds of festivals, fairs, melas and other cultural events, month after month and year after year, in a sort of logical sequence, present a myriad range of avenues for trade and commerce. The cyclic and cascading effect of the

above process is the reason behind the development and prosperity of many a culture rich civilization. Culture and Education- the inseparable twins. Having looked at how culture has provided the necessary impetus to the economy through the ages, let us now see the implications of education on culture and , consequently, on the rural sector. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan said, the aim of education is no the acquisition of information, although important, or acquisition of technical skills, though essential in modern society, but the development of that bent of mind, that attitude of reason, that spirit of democracy which will make us responsible citizens. Indeed, a comprehensive education system would help shape the younger generation into one that has a sound ethical base and a strong sense of social responsibility.

Culture and education are inseparable and yet complementary with multiple points of interaction. Culture paves the way for education while education is responsible for flavoring the cultural values in life. Therefore, both have to be interwoven in various ways. A sense of pride in our culture has to manifest itself through all the stages of an individual growth. Primary education is where it all starts and the child begins to respect the importance of a value based life as she/he and he sees things and events happening, and the behavior of others, around.

These collectively, form the personality that develops in the process. Therefore, it is necessary to inculcate the importance of education and value based living for a truly sustainable development of the rural sector. The maxims of Gandhiji, Tagore, Vinoba Bhave and many other social activists, bordering on equitable living, rural empowerment, voluntary rural reconstruction and transformation, and sustained rural development, have to be made as the central themes of the education system.

Education founded on strong cultural values will help students understand and acknowledge the significance of culture in the development context. Education devoid of culture will only serve as a flight to obscurity. When one uses the phase education rooted in culture. What it means is that if education has to serve as an engine for development, especially in the rural areas, then it has to extract the best out of our values that have stood the test of time in the face of adversities ranging from tyranny to colonialism/imperialism or other turbulences and propel ourselves onto the path of inclusive development.

Obviously the development of a nation hinges on how much its rural segment has been mobilized to contribute to the over-all growth. While material growth is evident amongst many nations, the cultural dividend is grossly missing. Some cultures have been lost to reconstruct their history, picking up bits and pieces of their cultural heritage whatever little can be traced in order to revive some of their cultures. So, as we can see, although there is rural development, the cultural pedigree is often missing. Fortunately, we in India, have yet fallen prey to the machinations of technological advancement leading to the depletion of our cultural base. But, if we do not pause and take stock of things now, and initiate necessary action, we will join the company of others who lost their cultural roots.

Cultures, as a matter of fact, keep adjusting to the times without losing much of their original flavor. Take for example, the festival of Deepavali was long celebrated by lighting the traditional ~Diyas (Lamps), symbolic of the victory of good over evil. But, the advent and impact of science, and the resultant innovations over time-especially during the twentieth century has been immense and we now see the same festival being celebrated by firing crackers preceded however, by the tradition of lighting the lamps without fail. We can have quite a few examples of tradition

being kept alive as a parallel to the process of modernization. What all this hints at is that development must be a result of the synergy between education and culture. Already pointed earlier, while the western-culture has almost overshadowed our cultural practices across the entire metropolis, cities and towns, a value based system still appears to be breathing in rural India and its interlands. This needs to be preserved, nurtured and propagated. And, to be able to do that, all efforts must be put in to ensure that villagers, tribal people and aboriginals stay in the rural areas, which will only be possible if we are able to bring to them what they seek from the urban areas: access to proper education (primary, secondary and higher), training and support, and employment and income-generation opportunities on par with their urban counterparts

There is also the possibility of their becoming self-dependant. If Mahatma Gandhi's views on higher education are analyzed and reviewed in the perspective of the circumstances prevailing today, the above stated educational system would be according to them. It will be in proximity to his statement in which he expressed his desire that by changing the nature of college education, he would make it conform to the needs of the nation. Having become a graduate with technical knowledge any young boy or girl would be capable of seeking self-employment in a country with a population as large as in India and it will be comparably easy for him/her to get a government or non-government job. He or she can also pursue his or her studies further while doing his/her job. In this way, being self-dependant, a young boy/girl can continue his/her studies further to fulfill his/her aim and object. This is what Gandhi wanted. One who is self-employed will not have to run about after graduation for post-graduation or any other higher degree. Apart from this, he will not be required to waste precious time and money. It

will naturally bring down the unnecessary crowding in colleges and universities. Besides, education will be purposeful and will be able to guide in the right direction. In short, these are Mahatma Gandhi views on higher education and keeping them in mind, the system of education in India will have to be reformed. These views of Mahatma Gandhi can be our guide and can contribute to the management of our educational system. Mahatma Gandhi had talked about self-sufficiency of colleges and universities. It meant that these institutions instead of depending on government aid should be self-financed. India is an agricultural country. Most of the industries are based on agriculture. Gandhi wanted that more and more self-financed Agriculture-Colleges should be opened and they should be attached to related industries which would turn out graduates according to their requirement. Not only this, they should bear the expenses of their education and the training-staff. Gandhi wanted the same system to be adopted for graduates of engineering and medical colleges. Engineering graduates should be attached to the related industry and medical graduates to hospitals. Law, Commerce and Arts colleges can be managed by voluntary organizations and donations can be procured according to their requirement. Mahatma Gandhi was never in favour of government aid.

Conclusion:

However, wanted the universities control over the colleges and that of the government over

the universities. It is another matter that under the present circumstances, we have not been able to incorporate his views in our system of higher education, but they are worth giving a thought. The self-dependence he has talked about is certainly significant, otherwise how long will the colleges and the universities thrive on government aid? Keeping it in view, we will have to make a firm and well planned schedule and put it into practice. Peace through higher education it is absolutely necessary that the real meaning, purpose and goal of education is well understood. Simultaneously, by understanding the sense of all welfare, which exists in its root, practices are carried out. If it is done accordingly, there is no reason that peace does not exist among human beings or the way to peace is not available to every human being.

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