



## Embedment of Gandhian Nai Talim in Contemporary Times

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### ABSTRACT

Education is the fundamental element for the development of any country. Education is the most powerful means to teach the value of dignity of labor, raise a voice against any sort of discrimination, and practice good habits which lead to the overall development of a personality (body, mind, and spirit). Mahatma Gandhi formulated the idea of primary education or Nai Talim in 1937. Gandhiji believed quality education encourages social development by demolishing the pillars of social inequality, violence, and dishonesty. No matter whether India has attained freedom, their minds are still colonized. The decolonization of the mind is only possible when qualitative education reaches urban and rural areas, emphasizing the notion that both knowledge and work are inter-related or inter-connected. By putting a similar light on the Gandhian principle, the New Education Policy 2020 is framed, which is to be implemented in 2022. The New Education Policy has upgraded its strategy in all levels of education for the welfare of its citizens, to make them self-reliant. The purpose of the paper is to introspect on the principle of Gandhi's Nai Talim and New Education Policy by focussing on three main components; learner, teachers, and parents, as well as highlighting the need for global citizenship education in contemporary times, which worked on silent revolution and non-violent communication.

**Keywords:** colonization, ahimsā, swaraj, self-reliant, global education

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Mahatma Gandhi and his principles have great significance in today's challenging times when the world is ahead of its most unpredictable times. The 21st century is moving towards the democratization of the lives of the masses. Democracy not only remains at the political level; it has also started to penetrate every aspect of human life. Family, society, educational institutes, social groups, etc., have also started witnessing the demands for more and more democratization. With democratization, the choice lies on the shoulder of people whether to rule or to serve. What one opts for depicts one value system. This value system is based on certain principles taught from a very early stage to a child and will be followed in the future. The two principles that Gandhi followed his whole life

were non-violence and truth. He does not limit his principle to the political sphere, instead, he applied them in every aspect possible, in education, social and political movements, and others. Gandhi's teachings might look simple to aristocrats, but it is almost impenetrable to be followed by them only. India got independence a long time back, but the Indian mindset is still colonized or dominated by Western culture. The colonial rule destroyed the Indian education system by sowing its seeds through the East India Company. They created an unnatural division between labor and the skilled,

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educated class. This dualism or division started creating hatred and jealousy towards each other and further enhanced untouchability and the caste system. The dominant authority evaluates the things the labor class could 'have' access to or 'have not. Gandhiji, who had faced so much opposition for his race, color, and culture in Western countries, was well aware that this system will soon embellish and go along with Indians post-independence if the proper schooling was not given to them. Before Independence, Britishers strived to keep most of the people away from education and involved in agriculture as they knew if this common-people villagers get educated, they would rebel against their rules. In 1937, Gandhiji envisioned his scheme of Nai Talim or primary education for all, that would eradicate differences between the classes. He thought this scheme would help in changing the dominant mindset of considering laborers as an enslaved person or giving more importance to mental work than physical work.

However, this scheme failed as the British regime did not let it continue; they did not want Indians to become self-govern; or independent in their thoughts. Post-independence, every other person is just like a spider trapped in its web, the web of modernity. Gandhiji was not against western cultures but against modernity, modernity that destructs the way of life. He said that "the beautiful tree of education was cut down by the Britishers who made India more illiterate than it was hundred years ago" (Sinha, 2017). The modernity which downgrades your national language and culture is of no value. Any culture which teaches us to suppress another culture is wrong. In India, the modern Indian language, like English, is more important than the national language. In schools and interviews, if a person cannot speak English well, they stand nowhere in a competitive sector. However, the challenging part is to develop oneself in this largest democratic world because if one ignores it, then an individual is outdated. We have to look at the Gandhian philosophical idea of Nai Talim and frame it with New Education Policy, with specific changes which are a dire need of contemporary times.

## **Framing New Education Policy with Gandhian Nai Talim**

A thorough reading of New Education Policy 2020 makes it very similar to Mahatma Gandhi Nai Talim. Primary education means the overall development of a child, including body, mind, and spirit. In other words, the enhancement of a body, mind, and spirit is possible through physical training, knowing basic concepts, and being conscious of one's actions. Gandhi proposed the Nai Talim in Wardha in 1937 which emphasized on:

- (a) free compulsory primary education for all
- (b) mother tongue as a medium of instruction
- (c) skilled training.

If we focus on these three points from today's context and the proposed norms, we will notice that implementation becomes quite challenging. Access to education is divided into three classes per their economic background; elite or rich class, middle or poor class. The elite or wealthy class children are welcomed in international schools with a modern education system, tall buildings, luxurious classrooms, and appliances. The middle-class families get admission to their students in convent or public and somehow manage their tuition training. The poor ones cannot afford school, and if they can, they would send their children to a government school/Panchayati Raj Institutions/ashram. However, in rural areas, the conditions of these schools are even worsened. Those working in the agriculture sector aspire their children to work in fields so they can earn a bit instead of wasting time on education. In the New education policy, "Educational outcomes and the transparent disclosure of all financial, academic, and operational matters will be given due importance and will be incorporated suitably in the assessment of schools. This will further improve India's progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goals 4(SDG4), ensuring free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education for all children" (New Education Policy, 2020). This framework is designed especially for the students coming from the disadvantaged and under-privileged sections

so that they can upgrade themselves and serve a country in the future. Those who are interested in the agriculture sector have the opportunity to enroll in agriculture and allied studies to contribute to further research, understand and use their local knowledge in land productivity, climate change, food sufficiency, etc.

Second is the medium of instruction in teaching. According to Gandhiji, no individual should leave the touch of the national language. If we fail to exercise our freedom of connecting with others through our national language, then we certainly lack the freedom of expression, which is our constitutional right. The culture of India is rich and glorious, with diverse languages constituting significant literature. India has an immense collection of ancient classical texts in Sanskrit written by intellect seers decades back. Unfortunately, the translation of these classical texts is interpreted in the modern English language. Those who are unable to speak English is referred to as uncivilized, uncultured person. Even in Bollywood cinema, if you remember a famous dialogue of Amitabh Bachchan in the movie *Namak Halal*, I can talk *English*, I can walk in *English*, I can laugh in *English* because English is a very *Funny Language*. Indeed, it is a funny language because the meaning of a word changes completely. For instance, we try to alternate or equate the terms *dharma* and religion. They are altogether different terms with distinct meanings. Most often, they are equated in our daily language, which gives an impression to us to what extent our minds are colonized. In New Education Policy, the medium of instruction to be retained is bilingual in schools across the country, not emphasizing any modern language. Even Gandhiji understood the sensitivity of every citizen towards their mother tongue and observed its significance while communicating with the overseas Indian community.

The third point is on the significance of training. In the present scenario, primary and higher education educational institutions have focussed more on theoretical knowledge. Every student is chasing marks, not by understanding but by cramming the confined syllabus of their respective class. Such learning will be stored in a brain for a short period.

This will surely not make you intellectual. There should be a balance among mind, body, and spirit faculties. Take the instance of village folk; from their childhood, they sweat and labor in the field of agriculture with cattle. Villagers are deprived of the opportunity to develop their minds and spirit; they are stuck on the periphery of manual work. They are doing it without primary education. Gandhiji stresses 'learning by doing.'

Before learning or writing the alphabet, a child is responsive toward the words that they catch and observe different objects. It means mental, physical, and spiritual roles should be harmonious to reach the right end. Gandhiji was a simple person who is mainly seen figured with a *charkha* or spinning wheel. He has always emphasized arts and crafts, on paper-cutting, designing, book-binding, and embroidery, that can be learned without much financial outlay. Post-independence, specifically in convent schools, there was a period of Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) that taught students such skills. However, various other institutions did not give any importance to it. For Gandhi,

*As to the necessity and value of regarding the teaching of village handicrafts as the pivot and center of education, I have no manner of doubt. The method adopted in the institutions in India I do not call education, i.e., drawing out the best in man, but debauchery of the mind. It informs the mind anyhow, whereas the method of training the mind through village handicrafts from the beginning as the central fact would promote the real, disciplined development of the mind resulting in conservation of the intellectual energy and indirectly also the spiritual (Gandhi, 1962, p. 131).*

So, the education for Gandhi, as we understand it, is drawing out the best potentiality in human beings. We cannot deny that there are villagers or rural areas with a vast population still unapproachable of a good education system. The learning for these students in art and craft would help them to become self-employed, not as a small child but, once they grow up, they could earn money by selling handicraft products to market and in the school

itself. In urban areas, too, until a human being does not reflect on things practically, theoretical skills will be useless. The thing that an individual learns at ground level is of social significance. For instance, an analysis or thinking process is possible when a person can train the mind to solve the problems of daily life in connection with education. We are educated at the school level about the refraction of light, gravitational law, contraction principle, and similar alike; however, this education process is complete only after deliberately reflecting through observation or experiment. In New Education Policy, the education is focused on the treasure of art, culture, practicing yoga, and meditation rather than focusing on quantitative elements. There would be an articulated inclusion of traditional Indian philosophy and contemporary thinkers, especially in secondary school and higher education so that inter-disciplinary and allied studies could be retained. Students can choose an ideal balance among themselves to develop their academic career with creative minds.

A wave of educational reconstruction over the country has passed years ago. It will continue till there isn't a proper implementation by a system that requires *Parents-Teachers-Students* to work together peacefully.

### **Role of Teachers, Parents, and Students in New Education Policy**

Contemporary times need change and change is essential for the fruitful development of human beings. The idea of rote learning has been followed for centuries. There is a need to shift from the idea of reading, writing, and memorizing to the idea of holistic, integrated, and engaging learning. The role of teachers is vital here to encourage students to develop analytic and critical thinking. However, there has been a scarcity of skilled, educated teachers in India. Despite various measures, the teaching profession is rarely chosen. The degree in Doctorate of Philosophy is pursued by a few scholars who are interested in research or dedicated for 10-12 years in studies after completing 12<sup>th</sup>. Generally, students follow a professional master's

course that leads to an immediate job. Teachers require to put an effort similar to a mother who thinks of the betterment of a child foreseeing the development in the future.

With this, I do not mean that the emotional aspect should only be taken care of, but also a rational aspect. This is possible only when students are taught to express their feeling with the right attitude. For instance, when a young child spills ink on another child or some files in school, they try to hide the evidence or themselves from the situation. If they get caught, they will bite their lips or cry later, hiding in a pillow at night. This is a suppressed feeling of a child in an initial state, which soon turns into a phase of depression or fear. Freedom of speech requires recognizing and acknowledging the situations when one has to express their emotions. This non-violent feeling in a child/student is initiated at home and school. Gandhiji expressed his experience in a school where a teacher dictates a statement and Gandhi asks her to repeat it. Instead of repeating a statement, the teacher asks to copy from another student. However, Gandhi's idea of 'copying' itself is not clear. Teachers should be patient, interactive, and creative with students then only better learning would be passed on. Otherwise, the environment of a classroom becomes dull.

If we talk about ancient times or Indian philosophy, we see a great trust between a guru (teacher) and śiṣya (disciple). Almost in all the Upaniṣads, we can see a guru-śiṣya bond (Yama and Naciketā, Uddālaka and Śvetaketu, Yājñavalkya and Gargi, Krishna and Arjuna in Gita). The word Upaniṣads is derived from splitting two words: *upa* means nearby, and *niṣad* means to sit down. The knowledge is obtained when a disciple sits down nearby to Guru. Whether spiritual knowledge, scriptural, architectural, arts, musical, etc., it is imparted through the developing relations between guru and disciple. Unlike today, earlier education was not dependent on caste, age, gender, or looks. Instead, it was focused on a teacher's devotion towards a student; latter determination in learning as well as obedience and respect towards the former in learning.

Technology has certainly modified the way of the education system in multiple ways. With modern society, comes modern means of knowing things. The emerging means of technology and pandemic situations that have shut down schools and colleges raise numerous challenges in online teaching. Preventing unethical practices and teaching students' activities through experiments becomes very difficult unless it is not applied at home.

A child learns value from family, teachers, and the environment. However, Indian parents leave their children at daycare centers, which does not encourage the *swadeshi* spirit. Gandhiji has indeed said that our lifestyle has changed and is based on foreign beliefs and concepts. Akbar Allahabadi, a noted Urdu poet, described present-day education in his Urdu couplet as follows:

*"Parents' culture is not reflected in their children because they are brought up on milk powder and government education" (Dharmadhikari, 2014, 143).*

Indeed, the environmental conditions and facilities in which our parents and grandparents are brought up are poles apart from ours. However, the value of education remains constant, which tries to create an independent feeling in children and men. Today children try to bring a change in parents, a change that liberates us from enslavement. The development of a child begins at home. If a child observes that his parents keep on fighting/arguing with each other in a loud voice or the father raises an eyebrow towards a child in anger, or there is any discrimination between the workers and owners, which is mainly seen in all houses, that few cups or plates are placed separately for the workers as if they are untouchable. This kind of setup affects a child mentally. In schools, we are taught to stop this discrimination or not to participate in such a system. Whether we refer to Gandhian Nai Talim or NEP, the motive remains: to produce self-reliant and socially beneficial people who could use their brains for the proper conduct in real-life situations. Nai Talim/New Educational Policy "will possess the skills/ capacities required for the overall development of society and individuals. By its very nature, its emphasis is on character building

rather than on providing information. The moot question is whether we want only "*Saksharta*" (literacy) or our aim is "*Sarthakta*" (meaningful life)" (Dharmadhikari, 2014, 144).

## Gandhi and Global Citizenship Education

The term "world" is getting a new dimension visible on social media platforms. Through social media, we are all connected to the whole world. It does not matter whether we have time to interact with our neighbors or not, but social media platforms are bridging the gap. There, the pace of interaction is very fast. Globalization has increased 'global interdependencies' across the nations regarding trade, investment, migration, and technology. No doubt, the expansion of globalization has various advantages economically and politically. But if we look from the ethical and cultural perspective, it literally guides us to take care of one another since we are all interconnected. The challenges that the world faces today are transforming violence into peace and harmony, injustice into equality and justice, and living with compassion and harmony within countries. Gandhi discusses the notion of global citizenship education through humanity within citizens. Gandhi once stated, "It is impossible for one to be an internationalist without being a nationalist. It is not nationalism that is evil it is the narrowness, selfishness, and exclusiveness which is evil." (Gandhi, 1925, 6-18). Gandhiji adopted a non-violent strategy to achieve independence to get rid of British colonialism. Gandhiji has given jewels to the world in the form of non-violence (*ahimsā*) and truth. The word *ahimsā* means 'not to cause injury or to be compassionate not only towards humans but also to all other living beings. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi advocated the principle of non-violence (c)in all spheres of life; from fighting for freedom (Quit India movement) to the Satyagraha and Champaran movement. These movements influenced not only one nation but thinkers from all over the countries, like Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and James Bevel.

Non-violence or *Ahimsā* includes not only violation of the acts that cause physical injury but also the

feeling that causes hatred, jealousy, evilness, and harshness towards others. Global Citizenship Education is about imparting knowledge to every citizen about human rights, gender quality, justice, environmental sustainability, marginalization, and discrimination necessary to address peace and conflict resolutions. "Gandhi's intercultural approach to the ideas of civilization and citizenship is a form of cosmopolitanism that refrains from monolithic moralizing and gestures instead towards a comfort with difference, alterity, and otherness". (Jahanbegloo, 2017). In a cosmopolitan society, the question arises: what is that institution which can help humanity to be in harmony with each other? Skilled education can be a viable source that can provide human beings with specific values and philosophies. With the help of such values, a human being would realize the interconnectedness of existence globally. Modern society should welcome any such educational reformation that helps empower youth to become resilient toward non-violence. That would also be a practical approach to the need for interconnecting humanity.

In today's time, we should work together to promote professional education that could help in greater happiness of citizens in the future. Gandhi offered Nai Talim (New Education Policy) that breaks discrimination or leads to Swaraj for millions of people all over the country living in poverty (affected physically and mentally) and starving spiritually. Recognizing the importance of education and peace globally, the New Education policy has worked toward a dynamic, transformational framework to prepare its citizen for a better future. As Gandhiji also believed that the development of any nation is not limited to its literacy rate but schooling in such a way that it corresponds to a healthy environment as well as the harmony of mind-body-spirit. When tutors inspire learners to develop their critical and analytical skills by giving them practical situations, this will automatically boost their confidence and communication. As I have also discussed earlier, at the primary level, students should understand the importance of education, giving them words,

making them observe, and letting them be creative in their minds. At a young age, children are more curious about things, the nature of objects, the creation of life, etc., and they try to understand things from the other (another person) perspective. Thus, the most significant responsibility lies in the hands of teachers, parents, and authority one has towards curriculum so that apart from knowledge and skills, a discussion towards equality, non-violence, and the truth is a necessity in this changing world.

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