

IMPACT OF MAHATAMA GANDHI'S NAI TALEEM ON THE NEW EDUCATION POLICY 2020: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Quality Education is a significant tool in achieving social development and social equality. Education plays a key role in the foundation of a sustainable society. It encourages tolerance and turns the learners into self-reliant individuals who are capable of facing the challenges of life. It helps in the social and political progress of the nation by giving its citizens a voice to speak up and enhancing their productivity and competitiveness. Mahatma Gandhi viewed quality education as one that focusses on the holistic development of the learner and equipping him with the necessary basic skills. His Nai Talim also referred to as Basic Education or Buniyadi Shiksha formed the base of many educational practices that were implemented in our nation. It stressed on bringing up a sustainable society by nurturing its learners with values like non-violence, truth, empathy, compassion, courage, resilience etc. Providing quality education to the learners is still a major developmental goal to be accomplished by the country. This paper shall analyse the National Education Policy 2020 in the perspective of Gandhi's views on Nai Talim and Education and the relevance of his views in contemporary India. This paper proposes that we can bring up an empowered and self-sustaining nation by viewing the Nai Talim as a roadmap in the implementation of NPE 2020.

Keywords: 'Nai Talim', NEP 2020

Gandhi's Nai Talim is a philosophy of learning and living. It is a call for decolonizing our minds as it holds open our notions of progress, success, freedom, happiness and well-being for critical interrogation. It is also a compass for creating a new politics, new economics, new spiritualities and new non-violent societies. Mahatma Gandhi is remembered as one of the greatest leaders of the nation, a preacher and even more significantly as an educator and an implementor. Even with the passage of decades, his views on the education of the nation and its practical aspect in today's 21st Century, still form an important area of interest. The NEP 2020, has given us a splendid chance to discover traces of Gandhi's vision in the daily walks of education in the nation.

Giving emphasis on education for democratic country like India he expressed his views "What is really needed to make democracy function is not knowledge of facts, but right education." Mahatma Gandhi, in his paper 'Harijan', 1937 proposed his views on Education based on his experiments in 1904 when he was in South Africa to his experiences while he stayed in ashrams in Sabarmati and Sevagram. His philosophy was based on the development of the total personality of the individual from the body and mind to its spirit. His views were based on four foundational principles that include emphasis on learning in the mother tongue along with development of skills like handicraft, linking the occupation with the vocational needs of the culture, linking the education with vocational training and that the work should be such that it is not only socially useful and productive, but also self-sustaining. His approach focussed on an education that centred around vocation and the facilities accessible in the locality.

Post-independence, his 'Nai Talim' was brought into reality in several primary schools of the nation. However, the policies of education were still based on the western system of education introduced by the colonials that revolved around the textbooks. The western system that focused on competitiveness could not co-exist with the system of mass education proposed by the 'Nai Talim'. The views of the 'Nai Talim' resurfaced again in the form of Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) and formed a peripheral part of school curriculum. Another chance of presenting Nai Talim came up with the formulation of the National Policy on Education, 1966 based on the reports of the Education Commission. The Report proposed two discrete approaches, one that was based on making education a medium of National development as proposed by Mahatma Gandhi and the other that was based on the western educational system.

Gandhi's emphasised that learning formed a vital component of Education. According to him, the body, the mind and the spirit formed the base of an individual. He believed that the Education system laid stress on the mind and neglected the body, spirit that too were cornerstones of an individual. The NEP 2020 too lays stress on shifting the prevalent philosophy of rote learning as such a form of learning will never be able to facilitate development in the nation. The NEP now emphasises on a holistic, integrated and inclusive approach to education that would not only eliminate rote memorization and exclusion in our education but also encourage rational thought and creativity in the learner.

The NEP 2020 also proposes the remarkable concept of learning how to learn, but this too will be preceded by an array of educational reforms both in the curriculum and the pedagogy of the teaching- learning process. Gandhi thought that the system of education in our country that nurtures our population of future citizens does not cater to their body and spirit and is only limited to the mind. He thought that the prevalent education arrangement only showers information on the students which had no practical implementations in their daily lives, which made him feel concerned for his vision of holistic development of the mind. His views, however, hold true even in the education of the 21st Century.

He summed up his views in 1921 that my experience has proved to my satisfaction that literary training by itself adds not an inch to one's moral height and that character-building is independent of literary training. I am firmly of opinion that the Government schools have unmanned us, rendered us helpless and godless. They have filled us with discontent, and providing no remedy for the discontent, have made us despondent. They have made us what we were intended to become, clerks and interpreters.

It is true that any discussion on his views remains unfinished without the mention of his Nai Talim which had its beliefs deeply rooted in Education for life, through life and throughout life. The concept of education is far beyond the mere educational grounds and stresses on bridging the gap between education and vocation, an aspect that is emphasised in the NEP 2020. The words such as 'behaviour', 'ethics' are reflective of his vision of education in the nation. The policy emphasises on a holistic approach towards education by integrating physical education, vocational education along with academics in the classroom. Gandhi thought that vocational education was a significant aspect of education as it was capable of making an individual self-reliant and independent. He had the opinion that only this kind of education can be not only self-sustaining but also sustainable. His views on incorporating skills like handicraft and cattle rearing, though not totally relevant in the 21st Century represent his ideas which are now being replaced by contemporary alternatives like digital skills and technology. Gandhi ji believes that literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means by which man and woman can be educated. Literacy itself is no education. I would therefore begin the child education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training.

As far as the current system of education in the nation is concerned, it lays undue importance on the format in which content is presented and the delivery of knowledge and curriculum. The NEP addresses such concerns and proposes a system of education in which the learner has the freedom to select courses of his interest and

the educational institutions have flexibility in assessing the students. rigid demarcation of streams or subjects will be removed. There will now be flexibility to choose from interests within arts and sciences, vocational and academic streams as well as curricular and extra-curricular activities. The new policy proposes a shift from an assessment that is based on the outcome of a program to a year-round assessment structure. This entails reduction of curricular content and rote learning and supplements it with conceptual learning, experimentation, and critical thinking. The aim is for this era of Indian students to receive a holistic model of learning, well equipped with cutting edge skills necessary to excel in the 21st century.

The role of teachers and educators in making his visions a reality will be of utmost importance as they are the ones who shall play roles not only as enablers but will also be co-learners in this process. Gandhi stressed that the learners should not only be mere observers and imitators in the teaching-learning process, but should have their own rational thoughts and the spirit to have thoughtful conversations with their teachers and make the classroom a centre of rational thinking, a proposal that forms the very essence of the NEP 2020. The NEP 2020 believes that teachers play a significant role in shaping the future citizens of the nation. In order to bridge the gap between the number of teachers to the number of students, the NEP lays emphasis on investing in re-establishing the 'status of educators' and giving them freedom to shape the curriculum and pedagogies of teaching. The policy encourages them to foster an environment of thoughtful learning in the educational institutions and build small units of governance.

An important aspect of Gandhi's concept of education lies in the deeper understanding of how he viewed equity and inclusion in the then prevalent scenario. He always emphasised on the idea that knowledge should be accessible to every individual and that there should be a democracy of knowledge in our society. His views on inclusion and equity have formed the base of various policies on education that were implemented in the past. In the present NEP, these views are taken into consideration in the bigger domain of The Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). His views were mainly focussed on including the vulnerable and marginalized groups that included women, untouchables and other socially and culturally disadvantaged groups into the mainstream of Education. He emphasised on providing them with equal access to education and other educational opportunities that their more privileged counterparts in the society enjoyed. His ideas on 'Lok-vidya' and education for all irrespective of caste and creed is recognized and represented in the NEP 2020.

His views repeatedly highlight the significance of local knowledge and wisdom in the educational arrangement. This local wisdom can be recognized only through the medium of knowledge, an aspect that was greatly stressed by him throughout his journey. Having witnessed the era when not only Indians but also the Indian Education was under the control of the colonial emperors, he was against the idea of having English as the medium of instruction, a situation faced by us even today. Keeping these ideas into consideration the NEP now lays emphasis on making the instruction available in the mother tongue of the learner as only this form of approach can give vent to natural expression. Only if a child is exposed to his natural culture and dialects, can he relate the realities of his society and culture and appreciate their values both at both moral and intellectual levels. The way in which his views hold significance in the 21st century reflect how he was ahead of his time. As in his words:

“There never was a greater superstition than that a particular language can be incapable of expansion or expressing abstruse or scientific ideas. A language is an exact reflection of the character and growth of its speakers. Among the many evils of foreign rule this blighting imposition of a foreign medium upon the youth of the country will be counted by history as one of the greatest. It has sapped the energy of the nation, it has shortened the lives of the pupils, it has estranged them from the masses, it has made education unnecessarily expensive. If this process is still persisted in, it bids fair to rob the nation of its soul. The sooner therefore educated India shakes itself free from the hypnotic spell of the foreign medium, the better it would be for them and the people”.

It is also suggested in the policy that the medium of education until at least grade 5 should optionally be in the regional language, mother tongue or local language. Sanskrit, an Indic language of the ancient Indian subcontinent, will now be mainstreamed in schools as one of the language options in the present three-language formula. Indian Sign Language (ISL) will also be standardized throughout the country and a new curriculum will be developed for deaf children.

The ideas of equity and inclusion have to be realized in the practical aspects of their implementation in the society. He believed that the ideals of social service should be deeply rooted in the education arrangement of the nation. Serving the underprivileged and deprived should be a fundamental part of learning from the foundation itself. Such an approach will facilitate not only the development of the mind and the spirit, but will also develop a sense of empathy, compassion and active citizenship amidst the learners. Active citizenship is related to understanding and fulfilment of one's rights and duties as citizens of the nation. His views in an era dominated by the rural background, can still be seen as parallel to the issues and challenges faced today. These views have not failed to find a space in the NEP 2020.

In a way similar to Gandhi, the NEP 2020 too envisions an active participation of the state and other stakeholders in an effective operation of schools and educational institutions in India. It shall be apt to conclude this article in the words of Gandhi: "The future of India lies in its villages" and as emphasised in the NEP, the agenda of global education development reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.

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