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## Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy of Education and Its Relevance to Contemporary Indian Education

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### Abstract

This research paper explores the philosophy of education of Mahatma Gandhi using a historical approach and considers its applicability to the modern education. Gandhi did not consider education as literacy or passing examination. He perceived it as a character-building process, development of self-reliance, work to train the body and mind, and equip the learners to live an ethical social life. His pedagogical views were formed by his writings like Hind swaraj and by his subsequent experiments which led to the Nai Talim or Basic Education which was formally stated in the late 1930s. Gandhi focused on mother tongue, dignity of labour, craft-based learning, moral growth, citizenship, village reconstruction, and compatibility between individual development and welfare of the society. This paper is based on past and documentary materials to decipher the development, ideals, and objectives of Gandhian education. The results indicate that, the educational thought of Gandhi was a catalysis of colonial, scholarly and estranging education and a proactive programme of national restoration. The paper presents that Gandhian thought is still relevant in the current discussions of experiential learning, value education, vocational integration, sustainability, peace education, and inclusive community-based schooling. Despite certain aspects of the Gandhian education, which need to be reinterpreted in a technological and globalized world, its ethical and pedagogic principles still provide a valuable guideline to human-centred education.

**Keywords:** Gandhi, Nai Talim, Basic Education, Value Education, Self-Reliance

### Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi is the key figure of the Indian educational thinking. Even though he is mostly remembered as a political leader and moral philosopher, he also cared about the purpose, content, medium, and method of education. Gandhi felt that the colonial educational systems in India made them dependent, aped the foreign ideals, overlooked productive labour and disconnection between learning and life. In Hind swaraj, he attacked a kind of modern civilization, which gave material progress more importance than moral self-mastery, and this was the theme of his subsequent educational thought. To Gandhi, amassing knowledge was not the best form of education but the disciplined growth of the body, mind and spirit. He demanded that the human beings be made truthful, self-controlled, socially responsible and economically capable because of education.

The educational thinking of Gandhi was developed with time and achieved its practical expression in Nai Talim, which is also referred to as Basic Education. This scheme

was conferred during the Wardha conference in 1937 and suggested free and compulsory education based on productive handicraft, mother tongue, correlation of subjects and activity and dignity of labour. Such education to Gandhi was the only way of reconstructing India at the village and up. His school of thought aimed at reconciling the intellectual learning with the manual work, personal discipline with social service, and personal liberty with duty. The concepts of Gandhi should be reexamined in the academic sphere in the current century when educators are occupied with the issues of holistic development, skill-based learning, peace, sustainability, and ethical citizenship.

**Review of Literature:** The existing literature in the field of Gandhian education can be divided into primary writing, interpretive essay writing and institutional writing. The most valuable sources are the writings of Gandhi himself. Hind Swaraj gives the philosophical underpinning of his criticism of contemporary education, and most particularly its inability to inculcate moral responsibility. His practical

interests in language, craft, social equality, and character formation are explained later in his writings and speeches on national education, village reconstruction and Basic Education. Examples of the works of Gandhi reveal that he always associated education with self-sufficiency and productive labour as well as social elevation and not with literacy solely.

Gandhi had a philosophy on education which is elaborated through the lens of some academic and institutional explanations. Nai Talim as outlined in UNESCO sources is an education of life, which focuses on social engagement, moral development, and professional capability. The mentioned sources also mention that Gandhi intended to change the school-society relationship by prioritizing lived work in the learning process. Other interpretative texts hold that Gandhian education was aimed at bridging the mental-manual labour divide and producing self-respecting, non-violent, non-cooperative citizens. The literature thus portrays Gandhi as an opponent of colonial education and an imaginative mind that had provided an alternative rooted in social perspectives.

Another observation brought out in the literature is that Gandhi never divided educational reform and social reform. His pedagogical propositions were associated with swaraj, elimination of social hierarchy, female involvement, village industry and good citizenship. This renders Gandhian education to be wider than classroom method. It has been described as an anti-reconstruction social philosophy of learning where the school becomes an agent of learning. This reading is significant in the current times as education discussions tend to separate curriculum out of general issues of justice, community and national building. Historical evidence can thus indicate that Gandhi hoped education to change the learner as well as the social order by means of disciplined, cooperative and meaningful activity in the day-to-day social life.

**Need of the study:** The work is necessary due to the fact that the modern education has tended to be examination based, disjointed, commercialized and out of touch with the moral life and community. On this basis, the historical option of Gandhi with regard to educational thinking provides an alternative of connecting learning to ethical development, productive work, citizenship and social justice. Historical review can be used to enable the educators to appreciate not only the ideas that Gandhi suggested but also the reasons as to why he suggested it as a reaction to the colonial conditions and national reconstruction. The need to conduct this study is also due to the fact that Gandhian education is at times confused with craft training or anti-modern romanticism. A more historical examination indicates that the goals of Gandhi were the integrated progression of both the learner and democratization of education in work of socially beneficial value. The reconsideration of these concepts can be added to the current debates on experiential pedagogy, vocational dignity, peace education, environmental responsibility, and local knowledge systems.

### Objectives

#### The study objectives are

1. To analyze the historical process of education

philosophy of Gandhi.

2. To determine the significant principles of Gandhian education.
3. To examine the applicability of Gandhian educational thought to the modern educational situation.
4. To discuss the weaknesses and strengths of Gandhian education as a model of education.

### Delimitation

The analysis is confined to the major educational concepts of Gandhi as documented in some of the historical writings and interpretive sources. It does not make any effort to give an exhaustive list of all the educational experiments that have taken place in India under the influence of Gandhian influence. The presentation primarily dwells on philosophical principles, development of Nai Talim, and its relevancy in the Indian context today.

**Research Design:** This study follows the historical research method. It is based on qualitative analysis of secondary and selected primary documentary sources, including Gandhi's writings, historical accounts, and interpretive studies. The method involves collecting relevant documents, examining them in historical context, identifying recurring themes, and interpreting their educational significance. No field survey or experimental procedure has been used.

**Findings:** According to the study, the educational thought of Gandhi emerged as a general moral critic of civilization and colonialism. He was opposed to education which separated literacy and life, intellect and labour, knowledge and character. He considered education as a lifelong process of self-realization and social responsibility. Another significant discovery is that Nai Talim was an effort to instantiate such principles by way of free and mandatory education based on craft, their native language, and local life. The paper also concludes that Gandhian education is holistic in nature. It aims at physical growth by labor, intellectual growth by the correlated learning, moral discipline by the truth and non-violence and social formation by cooperation and service. Education is not an economic use, but Gandhi held that fruitful work ought to enable learners to acquire the self-respect and practical competence. Lastly, the paper concludes that numerous existing education issues e.g. experiential learning, value education, integration of skills, sustainability and development of citizens are deeply connected to Gandhian ideology.

### Discussion

As far as the first goal is concerned, the educational thought of Gandhi can be followed through historical interpretations combined with his initial criticism of the modern civilization and his further constructive programme. In Hind swaraj, Gandhi doubted education that was able to sharpen the intellect without the moral discipline. During the next decades, his activities in ashrams, national institutions and rural reconstruction strengthened his belief that the education should be based on Indian circumstances. By the 1930s this belief was converted into Nai Talim which tried to streamline education in universal education based on craft-centred pedagogy. Therefore, the philosophy of Gandhi became historically the reflection, action, and

experiment of Gandhi.

As far as the second goal is concerned, the main tenets of Gandhian education are evident. To begin with, education should take care of development in all aspects; body, mind, and spirit. Second, it ought to be delivered using a native language. Third, handicraft ought to be the focus of the curriculum, but not the mechanical labour, but an educational tool that encompasses mathematics, language, science, and social comprehension. Fourth, truth, non-violence, self-discipline, cooperation and service should be nurtured through education. Fifth, it must honour work and be self-reliant. These values portray the attempt of Gandhi to rebuild the learner and the society.

As far as the third objective is concerned, Gandhian education is still relevant in significant aspects. Experience-based and activity-based learning is becoming more and more appreciated in the modern schooling that reflects the insistence of Gandhi on learning through work. His emphasis on truth, non-violence, and duty is also reflected by contemporary day concern on value education, peace, and democratic citizenry. Vocational integration and skills education takes a new dimension when associated with the dignity of labour proposed by Gandhi and not employability. His tendency toward local setting, communal involvement, and his humble lifestyle is also an appeal to the modern issue of sustainability and ecological consciousness. As such, Gandhian education still provides an ethic corrective to too competitive and market-oriented systems.

With regard to the fourth goal, there are strengths and weaknesses of Gandhian education. Its virtues are holistic development, social usefulness, moral seriousness, community orientation, as well as respect of labour. It is particularly beneficial to the societies that want equality and productive citizenship. Nevertheless, there are some shortcomings that are observed when Gandhian thoughts are used without redefinition. Craft-centred schooling may be misconceived to be either limited or backward when it is not linked to science, technology, and evolving working conditions. Administrative, financial and social barriers also hindered the implementation of Basic Education in the ancient times. Therefore, the most beneficial aspect of the philosophy of Gandhi is when it is viewed as a vibrant framework as opposed to a strict blueprint.

**Limitations:** The weakness of this research is that it relies on documentary and secondary sources. It lacks field research on existing institutions that are inspired by Gandhian education. Neither does it treat Gandhi in systematic comparison with other pedagogues, including Tagore, Vivekananda or Dewey. Thus, conclusions made are not empirical but interpretative.

### Suggestions

Future studies can focus on the ways in which Gandhian educational philosophy can be applied to online education without its human and ethical essence. It is also possible to make comparative studies between Nai Talim and current competency-based, vocational or experiential models. School examples of schools that were shaped by the Gandhian thought would also explain the practical opportunities and challenges of implementation.

### Conclusion

To sum up, the philosophy of education by Mahatma Gandhi is one of the most important contributions to the educational thought in India by natives. It was a product of a historical struggle against colonial subjugation and a moral quest to find a decent social order. Gandhi denounced an education that resulted in imitation, dependence, and immorality and suggested an education based on life, labour, language, character, and community. His Nai Talim was not a scheme of school, but one of a larger view of human liberty, of village renewal, of national renewal. Although, as we witness today, competition, credentialism and commercial pressures so often dominate the formation of the educational process, Gandhi reminds us that the ultimate aim of the educational process is the creation of responsible, self-reliant, caring and ethically awakened human being. Even though certain aspects of his programme need reinterpretation in the context of the technological change and modern ambitions, its main idea is still strong: knowledge, work, values, and social responsibility have to come together through education. This is why Gandhian educational thought remains topical as an object of historical study and a source of reconsideration of the educational process in the modern world.

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