

# GANDHI FOR HOLISTIC EDUCATION: A LOOK INTO NAI TALIM

POORAN SINGH UJJWAL<sup>1</sup>, SUNNY UJJWAL<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Profesator, Department of Political Science, Meerut College, Meerut, India

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Meerut College, Meerut, India

## ABSTRACT

*This paper reflects upon Gandhi's concept of Nai Talim and attempts to place it in its rightful philosophical context to underscore its vision and relevance for 'sustainability' education. It also investigates the concept-policy interface i.e., understanding whether Nai Talim has found any resonance with the education policy of the Indian state since independence.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Nai Talim, Holistic Education, Sustainability Education, Experiential Learning, ESAD*

## INTRODUCTION

Education is the backbone of any community. While laying the foundation of the future for an individual, it also shapes the character of society. One of the fundamental shortcomings of Modern education has a propensity for producing 'area-experts.' While developing expertise in exclusive areas of knowledge by compartmentalization of education, it misses out on the very essence of education i.e., all-round personality development and holistic growth of the learner. The present education apparatus has, by and large, failed to provide the desired direction to learners. Passing examinations and gaining numerous degrees are of little use if they do not prepare a student to face varied life challenges. In such a scenario a relook or revision of the existing educational framework in India is desirable. Our new National Education Policy of 2020 approves this proposition to some extent and proposed to make substantial refinements in the educational structures of the country.

Mahatma Gandhi was aware of the transformative potential of education. He was not a votary of modern education. To him, the desired form of education ought to be based on the principles of Truth and Non-violence. In line with his views about 'true civilization,' he proposed an alternative educational policy – Nai Talim, as it later came to be known. To him, Nai Talim was a means to shape true civilization - 'which points to man the path of duty.' Ordinarily, Gandhiji's notion of Nai Talim is considered to revolve around components like craft-based education or the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction. They are surely crucial and essential components of his scheme but Nai Talim must be seen as a much larger concept. It is not only an educational policy but an educational philosophy (Jeyapragasam, 2010, p. 26). Gandhi looked at life holistically and comprehensively. His

vision for education ought to be seen in the same manner. Instead of looking at it as a concrete set of few procedural mechanisms, it should be placed along his philosophy of life.

## CONTEXTUALIZATION

A brief look at the evolution of the educational concept is warranted to get a clearer understanding. In June 1937, Gandhiji brought forth his idea on basic education in the periodical 'Harijan'. He stressed that the education apparatus of the British Raj was wasteful in outcome and even harmful to Indian society. He wanted an alternative model for basic education which enhances the intellect of students and purifies their souls. With this objective, an all-India National Educational Conference was organized on 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> October 1937 at Wardha; attended by eminent educationists, professionals, leaders of the congress, and education ministers of a few states with Gandhiji presiding over the meet. Various aspects of the new scheme of education were proposed by Gandhiji. A committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Zakir Hussain was mandated to prepare a detailed plan of education. Its final report came in by April 1938, suggesting radical changes in the new scheme for basic education; it later became popular as *Nai Talim* (Priti Kumari, 2018, p. 73).

This new scheme of education was then known as Basic Education, it was to cover education for children between 7 years to 14 years of age. Pre-Basic and post-Basic education to cover years under 7 and over 14 years of age, was added over time. The whole scheme of education covering all three phases is collectively referred to as New Education or the *Nai Talim* of Gandhiji (Kumarappa, 1953). *Nai Talim* was the outcome of Mahatma Gandhi's sustained thought and experiences and the product of the experiments he conducted with the education of his children. He did not subscribe to the idea that education can be mere knowledge of letters (Hind Swaraj, 1909, p. 71). To

him, education beholds the 'seeds of the future of children of the soil.' In pursuit of truth, educational schemes must be framed with 'absolute sincerity,' bold experimentation, and fearlessness. To decide what constitutes 'national' education as distinct from foreign education, he stated that only such education shall be considered national which helps establish Swaraj.

Wardha Conference is usually associated with the emergence of Nai Talim but his views and vision for education are found across his writings, even dated before the conference. From *Hind Swaraj* to numerous articles in *Harijan* and *Young India*, we can find that his idea of Nai Talim is reflective of, firstly, his dissatisfaction with the British pattern of education; second, his keen desire for rural development (Teertha, Rani, & Sudhakar, 2010, p. 46). He stressed the merger of education and work for bringing social transformation and attaining economic self-sufficiency. Gandhi shaped *Nai Talim* principally around the ancient knowledge systems of India. The purpose and orientation of ancient education were like Nai Talim i.e., attainment of self-realization and enlightenment. He noted, "our ancient school system is enough. Character building has the first place in it.... A building erected on that foundation will last" (Hind Swaraj, 1909, p. 72).

Historically India had a rich tradition of education, be it the Buddhist mode of education or the Gurukuls. Gandhian vision is founded on the wisdom of ancient knowledge in India. Gaining a better understanding of Nai Talim necessitates, first, placing Gandhi's vision in the context of Indian civilization. Secondly, situating Nai Talim within his larger philosophy of life. It can only be in Mahatma's violation if we try to categorize Nai Talim or any of his concepts. Holisticness is the essence of Gandhian philosophy. His ideas should not be categorized, in doing so we can only find the 'body' not the 'soul' of his vision (Gupta, 2010, p. 12). To him, education was not to feed children with excessive information but to the realization of hidden purity and goodness in each human being. Literacy can only be a means and not an end. All-round development of students was his objective. Sustainability consciousness was implicit in his holistic approach to life and by inference in his concept of Nai Talim.

#### FUNDAMENTAL FEATURES OF NAI TALIM

- *Free and compulsory education for all*
- *Mother tongue as the medium of instruction*
- *Holistic learning and teaching*
- *Craft-centric education*
- *Focus on creativity and critical thinking*

- *Collaborative teaching and learning*
- *Indoctrination of moral education*
- *Prioritizing character-building.*
- *Emphasis on self-reliance and patriotism*
- *Learning the virtues of Truth & non-violence*
- *Developing a spirit of social service and empathy*
- *Sensitive towards cleanliness and against untouchability*
- *Living a life of modesty in harmony with nature*

#### CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF NAI TALIM

Although Nai Talim as a concept came into being about a century ago, it seems to have become even more relevant in present times. It has been unfortunate that mainstream educational discourse in our country seldom incorporated Nai Talim. The philosophy of Gandhi's Nai Talim is guided by the principle of unity of life. A lot of discussion and debate has taken place over Nai Talim but still certain areas seem to have remained mostly unnoticed. Sustainable utilization and conservation of natural resources or sustainability consciousness inherent in the Gandhian approach may be considered one such dimension. Many scholars of Gandhian studies have advocated that Nai Talim should not be restricted to a few catchy terms like modesty, value education, self-reliance, vocational education, and so on (Prabhath, 2010, p. xii). They hold the view that the true depth of Nai Talim has not been realized yet.

Modernity has created many myths and assumptions around right and wrong, good, or bad, and the desirability of things. The modern idea of development gives precedence to outer appearance over inner being. The degree has a higher value than real wisdom. Material bodily comforts are considered of central importance over individual well-being and happiness. Mahatma was not taken by these artificial constructs of modernity. His Nai Talim presents a challenge to these assumptions and myths of modernity and strives to re-establish Truth.

The history of challenges faced by people across the world suggests that violence stands out as a major and consistent problem. Even now a devastating war is being fought in Ukraine, not to mention many like Yemen, Afghanistan, and Africa. At the domestic stage, daily newspapers are filled with scenes of violence – murder, riots, lynching, etc. It is hard to imagine a life free of violence under modern systems of living. In such a situation it is imperative to search for every possible

way to limit the extent of violence. Gandhiji's principle of non-violence as a way of life appears to be a ray of hope.

At the level of economy which is driven by capitalism and globalization of economic activity; it appears that economics is no longer a means for fulfilling human needs and organizing resources in society. Economics has taken center stage in all spheres of life to such an extent that humans have become means to sustain economies. Industries and manufacturing are there solely to make profits. Gandhi was against the indiscriminate use of machines as they become a source of mass unemployment. He favored local cottage industries working on a small scale rather than relying on machine power. He was in favour of the use of small machines and instruments which makes the daily work of men easier. Looking through such a lens, Nai Talim is an attempt to provide such education which not only teaches to be self-reliant but also advocates morality and ethics in economic enterprise.

*Nai Talim* remains relevant as it can play a very significant role to stimulate the feeling of harmony and cooperation among the members of society. Future citizens educated in the principles of the New Education shall be better placed to carry out the right kind of development of the country without destroying the environment.

#### GANDHI'S NAI TALIM AND NEP

Education plays a crucial role in social transformation and building a humane society. Access to the right kind of education is important for founding a sustainable society. In Gandhi's opinion quality education is that which leads to the holistic development of children. The education policy of any country plays a very important role in shaping its society. It is reflective of the direction and orientation of a nation. In India for many years, Nai Talim has found resonance with our education policy. The new education policy in 2020 India is informed by a broad and holistic vision. It further incorporates some of the basic tenets of Gandhi's Nai Talim. For instance, Gandhi always emphasized that learning should take place in one's mother tongue. Imparting education to children in their mother tongue is one major thrust area of NEP 2020. This is accepted beyond reasonable doubt that there is high usefulness in relying on a language coming naturally to a child for learning purposes. Further, Gandhiji wanted his Nai Talim scheme to provide a conducive atmosphere for the overall personality development of a child. An educational model that is self-sustaining and holistic. For Gandhi, education should be a seamless combination of vocational learning, environmental education, value education, and science education. Likewise, NEP 2020 focuses on giving multidisciplinary and holistic education. Gandhi emphasized building the creative and

constructive capability of a learner. NEP 2020 also promotes developing critical and analytical thinking by suppressing the practice of rote memorization (MHRD, 2020).

The New education policy of India focuses not only on factual knowledge or knowledge of modern books but also on providing vocational education. Students should not get only degrees but be equipped with employable skills, this was a major area of concern in Gandhiji's *Nai Talim* policy. Providing skill-based education is a major objective of NEP 2020 to make an individual self-reliant. Education should remain rooted in the situational context of a child was an important element in Nai Talim. NEP 2020 also addresses this by making the curriculum flexible for students so that they can study subjects based on individual interests and talents. Students are now offered choices from arts, science, and vocational subjects simultaneously along with extra-curricular activities (Payal Gupta, 2020). It might be said that the new educational policy of India finds good resonance with Gandhi's educational scheme. And further establishes the relevance of Gandhi's Nai Talim or New Education.

#### CONCLUSION

Such an education system is desirable for our times which indoctrinates children with human values such as compassion, tolerance, non-violence, and empathy towards natural environment. Education ought to help students understand the economic, societal, and environmental interconnectedness, that all these spheres collectively work for betterment of life on earth. The needs of people are also interdependent; students should realize by the way of education that it is an imperative to build socially sustainable societies based on cooperation. Mahatma's theory of trusteeship shall be referred to for guidance. His theory of trusteeship has a great influence over his educational policy. To attain sustainability in living in future, sustainable development process shall be powered by eco-sensitive teaching and learning. Formal education should include vocational, liberal, environmental, and value education; and Nai Talim might provide the needed reference to develop such type of educational model. Gandhi's Nai Talim should inform the discourse on education for sustainable development (ESAD).

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