

Gandhian Educational Thoughts and an Awakening of Spiritualism

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Abstract: Religion is an institution established by man for various reasons. Exert control; instill morality, stroke egos, or whatever it does. Whereas Spirituality is a complete control over the conduct of human beings. It is the awakening of inner sense and manifestation of the perfection and divinity in men. The meaning of spirituality has developed and expanded over time, and various connotations can be found alongside each other.. Traditionally, spirituality referred to a religious process of re-formation which "aims to recover the original shape of man", oriented at "the image of God" as exemplified by the founders and sacred texts of the religions of the world

Key words: Atman, Brahmacharya, Satyagraha, Swaraj or Ram Raj, Takli, daridranarayana

All round development in man is the end of education. Without spiritual development a man can not be a complete human being. Spiritualism is a great exposure of the awakening of human consciousness to drive a man to know himself and to have a complete control over himself. Spiritualism in man brings self-purification and self-discipline. Spiritualism evolves out of a purified and serene state of mind that makes a harmonious balance between inherent needs and diverse attractions. When a man exceeds himself and thinks beyond himself, he can conquer the little self and ascend to know the higher self – the supreme self which is in terms of spiritualism stands for the real atman. The practice of non-violence is based on the sound inner practice of self-purification. ‘...the use of the matchless weapon of Satyagraha which is a direct corollary of non-violence and truth.It is a solvent strong enough to melt the stoniest heart.’¹ The essence of spiritualism in Gandhian education enlighten the inner self and crushes the essentials moral restraint. ‘The ascent of the inner spirit for which Gandhi continually aspires is what serves as the essence of Gandhian spiritualism. Here is a continual aspirant for enlightenment of the inner self,-the sacred and serene self-who pays earnest endeavour to move all the world with his theory and practice or non-violence to be aware of utilizing and ennobling the qualities of the head and the heart that stand for spiritualism par excellence.’²

Gandhian spiritualism allows priority of the heart to the head, the inner beauty of religion to mere observance of rites and rituals. According to Gandhi Brahmacharya is an opener of the doors and avenues of spiritualization. A proper synchronization of body, mind, thought, word and deed is needed through spiritual ascent and excellence. He clarifies his view points:

“I was anxious to observe brhamacharya in thought, word and deed, and equally anxious to devote the maximum of time to the Satyagraha struggle and fit myself for it by

cultivating purity. I was therefore led to make further changes and to impose greater restraints upon myself in the matter of food. The motive for the previous changes had been largely hygienic, but the new experiments were made from a religious standpoint.”³

The purity of thought and action is essential for self-restraint. Fasting in relation to self-restraint is on Gandhi’s views:

“Fasting can help to curb animal passion, only if it is undertaken with a view to self-restraint. Some of my friends have actually found their animal passion and palate stimulated as an after effect of fasts. That is to say, fasting is futile unless it is accompanied by an incessant longing for self-restraint.”⁴ It is the teacher who has a very significant role for the spiritual development of students being a living example of man of character. Gandhi makes a very clear analysis:

“The spiritual training of the boys is a much more difficult matter than their physical and mental training. I relied little on religious books for the training of the spirit. Of course I believed that every student should be acquainted with the elements of his own religion and have a general knowledge of his own scriptures, and therefore, I provided for such knowledge as best as I could. But that, to my mind, was part of the intellectual training. Long before I undertook the education of the youngsters of the Tolstoy Farm I had realized that the training of the spirit was a thing by itself.”

“To develop the spirit is to build character and to enable one to work towards knowledge of God and self-realization. And I held that this was an essential part of the training of the young, and that all training without culture of the spirit was of no use, and might be even harmful.”⁵ According to Gandhi spiritual education aims at revelation of Truth and ensures boldness and awareness to a certain sense of spiritual insight. Spiritual development occurs when pupils

themselves are encouraged through their inner sense disseminate between the right and wrong, the good and evil, the moral and the immoral, truth and untruth, they will be able to form within themselves the rightest attitude towards spiritualism. Gandhi believes, “pupils should know to discriminate between what should be received and what rejected. It is the duty of teacher to teach pupils discrimination. The Rishis taught their pupils without books. They only gave them a few mantras which the pupils treasured in their memories and translated in practical life.”⁶

Gandhi earnestly feels that the present day student has to live in the midst of heap of books, sufficiently fails to receive the education of the heart and crude facts of life. Education of the heart is the education of self realization reveals the ultimate truth, beauty and goodness and harmonizes body, mind and spirit. Such education enables the child to have a control over passions and emotions but the modern mind has been maimed and crippled at the hands of automation and passivity. To him spiritual development of the child necessitates proper manifestation.

His views on spiritual development are as follows:

“True education of the children can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, e.g. hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words, an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of development of his intellect. But unless the development of mind and the body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lopsided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart.”⁷ The History of human civilization admits that it is Gandhi and Gandhi alone who has ennobled manual work as the highest spiritual endeavor in education. He made a balance between intellect and spirit- the culture of the brain and the culture of hands and feet. It was a revolutionary approach to education that formulated the concept of Basic education. Gandhi expressed his views:

“He (Gandhi) had great regard for what could be achieved with men’s hands and feet. Indeed he used to say, ‘ there is no point in developing the brain only. One has to develop one’s brain through one’s hands’. If I were a poet, I would write a beautiful poem on the possibilities of the five fingers of one’s hand. Today one tends to say that a person is cultured if he does not use his hands. It is necessary to correct the concept of culture and spirituality and recognize and embellish the moral and spiritual equalities of the different occupations of working classes. And that was for Gandhi completely right. 8.

Gandhi gave emphasis on soul development through the education of heart and politeness to enable learners to follow nobler and higher values of life. He advocates for stimulating purity, simplicity, politeness and dissemination

of clear concept of right and wrong, good and evil. Spiritual education will not divert humane sensibilities towards evil directions. He rightly remarks:

“ we cannot properly control or conquer the sexual passion by turning a blind eye to it . I am, therefore, strongly in favour of teaching young boys and girls the significance and right use of their generative organs and in my own way I have tried to impact this knowledge to young children of both sexes, for whose training I was sensible. But the sex education that I stand for must have for its object the conquest and sublimation of the sex passion.....it is man’s special privilege and pride to be gifted with the faculties of head and heart both, that he is thinking no less than a feeling animal, and to renounce the sovereignty of reason over the blind instinct is, therefore, to renounce a man’s estate.”⁹

Gandhi believes that students should be taught how to lead a desirable, moral and spiritual life. The most important task of imparting moral and spiritual education is to be taken up and performed to eliminate ‘sex complex’ right from the educational Institutions. The soul force in the learners will direct spiritual awakening to control greed, lust, corruption and sensualism.

“The conquest of Lust is the highest endeavour of a man’s or a woman’s existence. And without overcoming lust , man cannot hope to rule over self, there can be no Swaraj or Ram Raj. Rule of all without the rule of oneself would prove to be as deceptive and as disappointing as painted toy mango, charming to look at, but hollow and empty within. Soul –force comes only through God’s grace and never descends upon a man who is a slave to lust”.¹⁰

Gandhi an ardent follower of spiritualism sincerely hopes of controlling animal passion through spiritual excellence. Self –realization can restrain animal passions and safeguard moral laws and principles. In this connection he opines:

“ It s wrong and immoral to seek to escape the consequences of one’s act. It is still worse for a person to indulge in his animal passions and escape the consequences of his acts. Moral result can only be produced by moral restraints. 11

Basic Education throws light on the spiritual education for character building and humanizing lesson. The foundation of right thinking, right feeling, right doing can be developed through the inculcation of spiritual lesson of education for character building. Absolute purity of heart comes through the observance of truth and brahmacharya.

Education is the manifestation of purity and perfection. Gandhi moulds education for inner awakening. The learner has to draw out his inherent spiritual force latent in him to pave the avenues of self-understanding and self-assessment. But modern education is alarmingly camouflaged due to lack of spiritual education.

Gandhi highlights manual training in primary education at wardha conference on 22nd October In 1937 and says, “ I am convinced that the present system of primary education is not only wasteful, but is positively harmful....I think the remedy lies in educating them by means vocational and manual training. I have some experience of myself, having trained my sons and other children on Tolstoy Farm in South Africa through some manual training,..”¹²

The wholeness of education could be achieved through an insight into manual labour –‘a practical religion’ of self-help is the inner worth of spiritualism. Gandhi shows us a distinct pattern of spiritualism through manual work. He remarks,

“I have been accused of being opposed to literary training. Far from it, I simply want to show the way in which it should be given. Takli is a good enough toy to play with. It is no less a toy because it is a productive one. Whilst the child will be encouraged to spin and help his parents with agricultural jobs, he will also be made to feel that he does not belong only to his parents but also to the village and to the country, and that he must make some return to them. They would make them self –confident and brave by their playing for their own education by their own labour. This system is to be common to all Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians. Why do I not lay any stress on religious education, people ask. Because I am teaching them practical religion, the religion of self-help.”¹³

Gandhi strongly intends to bring about a radical change in the concept of education. He wants education to be shaped for emancipation of inherent spirit of an individual through ‘learning by doing’. He emphasizes to reshape education for right thinking, right feeling and right doing to eliminate passion and enrich detachment. According to him “the present system of education does not meet the requirements of the country in any shape or form. English, having been made the medium of instruction in all the higher branches of learning, has created a permanent bar between the highly educated few and the uneducated many. The absence of vocational training has made the educated class almost unfit for productive work and has harmed them physically.”¹⁴

Gandhi advocates education for self-purification through a spiritual manner to bring a real social revolution. He desired to create a favorable atmosphere of purity and self-restraint for the harmonious development of pupil.

He remarks, “When Gandhi speaks for truth or non-violence it also encapsulates this spiritual ascent of man. Let every child grow up in an atmosphere of purity and self-consciousness, self-restraint and fearlessness. No other education can replace this objective because no other education can embrace ardour and adoration, labour and devotion for spiritual erudition that heightens the inherent and true spirit of religion”¹⁵

Spiritual development enables man to differentiate between good and evil. It is the awareness that evil can not lead goodness rather it is goodness that gradually eliminates evil. His spiritual education gave emphasis on the sound foundation or means to reach the end. He remarks:

“If I want to cross the ocean, I can do only by means of a vessel; if I were to use a cart for that purpose, both the cart and I would soon find the bottom. The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same invisible connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. I can not likely to obtain the result flowing from the worship of god by laying myself prostrate before satan. If, therefore, anyone to say: ‘I want to worship God; it does not matter if I do so by means of Satan’, it would be set down as ignorant folly. We reap exactly as we sow.”¹⁶

Holding goodness under every circumstance is desirable through the continual and strenuous process of self-purification. According to Gandhi, ‘The spiritual weapon of self-purification, intangible as it seems, is the most potent means of revolutionizing one’s environment and loosening external shackles . I work subtly and invisibly, it is an intense process through it might often seem a weary and long drawn process; it is the straight way to liberation, the surest and quickest and no effort can be too great for it. What it requires is faith-an unshackable mountain like faith that flinches from nothing’

Gandhi believes that the education of socialism is the education of spiritualism that teaches the lesson of unity in diversity and purity of thought and action. A socialistic society provide an environment of truth and non-violence through which the crude desire and ill wills can be eliminated. So elimination of impurity of mind and body is the main task of education. Society is the great source of spiritual development. Social ills keep the inner sensibilities inert and inactive and everyone has to fight against these ills and keen to transform himself from petty interests towards societal national and global development.

“Gandhi’s entire approach was thus societal in content. Although Gandhi reposed great faith in God and believed in the values of spirituality and ethics, his spirituality, his God and his ethics were all products of the social reality. ‘Truth is God’ said Gandhi in later years and indicated that he had found his God in the habitats of the poor, the daridranarayana. Gandhi’s position became further clear when he said, in his independence day message to the country on 15th August ,1947, that ‘ God comes to the poor in the shape of bread’. Gandhi’s main concern was, therefore, with truth-the supreme fact of life, one that has accounted for the total global reality of his times.”

Gandhi redirects religion towards the best possible manifestation of spiritualism-the course of love to mankind and a synchronized manner of simplicity and tolerance. It

will teach the lesson of endearment and glorify the spiritual ascent of man. Tolerance contributes to the manifestation of religion as a great transcendental force which modifies the limitations of religious beliefs and faith. Tolerance is an invaluable component for spiritual insight that can be achieved through the indigenous pattern of education. The religion that places man as the endless worshiper of Truth, Beauty and Goodness is the true religion of love for mankind.

The spiritual education of Gandhi opens the new following parameters:

Spiritual education is the only education for the advancement of man as a good human being for the sake of good of all human beings. Education is a unique, unending and complex process of self-realization Education through work harmonizes the matter with spirit and creates intrinsic motivation in students mind

The ultimate goal of education is the development of soul force. Spiritual education accelerates this inner development and to achieve this goal education should be directed towards this end. Gandhian education quickens the transcendence of humanity and human values Gandhi moulds education to promote Truth , Beautiful, and Goodness and to safeguard human values like conscience, love and tolerance. Education with spiritual touch dispels the mists of ignorance and frees human mind from stress, anxiety, delusions , disappointment, despair and depression.

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