

## **Experimenting with Gandhi's Educational Thinking as Decolonized Knowledge System: A Postscript for NEP - 2020**

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Gandhi's ideas are not only for international and national celebrations on his birth and death anniversary year after year, but his practices need to be examined and adopted in designing education policies in order to decolonize the knowledge system. The pedagogical relevance of Gandhi's idea of satyagraha, swaraj, and sarvodaya in our schools and in higher education reflects on educational thinking of Gandhi and its impact on inclusive and integrated teaching-learning process in of our educational institutions to make a creative and constructive human being. For Gandhi, education has both intrinsic and instrumental goals but of the two, the intrinsic goals are primary. These include self-realization, attainment of knowledge and understanding for its own sake and the all-round development of individuals. By emphasizing on importance of character education, social education and vocational education, Gandhi realized that the key aim of education is to know the self and recognize the coalescence of Atman-Brahman and the unity of existence.

The idea of constructive and creative education policy required to understand satyagraha, swaraj and sarvodaya as a strategy, epistemology, and methodology for creating a space for inclusion of indigenous knowledge and worldview in curriculum and pedagogy. So his philosophy of education is a very wide-ranging one, including higher and school education, Gandhi is, of course, remembered primarily for his role in the Indian independence movement or swaraj and education played a crucial role in this. A proper education, which should be in the vernacular not in English and involve knowledge and appreciation of Indian history and customs, is necessary to prepare India to build a true knowledge society. At the same time Gandhi was a pluralist and did not want to neglect the contribution of European and other civilizations. There is a need to understand the similarities between Gandhi's philosophy of education and that of other reformers such as Vivekananda, Roy, Tilak, Tagore, Gokhale and Ambedkar. He also brings out links with the ideas of Western educational philosophers such as Plato, Tillich, Whitehead and Montessori. Of these, Gandhi is possibly closest to Whitehead as both support vocational as well as liberal education and stressed individual self-development and self-reliance as well as highlighting the religious dimension of education.

Although Gandhi hardly finds any reference in National Education Policy (NEP), his idea can be searched through idea of indigenous ways of learning different disciplines including yoga and sports<sup>1</sup>. This paper is a humble attempt to analyze impact of Gandhi's philosophy of education on NEP-2020. This paper has two parts; a brief survey of Gandhian perspectives of education, followed by an analysis of the National Education Policy 2020 to explore the influence of Gandhian philosophy in its framework and proposals. This paper also investigates why the models

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of educational development visualized and experimented by great educators like Rousseau, Dewey, Tagore, Vivekanand, Ambedkar and Gandhi have not been perused by any country as the mainstream education system.

Mahatma Gandhi is undoubtedly a national touchstone for the Indian Republic. So, it is imperative that any great national event in the country is analyzed in the context of Gandhian principles. The National Education Policy 2020 is a landmark policy document when it comes to governmental intervention on education in India. Hence, it is important that the NEP document is analyzed with reference to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of education. This paper is a humble attempt towards this goal. This paper has two parts; a brief survey of Gandhian perspectives of education in general and education of Indians in particular, followed by an analysis of the National Education Policy 2020 to explore the influence of Gandhian philosophy in its framework and proposals. However, it is true at the same time, that the models of educational development visualized and experimented by great educators like Rousseau, Dewey, Tagore and Gandhi have not been perused by nay country as the mainstream of education<sup>2</sup>.

At the outset, let us identify the basic tenets of Gandhian views on education. Here, one should not lose sight of the fact that Gandhi's ideation on education was a response to modern education system, inherently British with English as its medium of instruction, introduced by the British colonial administration in India which had, by the end of nineteenth century, replaced various native modes of education which were prevalent in the pre-British era in different parts of the Indian subcontinent. There was an urgency to offer a native response to English education system and provide remedies for the perils it had brought forth for the Indian society and culture. It is important to note that Mahatma Gandhi did not write a single book as specific treatise on education in general or education of Indians in particular. Gandhi's views on various aspects of education in general and education of Indians in particular are spread throughout his various writings and are often articulated in various contexts. For the purpose of the present study, an attempt is made here to present together major aspects of Gandhian educational philosophy.

Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Swaraj revolved around the idea of model villages. He considered village as the nucleus of his ideal society. Hence, his conceptualization of Swaraj and education in and for the Swaraj necessarily focuses on the village locale. Gandhi's idea of 'true education' of the village emphasized "a harmonious development of three H's—Head, Heart and Hand."<sup>3</sup> This 'true education', Gandhi hoped, could be achieved through what he called the 'education of the body and mind' in the system of education he proposed. Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* (1937):

By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man - body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education.<sup>4</sup>

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For more than a decade even after independence most of the Indian educational policies struggled between traditional and progressive and scientific approaches. It was always difficult to challenge the orthodox education system based in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on his South Africa experiences on educational practices Gandhi quickly noted that ancient educational practices are inadequate for rebuilding the country. There is a little evidence that Gandhi's 'Nai Talim' so much resembled Dewey's system, ever had direct influence from American philosopher. Friends who knew the Mahatma will say his mind was stimulated by the experiences in the frontier-like South Africa and by his work with the Tolstoy farm educational project there. Most of all, perhaps he was faced with the immediate realization that something 'practical' must be done to lift the masses of India<sup>5</sup>. So, literacy is not an end in itself, but only a means to larger ends. Literacy in Gandhian view is only a tool of education and not education itself. While literacy will help the education of the head, there certainly are other means whereby Gandhi conceptualises education of the heart and hand. Complete development of the head is not possible through mere literacy. As Sadgopal observes, "Gandhi's struggle for *swaraj* was to be founded on *civilisational, philosophical and moral* awakening of the Indian people. This enlightenment of the masses, therefore, was the purpose of education."<sup>6</sup>

In his *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, Gandhi proposes what he calls "New or Basic Education" commonly known as 'Nai Talim'. He elaborates what his idea of New Education in the following words: "This education is meant to transform village children into model villagers. It is principally designed for them. The inspiration for it has come from the villages."<sup>7</sup> He argues that in the English education system under the British administration, "primary education is a farce designed without regard to the wants of the India of the villages and for that matter even of the cities."<sup>8</sup> However, in contrast to this imposition of an alien knowledge system, Gandhi proposes that his idea of basic education will be the rightful way of educating Indian children. According to him:

Basic education links the children, whether of the cities or the villages, to all that is best and lasting in India. It develops both the body and the mind, and keeps the child rooted to the soil with a glorious vision of the future in the realization of which he or she begins to take his or her share from the very commencement of his or her career in school.<sup>9</sup>

Marjorie Sykes observes that "for Gandhiji, Nai Talim was the expression of the principle of non-violence in the educational sphere. It was the preparation for, and practice of, the peaceful organisation of a co-operative human community."<sup>10</sup> Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari, in his contemplation on Gandhian educational thought argues:

The philosophy of Nai Talim does not accept the unequal values assigned by our present society to physical and mental work. It takes the position that every kind of

service rendered by a man, whether it is physical or mental, is ethical in its nature. The value of an ethical act cannot be calculated in economic terms.

The spiritual principle of Nai Talim is that knowledge and work are not two separate things. They are the same thing. It is a mistake to say that knowledge is higher than work or work is higher than knowledge. Nai Talim is based on the concept of unity of knowledge and work.<sup>11</sup>

"Fundamentals of Basic Education", in Gandhian framework, are the following as Gandhi delineates them in *Harijan* (1947):

1. All education to be true must be self- supporting, that is to say, in the end it will pay its expenses excepting the capital which will remain intact.
2. In it the cunning of the hand will be utilized even up to the final stage, that is to say, hands of the pupils will be skilfully working at some industry for some period during the day.
3. All education must be imparted through the medium of the provincial language.
4. In this there is no room for giving sectional religious training. Fundamental universal ethics will have full scope.
5. This education, whether it is confined to children or adults, male or female, will find its way to the homes of the pupils.
6. Since millions of students receiving this education will consider themselves as of the whole of India, they must learn an inter-provincial language. This common inter-provincial speech can only be Hindustani written in Nagari or Urdu script. Therefore, pupils have to master both the scripts.

*Harijan* (1947)<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi is establishing a direct link between knowledge and work. The way knowledge must be imparted and acquired, according to him, is through work. Hence, Gandhi's idea of basic education is also, necessarily, vocational. Even though the idea of integrating manual labour with literary training is not purely of a Gandhian origin, he proposed what can be called a purely Indian way of this integration by suggesting ways to educate children through traditional Indian handicrafts and vocational skills. His examples in all his speeches and writings on the subject of education are, one can observe, Indian. He puts forth this vocational frame-work in *Harijan* (1937):

I would therefore begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. [...] I hold that the highest development of the mind and the soul is possible under such a system of education. Only every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically as is

done today but scientifically, i.e. the child should know the why and the wherefore of every process.<sup>13</sup>

He further adds that:

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.<sup>14</sup>

The rationale behind Gandhi's insistence of vocational training is double-fold. A vocation is both means and end of the schooling process, but schooling through vocational training helps in achieving the true aims of education in Gandhian framework which as Gandhi hoped included eradication of labour-based caste stratification and discrimination.. As the country is gearing up to create world's largest pool of skilled human resource at present, an agenda set in motion by the union government through national skill development mission,<sup>15</sup> India urgently needs to turn its focus towards Gandhian thoughts on education. Gandhi asserts that:

For the all-round development of boys and girls all training should so far as possible be given through a profit-yielding vocation. In other words vocations should serve a double purpose—to enable the pupils to pay for his tuition through the products of his labour and at the same time to develop the whole man or woman in him or her through the vocation learnt at school.<sup>16</sup>

It is often pointed out that Gandhi's educational philosophy is known globally for his views on basic education and not for higher education. It should be noted that, there is in fact pointers to take from Gandhi's writings for adult education and higher education as well. In *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, Gandhi offers a brief suggestion while pointing out the urgency of adult education. "My adult education means" writes Gandhi, "true political education of the adult by word of mouth."<sup>17</sup> And, "side by side with the education by the mouth will be the literary education."<sup>18</sup> Even though Gandhi attached "greatest importance to primary education" which, according to his conception "should be equal to the present matriculation less English" he is not without his proposals for higher education.<sup>19</sup>

Gandhi proposed what could be seen as an integrated and co-operative mode of college educational system. *Harijan* (1937) offers an elaborate explanation of his vision for higher education:

I would revolutionize college education and relate it to national necessities. There would be degrees for mechanical and other engineers. They would be attached to the different industries which should pay for the training of the graduates they need. Thus, the Tatas would be expected to run a college for training engineers under the supervision of the State, the mill associations would run among them a college for

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training graduates whom they need. Similarly for the other industries that may be named. Commerce will have its college. There remain arts, medicine and agriculture. Several private arts colleges today are self-supporting. The State would, therefore, cease to run its own. Medical colleges would be attached to certified hospitals. [...] And agricultural colleges to be worthy of the name must be self-supporting.<sup>20</sup>

From this, it can be construed that Gandhi's framework for higher education necessarily involved a public-private partnership where, under the supervision of the government, private industries will fund and develop the required human resources for their respective industries. However, one must hasten to add that, Gandhi's idea of private (self-financing) institution should not be mistaken for the contemporary trend where education has been turned into profit making business in the private sector. For him, the basic idea of private institution seems to be self-sustaining and not profiteering. The emphasis on vocational courses and vocational training of the students continues to be the backbone of higher education as well in Gandhian framework.

Gandhian educational philosophy considers it important to educate the masses of citizens in their native languages. Gandhi not only disliked English education but considered it an anathema for Indian society and India's freedom. In "Monoculture in Education" Gandhi squarely criticises the adoption of English as the lingua franca by Indians. He writes:

Hundreds of youths believe that without a knowledge of English freedom for India is practically impossible. The canker has so eaten into society that, in many cases, the only meaning of Education is a knowledge of English. All these are for me signs of our slavery and degradation. It is unbearable to me that the vernaculars should be crushed and starved as they have been.<sup>21</sup>

### **Decolonize the Knowledge Production through NEP's Promises of Multilingualism**

The NEP 2020 has realised the dominance of English over other Indian languages that hinder learners to have a sense and feeling of the concepts. Under the section of multilingualism and power of the language, NEP has strongly argued that young children learn and grasp nontrivial concepts more quickly in their home/mother language. The NEP document emphasize that whenever possible, the medium of instruction until at least grade 5 but preferably till grade 8 and beyond should home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language, this will be followed by both public and private schools to expand the ambit of mother tongue. NEP also stressed that all efforts will be made in preparing high quality bilingual textbooks and teaching learning materials for science and mathematics, so that students enabled to think and speak about the subjects both in their home language/ mother language and on English. The higher education policy envisaged that more higher education institutions and more programs in higher education will use the mother tongue/ local language as a medium of instruction and/or offer programs

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bilingually, in order to increase access and gross enrolment ratio and also to promote the strength uses and vocabulary of Indian languages. Private higher education Institutions too will be encouraged and incentivized to use Indian language as a medium of instruction and or offer bilingual programs<sup>22</sup>. Following this, government of India has decided to get engineering course materials to be translated into Indian languages. Such initiatives of NEP will boost the idea of Gandhi's idea of swaraj in learning with the help of pedagogical attempts in the local language and having education in the local language, it will boost the process of decolonization of the knowledge production system.

Gandhi wanted Indian languages to take lead in the construction of Swaraj in such a way that every citizen contributes to its development through his/her language. But Gandhi realised that for the masses to follow ideals of Swaraj and of modernity, they must be explained in their provincial languages. The problem, he found, was in the politically minded educated class who spoke more English than Indian languages. He laments that "our love of the English language in preference to our own mother tongue has caused a deep chasm between the educated and politically-minded classes and the masses. The languages of India have suffered impoverishment."<sup>23</sup> He argues that political education of the masses must be done through Indian languages:

It is inherent in Swaraj based on non-violence that every individual makes his own direct contribution to the Independence movement. The masses cannot do this fully unless they understand every step with all its implications. This is impossible unless every step is explained in their own languages.<sup>24</sup>

However, Gandhi believed that India should have a national language and that should be one of the Indian stock. In *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, he proposes the following to the nation:

And then for all-India intercourse we need, from among the Indian stock, a language which the largest number of people already know and understand and which the others can easily pick up. This language is indisputably Hindi. It is spoken and understood by both Hindus and Muslims of the North. It is called Urdu when it is written in the Urdu character.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, Gandhi realised that the hegemony of English is so deep that educated Indians who are responsible for educating and enlightening their fellow citizens insist on speaking in English and have turned a blind eye towards learning and using a common Indian language. In 1945 Gandhi was pessimistic about the potential of English to be of any good to India. He sighs that "the spell that English has cast on us is not yet broken. Being under it, we are impeding the progress of India towards her goal."<sup>26</sup> In his rules for students, Gandhi insists that "they will learn the national language, Hindustani, in its present double dress, two forms of speech and two scripts, so that they may feel at home whether Hindi or Urdu is spoken and nagari or urdu script is written" and that

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"they will translate into their own mother tongue everything new they may learn, and transmit it in their weekly rounds to the surrounding villages."<sup>27</sup> From this it is apparent that Gandhi puts significant emphasis on the development of Indian languages and using Indian languages as mediums of instruction in the context of education. Against the English hegemony, deeply rooted in the education system under British administration, Gandhi consistently presented his nativist view. He earnestly believed that a native educational system has to fully replace the alien model which was implemented by British administration.

The curriculum and pedagogic ideas which form the fabric of modern education were imported from Oxford and Cambridge, Edinburgh and London. But they are essentially foreign, and till they are repudiated, there never can be national education. [ . . . ] The fact to be realised is that India by the very fact of her long-established and elaborated civilisation had once the advantage of an educational system of her own, the only thing entitled to be called "national." But it was fundamentally distinct from the Anglo-Indian type and from the pseudo-national type that is its descendent. The question then is this: The choice must be clearly and finally made between national and foreign education, the choice of type and archetype, of meaning and purpose, of ends and means.<sup>28</sup>

To sum up, we can see that Gandhian thought on education was fundamentally a nativist proposal to replace foreign educational system in practice in India. It included an emphasis on basic education while also suggesting potential models for higher education. In both basic and higher education, Gandhi lays significant stress on vocational training of the students. By connecting productive labour with intellectual training Gandhi offered a genius solution to a pedagogic problem in modern education systems regarding education through literacy versus education through skill training in manual labour. It is a pragmatic proposal which could show the nation a way to deal with the issue of 'educated unemployed youth' whose number is growing everyday in the country.

Gandhian philosophy rejects the predominance of English both as a medium of instruction in educational institutions and as a lingua franca among educated Indians. Much as he detested its hegemonic influence among Indians, he considered it useful only to communicate with English speaking foreigners and not for communication among Indian natives, educated or otherwise. As Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o argued, in the colonial education system, "the language of ... education was no longer the language of ... culture" which results in a break for the child to be educated a connect with his/her own culture and civilisation.<sup>29</sup> One can see that it is because of a similar realisation that Gandhi insists on education of the Indian students in their mother tongue or provincial/regional language. He also vouches for a common language of communication among all citizens which, he argues, should be Hindustani and all students must acquire this language and be proud of their national language. Gandhian framework proposes self-sustainable educational institutions with an

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emphasis on public-private collaboration in the field of education, and absolute government control is discouraged.

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