

Philosophical Perspectives of Mahatma Gandhi's Educational Thinking

Prof. Jayendra K. Dave

1.0 EDUCATION

How does a philosopher acquire the ability of philosophizing? This is a crucial question. Generally, the origin of one's philosophy is one's direct experiences and a contemplative analysis of the prevailing knowledge in the related area. This is true about Mahatma Gandhi also. The life-experience he had in becoming Mahatma out of Mohan contributed to his philosophization. Unlike western thinkers, Gandhi tested his postulates and principles by experimenting on his own 'self'. It is quite unfortunate that the philosophy of such a thorough thinker is viewed in the perspective of some 'isms'. When the educational theorists try to fit Mahatma's vivacious philosophy into pre-moulded boxes of isms, it ceases to be a realization (JEEVAN DARSHAN) and becomes idealism, realism, pragmatism, etc. A thinker of Mahatma's stature takes step to philosophization for the radical purpose of emancipating the world out of the old rule. Mahatma did not have any concern with this or that time. As a thinker he was solely interested in the dialogue among human beings. British rule had created a discord among the Indian People, and education was gaining a major role. In this Gandhi's aim was to tune the cords into a sweet symphony.

These Philosophical backgrounds will help to explain and understand the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi.

1.1 METAPHYSICS

Metaphysics strives to study the basic assumptions and beliefs regarding man, the world and God.

For a student of educational philosophy it is difficult to reduce Gandhi's thinking to accepted philosophical models.

He had no training in theoretical philosophy nor was it important for him to differentiate between the theisms and pantheism. He had first-hand experiences of Indian people and Indian psyche. The Moritzberg incident gave a creative thrust to his dormant genius. "I feel insulated but why don't Indians feel so in similar situation?"

The 'why' was the source of his conscious contemplations. He traveled across the country in search of the answer, which finally he got: poverty, ignorance and superstitions are the evils which have enslaved this great nation. As a remedy to this his primary metaphysical submission was: The task of man is to strive a union

* Former Head & Dean, Deptt. of Education, Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujrat.

within, and unity with the world outside. To awaken the spirit of man, to establish one's own identity, the stark realization of ignorance and blind-faiths was indispensable.

The metaphysical category of 'union and unity' is rooted into his conviction of 'non-dualism'. The same divine spirit dances in man and the cosmos. His contention: I believe in a total unity of mankind and God is the social interpretation of the non-dualistic principle of Indian philosophy. This became a backbone of Gandhi's thinking aimed at eradicating all social disparities.

Gandhi believes in an ever changing universe, but God remains unchanged in this process. Among all the transitory forms around us there is an unchanging, non-transformative, stable, pivotal, creating-destroying-recreating reality. What is the nature of this reality? It is pure love and pure good. The proof of this is the perpetual life amid death. He says, "Therefore, I conclude God is full of life, he is the truth, and he is the enlightenment. He is the absolute good"..

Upto 1931 Gandhi tried to establish truth as synonymous with God. He started with "God is Truth" and later on asserted, "The truth is God". Gandhi's answer to the complex question: what is Truth was "It is the voice from the inner conscience. "Man's inner being, the spiritual impulse is the truth for Gandhi; love and non-violence are the tools to realize this truth. He declared that heart which is transformed with love is a non-violent heart, only such heart/soul can realize God that is truth. In the ultimate run to realize the truth means to realize the self. God is abode in the soul of an individual in the form of truth. Therefore, the Mahatma submits: "For me there is only one religion- It is to serve to God that is to mankind".

The goal of human life is the realization of God, this makes it imperative for man to harmonize his all social, political, activities towards this realization. His metaphysical truth reiterates the unity of a man as 'the man' as 'mankind. This unity was an instrument for the service of man. The only way to realize God, he says, is to see him in his creation, and achieve oneness with that creation. This can happen only through service to man (his creation). Man is the part of the universe, and one can't see God other than the mankind. Moreover man is the part of society and God can be realized through social service only. Thus the basic element of the universe: man the individual, and the society can realize the Truth-God through non-violence only. Non-violence means love to all, there is no place for any ill-feeling or hostility. In such a society the slavery and dependence of the weak and strong are uprooted naturally.

1.2 EPISTEMOLOGY

Gandhiji's belief about knowledge embraces the inner world and also focuses the principle of utility applicable to the physical or the world outside.

Knowledge of letters or knowledge of intellectual subject is not the knowledge per se. For him an innocent shepherd having a good moral character is far better a man compared to a so called educated person. To be literate doesn't signify anything, it is neither knowledge nor tool for seeking knowledge. It is merely symbols used to manifest guided ignorance. Knowledge should be in harmony with the act of learning and should be well organized with the concrete life situations. Obviously, such knowledge can't be had from state textbook and through inactive information transfer. Actually, a school is a place to seek and carry out experiments to achieve real knowledge. The students actively engage themselves in the pursuit of knowledge, in comprehending the social situations and using knowledge to regulate actions. Thus, knowledge develops a sense of social responsibility in an individual.

Gandhi interprets the ancient concept of 'VIDYA' as knowledge which is useful for everyone'. Thus the social application and heart purifying power are the main characteristics of knowledge.

For Mahatma true knowledge is neither moral nor immoral – It is a-moral. The morality or immorality depends upon the application of knowledge for various purposes. He used to say “If education (knowledge) does not bring about a moral character in you (students), all your knowledge of Shakespeare and Wordsworth is not worth anything. “Thus proper way to achieve such knowledge is to live like “Brahmchari” one whose actions are aimed at seeking the Brahma, that is God or the ultimate reality.

The right education of the spirit means striving for spiritual growth, to build character, to know the self and that is to know the God. All other knowledge is useless without this and children do need someone's help in this matter.

Gandhiji's epistemology is based on his metaphysics. The essence of man and/or essence of God is the unitary force. It unites man with man and man with God. This implies knowledge is also 'unitary whole'. The unitary knowledge can be realized only through the realization of unity of life. Thus, life itself becomes the force of knowledge.

1.3 AXIOLOGY

There is no axiological treatment of morals and ethics in Gandhi's philosophy. His axiology can only be inferred from his depiction of educational ideals. The other workable achievement of Mahatma is his effort to translate our religious and spiritual values into social values. He concentrated on the possibility of applying the basic Indian values to our day to day life.

'Unity' is the basic value in his educational thinking. Education should aim at creating and maintaining unity between the society and an individual. The education which harms such unity is a destroying force. Training in English

language at an earlier state alienates children from our religious and social heritage. The individual is the creator of 'unity'. Thus the individual ceases to be only a learner or a citizen or a member of the society, and become a value. It is the individuality or the personhood which is the foundation of the society based on non-violence. If education neglects any of the innate capabilities: physical, mental or spiritual it ceases to be true education. Partial education is the root cause of all evils. True education is the bullwork against all evils. Hence, it is a silent force of social well-being.

In man society and nation get united and assume one entity. Gandhiji has a deep faith in such union. The whole world rises with the rise of a person and falls with his fall.

Non-violence and love are the basic values in Gandhi's thinking. Gandhiji learnt the social application of love from Tolstoy. The active love includes the value of truth and fearlessness. If one accepts non-violence as the life value it will also affect education. Gandhiji was also influenced by John Ruskin's unto this last. He constructed 'SARVODAYA' as a value ameliorating from the value already discussed. All the values activated in a composite harmony will bring about self-realization.

References

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