

Study Materials on Great Educational Thinkers

Educational Thoughts of Rousseau

Meaning of Education,

Aims of Education,

Discipline,

Methodologies,

Use in Modern Education,

Educational Philosophy of Rousseau and differences with Froebel,

Jhon Dewey, Gandhi, Srimanta Sankardeva

PREPARED BY: Dr. N. I. Barbhuyan

Educational Thoughts of Rousseau

INTRODUCTION

J J Rousseau, a Rousseau, born in Geneva, Switzerland, a French philosopher and educationist. He is considered as great Philosopher of Education. He is known as the father of educationists and Philosopher of the Philosophers. He spent his childhood and adolescence in distress. He rose from a troubled and wandering youth to become one of the most influential philosophers of the enlightenment. His ideas on natural education, freedom, democracy, and human dignity continue to inspire modern education and society. He did not like strict discipline rather was in favour of free discipline.

Rousseau's educational philosophy laid the foundation for child-centered, progressive education. His emphasis on natural growth, freedom, and learning by experience remains relevant in modern times. Yet, thinkers like Froebel, Dewey, Gandhi expanded education into social, moral, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, balancing individual freedom with social responsibility. Although, his naturalistic education is very popular but educational thinkers and great educators strongly criticize his concept of negative education.

Meaning of Education according to Rousseau

- Rousseau (1712–1778), French philosopher and educationist, is often called the Father of Naturalism in Education.
- In *Émile, or On Education* (1762), he defined education as: “Education is the natural development of man, according to nature.”
- He believed every child is born good, and education should help preserve this innate goodness.
- Education should be based on the natural growth, interests, and experiences of the child, rather than imposed traditions.

Aims of Education advocated by Rousseau

- Natural Development of the Child: Education should unfold innate qualities.
- Self-reliance and Individual Freedom: Children must learn to think and act independently.
- Moral Development: Cultivation of sympathy, kindness, and moral sense.
- Preparation for Life: Not rote knowledge but real-life experiences.
- Harmonious Growth: Physical, mental, moral, and emotional development.

Discipline

- Rousseau opposed harsh discipline and rote learning.
- He supported natural discipline:
 - Allowing the child to experience consequences of actions (e.g., if a child mishandles fire, he learns from the burn).
 - Freedom with responsibility rather than fear and punishment.
- Education should discipline the child through self-control, not external control.

Methodologies of Teaching–Learning

- Learning by Doing: Direct experiences over bookish knowledge.
- Activity-based and Child-centered learning.
- Nature as the Best Teacher: Outdoor education, interaction with environment.

- Stages of Development: Education should match psychological growth:
 1. Childhood (up to 12) – focus on senses, physical activities.
 2. Boyhood (12–15) – practical knowledge, reasoning.
 3. Adolescence (15–20) – moral and social training.
- No premature learning: Avoid abstract subjects (like moral preaching, religion, or bookish knowledge) until the child is mature.

Use in Modern Education

Rousseau's ideas greatly influenced progressive and child-centered education:

- Modern Montessori & Kindergarten systems reflect his naturalism.
- Activity-based, experiential, and environmental learning are inspired by him.
- Stress on individual differences and developmental psychology is aligned with Rousseau.
- Emphasis on freedom, democracy, and self-learning in today's schools owes much to him.

Comparisons with Other Thinkers

a) Rousseau vs. Froebel

- Froebel (Father of Kindergarten) was influenced by Rousseau.
- Rousseau: Education should follow nature, freedom, and individual experiences.
- Froebel: Stressed play-way method and gifts & occupations for self-activity.
- Difference: Rousseau avoided early formal instruction; Froebel introduced structured symbolic play even in early years.

b) Rousseau vs. John Dewey

- Both are progressive educators.
- Rousseau: Natural development, guided by nature.
- Dewey: Learning through democracy, problem-solving, and social interaction.

- Difference: Rousseau stressed individual naturalism, Dewey stressed social experience and education as life itself.

c) **Rousseau vs. Mahatma Gandhi**

- Rousseau: Individual freedom, nature-based education.
- Gandhi: *Nai Talim* (Basic Education) – craft-centered, manual work, moral training, self-reliance.
- Difference: Rousseau avoided early social/moral training; Gandhi emphasized community life, truth, and non-violence.

d) **Rousseau vs. Srimanta Sankardeva (15th–16th Century, Assam)**

- Rousseau: Education based on natural growth, secular in nature.
- Sankardeva: Education rooted in religion, morality, art, culture, and bhakti (devotion).
- Similarity: Both opposed harsh discipline and emphasized learning through experience (Sankardeva used plays, songs, dance-drama as methods).
- Difference: Rousseau's education was naturalistic and individual-centered; Sankardeva's was spiritual, community-based, and value-centered.

Conclusion

Rousseau's educational philosophy laid the foundation for child-centered, progressive education. His emphasis on natural growth, freedom, and learning by experience remains relevant in modern times. Yet, thinkers like Froebel, Dewey, Gandhi, and Sankardeva expanded education into social, moral, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, balancing individual freedom with social responsibility.