

MAHATMA GANDHI

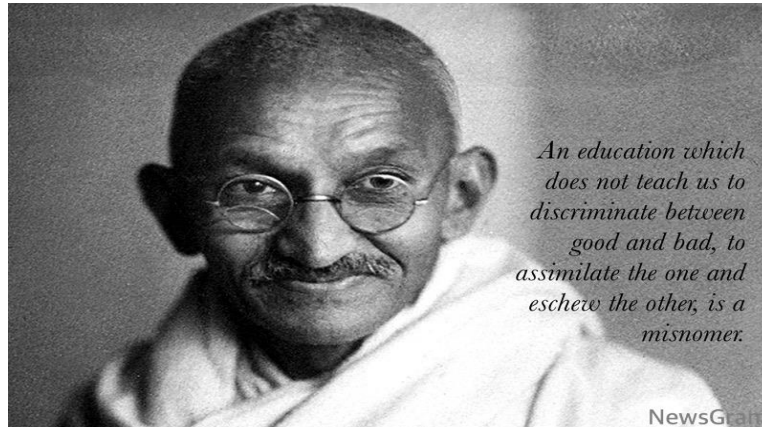
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Module Structure

Mahatma Gandhi	Introduction, Gandhi's Views on Education, Basic Education, <i>Swaraj and Swadeshi</i> , Objectives of Education.
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Description of the module

Items	Description of the module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Education and Society
Module Name/Title	Mahatma Gandhi
Module Id	9d
Pre Requisites	Relationship between societal need and educational system.
Objectives	This module examines Gandhi's ideas on the need to evolve an educational system that really gives freedom to citizens. Emphasis is laid on need based education rather than on mechanically following western modules.
Key Words	Village, Self-sufficiency, Freedom, Grounded education system, Equality



Mohandas Karmachand Gandhi (1869- 1948)

Introduction

Mohandas Karmachand Gandhi, known to the world as Mahatma Gandhi was born in Porbandar, Gujarat on 2nd October 1869, into a Hindu Modh family. His father was the Chief Minister of Porbandar, and his mother had deep faith in Jain religion and hence Gandhi's upbringing was on the tenants of Jain teachings of mutual tolerance, non-injury to living beings and vegetarianism.

Gandhi's exposure to realities of life in South Africa taught him about life much more than what he had learnt in formal institutions of learning. It is this understanding of life which gave shape to his views on the nature of education that a free India needed.

To understand Gandhi's views on education it is very important for us to visit his ideas on Indian society. This brings us to *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* the two guiding principles, which are at the root of all of his arguments.

Concepts of *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*

Swaraj and *swadeshi* are the two terms which represent the type of society that Gandhi visualised for free India. *Swaraj* is to be understood as independence/autonomy/home rule/self-rule. *Swadeshi* symbolises all that is rooted in our own society (material and non-material). It could also be understood as self-sufficiency or self-reliance (Burke, 2000).

Swaraj for Gandhi was not simply a question of freedom for India from the British and declaration of independence. To him freedom simply did not mean throwing out the British, and making way for leaders from India who would continue the British model of governance. Freedom begins from the bottom and the village must emerge as a republic having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs. Ultimately it is the individual who is the unit (see Burke, 2000).

Gandhi's ideas on education are basically rooted in his vision of an ideal society. His idea of 'village swaraj' is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. To him every village has to address the local needs of the people such as food crops and cotton for cloth. He further notes that the village should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then, if there is more land available, it will grow *useful* money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks, ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. The government of the village will be conducted by a [council] of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this [council] will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. (*Village Swaraj* compiled by H.V. Vyas, 1962. pp:44-46 http://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/village_swaraj.pdf).

Gandhi's Views on Education

Gandhi basically views education as a life trainer and not as theoretical knowledge imparted in class rooms. He argued that education is not merely a means to achieve status or earn money; rather it should bring freedom to the individual. (*The Selected Works of Gandhi* Vol. 6, 'The Voice of Truth'). He advocated the imparting of education along with vocational training. He was of the view that vocational training was grounded in the needs of the community. It is only this form of education which was a good way to learn and understand. To Gandhi basic education was the most important means through which an ideal society consisting of small, self-reliant communities with ideal citizens who are industrious, self-respecting and generous individuals living in a small cooperative community could be built (Burke, 2000).

Gandhi very clearly differentiated between literacy and education. 'By education I mean all-around development, drawing out of the best in the child-man body, mind and spirit. Literacy according to him is neither the end of education nor even the beginning. It is one of the means through which men and women could be educated. He noted that literacy in itself is not education' (http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_education_gandhiview.htm).

Objectives of Education

To Gandhi, Education is an instrument to attain equality. He very strongly spoke of the need for opening of educational opportunities for women and those who were denied access to education in Indian society. In his writings, Gandhi clearly displayed a holistic approach to education. While addressing the congress workers he noted that inclusion of *Harijans* into schools alone will not bring about change. He had indicated that hostels and schools should not segregate pupils on caste or class lines but must function as inclusive institutions.

Gandhi's values and vision of what constitutes a truly civilised and free India will help us understand his views on education. To him, education not only moulds the new generation, but also reflects a society's fundamental assumptions about itself and individuals who compose it. Gandhi's experience in South Africa changed his outlook on politics. It also helped him to see the role education played in that struggle. He was aware of the fact that he had been a beneficiary of western education and for a number of years while he was in South Africa he tried to persuade Indians to take advantage of it. However, Gandhi's ideas on western education changed after his return to India where he realised that Indian situations require a different type of education.

Wardha Scheme of Education

As an alternative to the existing system of education that had many anomalies, Gandhi proposed a scheme of free education for all. This initial idea found ground in many of his articles that appeared in *-Harijan-*. These articles started to churn a lot of debate among educators. It later developed into the Wardha Scheme of Basic Education. The Wardha Scheme of Education, popularly known as *-Basic Education-* occupies a unique place in the field of elementary education in India. This scheme was the first attempt to develop an indigenous scheme of education in British India by Gandhi. As a nationalist leader he fully realised that the British system of education could not serve the socio-economic need of the country. At the Round Table Conference in London (1931) he pointed out the ineffectiveness of the system of primary education in India and the alarming low percentage of literacy among the Indian people. He held the policy of the British Government responsible for this painful situation in the field of mass education. Gandhi said *-I am convinced that the present system of education is not only wasteful but positively harmful-* (www.kkhsou.in/main/education/wardha.html). He placed his ideas on Basic Education before the nation in the Wardha Conference in 1937. After a detailed dialogue, experts in the field and minister took the following decisions:

- Free and compulsory education to be provided to all children in the country.
- Mother tongue would be the medium of instruction.
- Education centring on some form of manual productive work suitable for local conditions would be imparted.

- In due course of time this education system would become self-sustaining and even cover the remuneration being paid to teachers.

The Wardha Conference led to a series of discussions on the need for reworking the education policy. This led to the appointment of a committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Zakir Hussain to prepare a detailed education plan and syllabus on the lines of the resolutions taken during the Wardha Conference. The Committee submitted its reports in two phases and this report is even today considered the fundamental document on basic education and continues to be known as the Wardha Scheme of Education. These reports were approved by Gandhi who was the chair of the conference. The Wardha Scheme of Education was placed before the Indian National Congress at its Haripura session held in March, 1938.

The first report included the basic principles of the Wardha Scheme of education, its aims, teachers training, organisation of schools, administration, inspection and inclusion of craft centred education regarding handicrafts like spinning, weaving etc. The second report dealt with agriculture, metal work, wood craft and other basic handicrafts. An elaborate curriculum for all the subjects and the strategies to be adopted to establish a correlation with other subjects was identified (www.kkhsou.in/main/education/wardha.html).

The seriousness with which the leaders and educators were committed to the cause of education was reflected in the large number of conferences being held and the increasing number of committees that were formed to discuss the subject. This led to addition of new features to the Wardha Scheme of education, which passed through different stages and took the final shape. The conference of 1945 at *Sebragram* characterised Basic Education as 'education for life'. The conference considered it a radical and important revolution in the social and economic structure of Indian society, i.e., 'creating a new way of life'. Since then Basic Education came to be known as '*Nai Talim*'. Marjorie Sykes, an educationist, a devout Gandhian and *Nai Talim* pedagogue writes in her book *The Story of Nai Talim*, that 'in Gandhi's perception, this curriculum aimed at preparing a good society, not just a literate and/or educated one. Seen from the context of an education system specially developed for a newly born democratic nation, it can be said that *Nai Talim* aimed to fructify education that gave freedom; freedom from ignorance, illiteracy, superstition, psyche of servitude, and many more taboos that inhibited free thinking of a free India. In Gandhi's words and vision, *Nai Talim* was aimed at becoming the spearhead of a silent social revolution' (as quoted in <http://www.gandhifoundation.net/about%20gandhi1.htm>). The range of teaching tools that Gandhi prescribed to actualise *Nai Talim* were as revolutionary and unconventional as the concept itself. For holistic development of body, mind and soul, he first emphasised useful and purposeful physical labour. The mind is a part of our body, and so are hands, legs, torso and spine. If the mind develops at the cost of the rest of the body, it would be so callous! Moreover, it would result in uncoordinated growth, and that is not what Gandhi wanted India to become, a nation of strong minds and weak bodies, or vice versa. With the

addition of heart or soul, the mind-body-soul combine completes Gandhi's vision of an inclusive, coordinated education. Handicrafts; art and drawing are the most fundamental teaching tools in *Nai Talim* pedagogy. Herein, their function is not visualised too literally as a cottage industry vocation, but as a means of engaging young minds in a learning technique that is time-proven, informal, unstressed, and full of ageless wisdom. Spinning and weaving, which can be aptly deduced to spinning khadi, were Gandhi's favourite techniques for implementing *Nai Talim*. Gandhi felt that this pattern facilitated faster learning, "One imparts ten times as much in this manner as by reading or writing." (<http://www.gandhifoundation.net/about%20gandhi1.htm>). Gandhi expressed the view that it was much more economical to impart learning through handicrafts than through classroom lessons. The *Nai Talim* pedagogy thus sought to create free and enlightened individuals, who would then constitute a good society, not just a free country. Gandhi's idea of 3 Hs and 3 Rs makes greater sense in the background of his philosophy of *Nai Talim* pedagogy.

The 3 Hs that Gandhi talked about are as follows:

1. Hand-psychomotor domain/skills
2. Heart-spiritual domain/skills
3. Head-Cognitive domain/skills

The 3 Rs that he wanted to enmesh with his idea of 3 Hs are:

1. Reading,
2. Writing and
3. Arithmetic (as quoted by Shriman Narayan, 1997).

To Gandhi learning only from books without linking the knowledge to our lives was a wasteful activity. He therefore insisted that every child/youngster should be trained through a combination of hand, head and heart. Gandhi wanted that the learning experience must be based on "what one does" (use of hand) "think what is needed" (application of mind/head) and "putting oneself into the action" (Heart). To him when these Hs and Rs are balanced, we could say that the person is educated as it builds a healthy personality (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi).

Gandhi was of the view that through education we need to teach youngsters certain ideals which would help them to be good citizens and through activities students are in a position to think on practical lines. This approach leads to character building. Gandhi's perception of education encompasses the head, heart and hands, thus, leading to the all-around development of a child. According to him education is that instrument, which draws out and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties of children. To Gandhi, the purpose of education is to raise human beings to a higher order (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi).

Further, Gandhi, conceptualising a "comprehensive new training" (*Samagra Nai Talim*) placed the same before the nation. This led to organising a conference of education ministers and educational workers was called by B.G. Kher in 1946 to fine-tune the *Samagra Nai Talim* given by Gandhi. This conference took important resolutions which impacted the quality of Basic Education in different

provinces. A clear understanding and implementation strategies of Basic Education finally emerged after a decade of experimentation and discussion.

The *SamagraNaiTalin*, laid down the following:

- Free, universal and compulsory education should be provided for all boys and girls between the ages of 7 to 14 years.
- Education should be imparted in the mother tongue of the child.
- All education should centre on some basic craft chosen with due regard to the capacity of the child and the needs of the locality.
- This craft must not be taught mechanically but its social and scientific implications are to be studied side by side.

In this craft-centered education all the subjects to be taught were to be integrally related to the selected craft or the child's physical and social environment (www.kkhsou.in/main/education/wardha.html).

Gandhi placed the highest premium on basic education and gave maximum number of lectures on how we need to internalise the need for basic education. Given in the next section are some of his celebrated thoughts on Basic Education, which he called '*BuniyadiShiksha*'.

Basic Education (*BuniyadiShiksha*)

The ancient saying 'Education is that which liberates' is as true today as it was before. Education here does not mean mere spiritual knowledge, nor does liberation signify only spiritual liberation after death. 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. Servitude is of two kinds: slavery to domination from outside and to one's own artificial needs. The knowledge acquired in the pursuit of this ideal alone constitutes true study (as quoted by Shriman Narayan, 1997).

Education to Gandhi was the space where 'persistent questioning and healthy inquisitiveness' are encouraged to acquire knowledge of any kind. He also refers to 'the attitude' of and 'the state of mind' of the learner. 'Inquisitiveness should be tempered by humility and respectful regard for the teacher and not degenerate into impudence' Insolence, Gandhi noted is the enemy of the receptivity of mind. To him knowledge should always be accompanied by humility and the will to learn.

At the primary education level according to Gandhi, children should be given elementary knowledge of history, geography, mental arithmetic and the art (say) of spinning. Through these he proposes to develop their intelligence. He felt that the commencement of training by teaching the alphabet and reading and writing hampers their intellectual growth. The alphabet has to be taught only after they are acquainted with the conditions and history of the society in which they live.

Gandhi's insistence on autonomy and self-regulation is reflected in his ideas on informal education. His conception of basic education was concerned with learning that was generated within everyday life. This is in fact the basis on which informal educators work. It was also an education

focused on the individual but reliant on co-operation between individuals. This leads to a relationship between educators and students/learners (Talk to Khadi Vidyalaya Students, Sevagram, *Sevak*, 15 February 1942 *CW* 75, p. 269).

Gandhi's idea of decentralising education is evident from the passage given below: 'I am 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. If we want to impart education best suited to the needs of villagers, we should take the Vidyapith (Literary seat of learning; University) to the villages. 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 the villagers. You cannot instruct the teachers in the needs of the villagers through a training school in a city. Nor can you so interest them in the condition of the villages' (<http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-81.pdf>).

Gandhi's dream was to impart primary education through the medium of village handicrafts like spinning and carding and the like, which would according to him spearhead a silent social revolution laden with most far reaching consequences. This form of education Gandhi felt would provide a healthy and moral ground for a sound rural-urban relationship. He felt that this method would help in addressing the existing social insecurity and unequal relationship between the classes. 'It will check the progressive decay of our villages and lay the foundation of a more just social order in which there is no unnatural division between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' and everybody is assured of a living wage and the right to freedom' (<http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-81.pdf>).

Gandhi on Medium of Instruction

Gandhi was totally opposed to English education. His distaste towards English education is evident in his writings. He wrote 'the rottenness of this education' and that 'to give millions knowledge of English is to enslave them' that, by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation' (<http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-81.pdf>). Gandhi was upset that he had to speak of Home Rule or Independence in what was clearly a foreign tongue that he could not practice in court in his mother tongue; that all official documents were in English as were all the best newspapers and that education was carried out in English for the chosen few. Gandhi attaches greatest importance to learning in the language into which a child is born. He notes that 'English is today admittedly the world language. I would therefore accord it a place as a second, optional language, not in the school, but in the university course. We and our children must build on our own heritage' Gandhi noted that by borrowing from another, we impoverish our own. His stress was on building knowledge in the languages spoken by people. 'I want the nation to have the treasures contained in that language and, for that matter, in other languages of the world, through its

own vernaculars into Indian languages. Bringing knowledge from across the world and from within the country was to be addressed by good translationsø (<http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-81.pdf>).

Gandhi's Radical Alternative to Colonial Education

As we have seen, Gandhi had not only rejected colonial education but also put forward a radical alternative. To understand the alternative system he proposed, we need to understand his disposition towards industrialisation, which was centric to western education. Gandhi through his writings and lectures has expressed his absolute opposition to modern machinery. In his collected works, he refers to machinery as having impoverished India and that it was difficult to measure the harm that Manchester had done to them by producing machine-made cloth, which, in turn, ruined the internal market for locally produced hand woven goodsø He writes about the conditions of women working in the mills of Bombay and made the point that before they were introduced, these women were not starving. Thus his idea of education to a great extent emerged from the realities of Indian society, and insisted on supporting *swadeshi* and attainment of Home Rule(Burke, 2000).

Within this context of the need for a machine-less society, Gandhi developed his ideas on education. The core of his proposal was the introduction of productive handicrafts in the school curriculum. The idea was not simply to introduce handicrafts as a compulsory school subject, but to make the learning of a craft the centrepiece of the entire teaching learning programme. It implied a radical restructuring of the sociology of school knowledge in India, where productive handicrafts had been associated with the lowest groups in the hierarchy of the caste system. Knowledge of the production processes involved in crafts, such as spinning, weaving, leather-work, pottery, metal-work, basket-making and book binding had been the monopoly of specific caste groups in the lowest stratum of the traditional social hierarchy. Many of them belong to castes considered 'untouchables'ø India's own tradition of education as well as the colonial education system had emphasised skills such as literacy and acquisition of knowledge of which the upper castes had a monopoly(Burke, 2000).

The social philosophy and the curriculum of what Gandhi called 'basic education'ø thus favoured the child belonging to the lowest stratum of society. By doing so it implied a programme of social transformation. It sought to alter the symbolic meaning of 'education'ø and to change the established structure of opportunities for education.

The motivation for Gandhi to propose the introduction of productive handicrafts into the school system was for these institutions to be self-supporting, to the extent possible. There were two reasons as to why he gave a pride of place to handicrafts. First, a poor society such as India simply could not afford to provide education for all children unless the schools could generate resources from within. Second, the more financially independent the schools are, the more politically independent they could be. What Gandhi wanted to avoid was dependence on the state which he felt would mean interference from the centre. Above all else, Gandhi valued self-sufficiency and autonomy. These were vital for his vision of an independent India made up of autonomous village communities to survive. It was the

combination of *swaraj* and *swadesh* that he visualised as the framework in which the education system must function. A state system of education within an independent India would have been a complete contradiction as far as Gandhi was concerned (Burke, 2000).

Gandhi constantly talked about equality in work. He was of the opinion that manual work should not be treated as something inferior to mental work. He held the view that the work of the craftsman or labourers should be the ideal model for a good life. Schools which were based on people centric productive work which would serve the cause of society and create a whole person in whose personality a semblance would be achieved between mind, body and spirit (<http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-81.pdf>).

Gandhi on Higher Education

Gandhi's views on higher education are need based. To him, the aim of university education should be to turn out true servants of the people who will live and die for the country's freedom. He was of the opinion that university education should be brought in line with basic education ([http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-6 &81.pdf](http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-6-&81.pdf)).

Gandhi planned to revolutionise college education and relate it to national necessities. Universities would offer only those degrees which are going to absorb the knowledge for the betterment of society, such as for example mechanical and other branches of engineering. These graduates he indicates are to be attached to different industries which should actually pay for the training of the graduates they need. He provides examples as to how this would work. The TATAs would be expected to run a college for training engineers under the supervision of the State and the mill associations would run among them a college for training graduates whom they need. Similarly Commerce associations would have their own colleges. Likewise in fields such as arts, medicine and agriculture concerned employers must be involved in the running colleges which turn out graduates whose services are required. Gandhi's idea was that the state must ultimately withdraw from the field of education. Medical colleges would be attached to certified hospitals. As they are popular among moneyed men they may be expected to make voluntary contributions to support medical colleges. Agricultural colleges to be worthy of the name must be self-supporting (see Burke, 2000; http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_education_%20buniyadishiksha.htm; www.kkhsou.in/main/education/wardha.html).

Gandhi did not advocate students going to other countries for education. He noted that on return they would find themselves to be square pegs in round holes. He was of the view that the experience that one gets from one's own soil is the richest and contributes most to growth (Burke, 2000).

Role of a Teacher

Gandhi in his talks on education very vociferously brought out the role of the teachers. In his educational plan Gandhi assigned autonomy to the teacher in the management of the daily curriculum

of the school. He wanted to free the Indian teacher from interference from outside, particularly government or state bureaucracy. He observed that under colonial rule, the teacher had a prescribed job to do that was based on what the authorities wanted the children to learn. Since adherence to textbooks was mandatory there was no space for teachers to share their experiences with students. In his view text books do not encourage students to develop original thinking (Gandhi, 1939). His vision was to end the teacher's subservience to prescribed textbooks and the curriculum. Learning cannot take place with the help of textbooks only. He believed that equal importance has to be attached to the freedom that the teacher should have in matters of curriculum. Gandhi strongly felt that the power that the state has over the teacher in deciding what ought to be taught in the classroom should be broken. Gandhi's ideas gave autonomy to the teacher but it was, above all, a libertarian approach to schooling that transferred power from the state to the village (Burke, 2000). In many states across the country, a virtual bureaucratisation of education has taken place, with teachers and academic bodies completely side-lined. It is time that Gandhi's views on academic freedom are revisited and implemented.

Gandhi was of the opinion that the teacher has far greater responsibilities than anyone else in an education system and that the teacher has to develop values among the learners. He held the view that the teacher should instil moral values in pupils. To Gandhi education of the heart could be only imparted through the living touch of the teacher. Education becomes effective and faithful only when there is a personal touch between the teacher and the taught. It is very difficult to engage in character building in the absence of devotion on the part of the teacher. A teacher according to Gandhi should have devotion to duty, to the students and to God. He equates the role of a teacher to that of a Mother. An ideal teacher in Gandhi's words is the 'mother teacher' (Talk to Khadi Vidyalaya Students, Sevagram, *Sevak*, 15 February 1942 *CW* 75, p. 269).

A teacher who establishes rapport with the taught, becomes one with them, learns more from them than what he actually gives. Gandhi used to say 'He who learns nothing from his disciples is, in my opinion, worthless. Whenever I talk with someone I learn from him. I take from him more than I give him. In this way, a true teacher regards himself as a student of his students. If you will teach your pupils with this attitude, you will benefit much from them' (Talk to Khadi Vidyalaya Students, Sevagram, *Sevak*, 15 February 1942 *CW* 75, p. 269).

End Note

To Gandhi education that aims at moulding the pupil as 'whole person' rather than concentrating on one aspect of his/her personality is the real education. He viewed education as a highly moral activity. Gandhi envisaged the building of five human values which in 1986 came to be known as 'National Panchsheel' when it was included in the National Policy on Education. These values are (1) Cleanliness (2) Truthfulness (3) Hardwork (4) Equality and (5) Co-operation. Gandhi's thoughts on education assume enormous significance in the light of major shifts that are taking place both in the content and management of education in the liberalisation era.

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