

## **Gandhian Philosophy of Nai Talim: A Scheme of Learning for Sustainable Development**

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### **Abstract**

The need for Sustainable development is a topic being discussed at all forums by leaders, politicians, environmentalists, academicians and statesmen alike. Sustainable development has to be an all encompassing phenomenon. Social justice becomes an integral part of sustainable development. Social justice is not possible without a sound and effective educational policy. This paper examines the shortcomings in the present educational policies. It also attempts to point out the utility of Nai Talim, Gandhi's philosophy on Basic Education, as a much better alternative.

**KEYWORDS:** sustainable development, social justice, education, Nai Talim

The former UN General Secretary, Ban Ki-Moon defined sustainable development thus, "Sustainable Development is the pathway to the future we want for all. It offers a framework to generate economic growth, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship and strengthen governance". The common man connects sustainable development to mostly two things from the definition, viz. environment and development. But attaining social justice and sound governance are also important ingredients for the same. In this article, the author seeks to establish the fact that effective and relevant educational policy is an integral part of planning for sustainable development as it is the stepping stone to establish social justice. The article advocates the case of the Gandhian philosophy of Nai Talim in this context.

### **HISTORY OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN INDIA**

India has a rich and vast heritage. The educational system of ancient India is an integral part of it. The ancient Universities like the Takshshila and Nalanda are some of the best known universities of all times. With the advent of foreign rule in India the situation underwent change. During the British rule, the educational policy in India underwent a drastic change with the introduction of the Macaulay's educational plan. He introduced the elimination of the indigenous system of education and replacing it with a foreign system under the name of 'reform'. This led to the establishment of many colleges and universities. The aim of this newly system of education was to mostly to create a class of bureaucrats which would become the lower cadres of the English administration. It also created the view that the erstwhile Indian system was defective and uncivilised.

After independence, the Governments in India introduced many educational policies. It appointed various commissions to prepare the blueprint of the policy. The University Education Commission, the Secondary Education Commission, the Kothari Commission

are some of the commissions appointed by the Consecutive Governments. Accordingly, new education policies for the nation were introduced in 1968, 1986, 1992 etc. The educational policies are highly competitive and rigorous but not without faults. Our educational system has sadly ended up becoming a trainer of rat race wherein the children do not develop their personalities and neither their skills. It has become a system which educates the students to imitate without critical analysis or involvement. It does not develop in them any significant skills. Thus, shockingly we come across reports regarding the employability of our student or rather the lack of it. But most importantly, it has also increased social inequalities, in a way, as all cannot afford the education which can ensure jobs and good pay at the end. This necessarily presents us with the need to address the issue with urgency. It leads us to the system of education that was put forth by Gandhi. He felt it would be the best system for a country like India which had a peculiar social and cultural structure. Gandhi named the system 'Nai Talim'.

### **HOLISTIC APPROACH OF GANDHI**

Before we turn to the Philosophy of Nai Talim of Gandhi, we need to understand certain basic things about Gandhi. He was neither an academician nor a theorist. He did not set out to put forth an 'ism'. What Gandhi wrote or spoke of, he did so on the basis of his experiences, his observations. He looked at the life of man as a whole. For Gandhi, all aspects of man's life were interconnected and interdependent. So he had a holistic approach towards whatever issue and problems that were presented before him. When Gandhi speaks of social issues, he does not isolate them from the financial, cultural or political. In this sense, for example, when he speaks of the practice of Truth and Non-violence, it was not just for the sake of the independence struggle but for the life of man. Taken in this fashion, the system of Nai Talim is also very closely related to the surroundings and needs of the society in India.

### **NAI TALIM**

To understand Gandhi's educational ideas one has to explicitly keep Dewey's following quote in mind, "We will know what type of education to provide, if we know what type of society we want (Sinha 2015:2)." The idea of Nai Talim or Basic Education for all was conceptualized by Mahatma Gandhi in 1937. Nai Talim is a revolutionary idea regarding pedagogy. In Gandhi's words Nai Talim was aimed at being at the forefront of a social revolution.

*Reservations about Colonial Education:* The reason Gandhi put forth Nai Talim was because he had severe reservations about the English education system in India. Gandhi's criticism of this system of education is a part of his critique of modern civilization. In fact, it must be emphasized here that no one criticized English education under colonial rule as much as he did. He believed that education must be a reflection of the basic principles and values of a given society. Education is inherently related to the socio-economic development of the society. On the contrary, he felt the English system of education created a psychological slavery. He lamented that such a system would do nothing for the development and self-esteem of his countrymen. Gandhi states that English cannot and ought not to become the National language (Rao 2012: 83). Gandhi's system of Nai Talim is a process which would decolonize the mind of the Indians. It

aimed to free them from foreign beliefs and develop a sense of pride and bonding about their own society.

*Revolutionary Views:* Gandhi's views on Education are revolutionary. He believed that the aims of education and of the society cannot be separated. His views are based on the notion of all round development of the personality of individual. It aimed for freedom from not only illiteracy but also from ignorance, taboos and superstition. Gandhi made a clear cut distinction between learning and education as according to him, "Literacy in itself is no education." He emphasised on incorporation of physical training and high morality in the process of education which should focus on intellectual and cognitive development. It is an approach to the total personality development of body, mind and spirit (Panse 2007). Nai Talim is not a rigid, methodical, curriculum based system of learning. It is a system which was appropriate for the surrounding conditions, learning of the mind through the hands. It aimed to make the individual capable of coping with the necessities and requirements of his life.

The system of Nai Talim had noble aims. It was a philosophy of life and action, preparing the individual to face and learn from his life experiences. He felt that Indians had been brainwashed into believing that mere literacy meant education. According to Gandhi, "Literacy is not the end of education, not even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated (Tendulkar 1999: 175)."

*Village Centric:* Nai Talim was aimed for the villages of India as Gandhi believed that India lived in her villages. He opined, "Forget them and you forget India. India is not to be found in the cities. It is in her innumerable villages (Harijan 1947: 393)." Through the new system of education, he wanted to shrink the gap between the urban and the rural populace. He wanted all Indians to realise the importance of rural India. The nation will not be in a position to grow, progress and thrive if her villages are not at the centre of all things. He wanted the rural regions to become self-reliant, which created lesser possibilities of exploitation, for which education was an apt answer. Therefore, through Nai Talim, Gandhi wanted the students to be taught the local handicrafts very early on. This principle had a dual aim; one, it would keep the craft alive and second, most importantly, it would provide the students to become self-reliant and self-employed.

*Learning by Doing:* Gandhi emphasized on educating the child through manual work rather than stuffing his mind with just information. This is something (stuffing of the mind); he believed was a part of the English system of education. Even modern neuroscience believes that learning by doing is the best way to learn. Gandhi emphasised this a little less than a century ago! Gandhi opined, "The real education is that which fully develops the body, mind soul of children (Nandra :175)." Nai Talim place productive work at the centre of the teaching-learning process, as a powerful corrective to the bookish and information oriented character of academic education (Devika and Arulamni 2014: 112). Such a system would provide the individual the means to be able to support him. It would be system where the skill of the hands would be the basis of development of the intellect. Here we need to understand that the areas of vocational training will definitely change in present times to suit the nature and needs of contemporary society. The Kothari Commission declared its faith in learning in this

fashion and incorporated work experience as an important part of building syllabus. But unfortunately the system was practised only for name sake in most educational institutions till recently.

*Ideals of Nai Talim:* According to Prof. Sohan Raj Tater, the ideals of Nai Talim are:

1. Ideals of a classless society
2. Freedom and Equality for all
3. Dignity of Labour
4. A non-violent social order
5. Development of a sense of social responsibility

The aim of Gandhian education is not only create a well-balanced individual but rather to create a well-balanced society. Since this education is for all and of the same kind, it would create a just social order. It aimed to remove the gap between the rich and the poor, leveling the society into harmonious relations. Undoubtedly, this would go a long way in achieving social justice which such an important ingredient of Sustainable development.

#### **PRINCIPLES OF NAI TALIM:**

Let us take a look at the principles of Nai Talim:

1. *Education or learning in mother tongue along with handicrafts:* Gandhi's idea of Nai Talim emphasised on vernacular education as it was social in character. It had the aim of the educated teaching the uneducated inevitably required vernacular medium. The education system which was in English could not achieve this motive. He stressed on the students being taught the local craft with the aim that they not only keep it alive but also create future possibilities for themselves.
2. *Production or work based on the vocational needs of the local population:* In his idea of the gram swaraj, Gandhi aimed to create self-reliant, self-sufficing independent villages. The production should therefore be to meet all the needs of the local population so that they will not have to depend on the outside world to get his needs satisfied.
3. *Learning associated with vocational work:* Education, primary and secondary, which is to be at the village level must satisfy the need to provide vocational education regarding these works. Simply the children must be taught in school itself the basics of practicing any profession.
4. *Work should have social utility:* The vocational training must be from the perspective of utility to the society. So that whatever is produced comes of use to the locality. The production should not create new, unwanted demands.
5. *Dignity of Labour:* Nai Talim teaches dignity of labour with a far reaching aim. It believes that just giving bookish education to the children is downright criminal. By

training the students for manual labour they also open up innumerable opportunities for them so that they always find some source to earn. Gandhi opined, “The brain should be educated through the hand (Samuel 2015:106)

*Conclusion:* In India Nai Talim never found a significant place in the educational planning. Several attempts have been made by organisations and Gandhians to practice Nai Talim on experimental basis. Nonetheless, none of this takes away the significance of having such policy for the realisation of social justice and ultimately sustainable development.

Nai Talim is system which aims at harmonious relations of the individual with his surroundings. It teaches equality, dignity and brotherhood. It figures out a role for each individual in a given society and trains him in his responsibilities. It abhors exploitation of individual as well as resources, and therefore maintains nature and Mother Earth. Nai Talim is a system which breeds self-respect and respect for all. Since each one is trained in and carries out manual labour. Naturally in such a system there will not be any problems of lack of employability, as each has been trained in some skill and handicraft or the other which will help them in earning a living. If practised on a larger level, it may reverse the process of migration to cities. This in turn will lessen the pressures on resources and administration.

Nai Talim is part of Gandhi’s plan of Gram Swaraj. By enlightening the citizens through Nai Talim, it will be possible for other aims of Gram Swaraj to be achieved as well. Gram Swaraj aims for a politically and economically self-reliant society. A society which leads an eco-friendly life by the practise of small scale and village industries, decentralisation, maintaining sanitation, practicing naturopathy, producing khadi, trusteeship etc. Gram swaraj is nothing but one of the best blueprints of sustainable development. It is an economy of permanence as opined by J. C. Kumarappa. Nai Talim is a part of such moral and ethical plan. Undoubtedly, it has the capacity to play a vital role in the sustainable development of man and this Planet.

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