



Craft-Based Education Is Only Based On The Idea Of Economic Independence.

To Refute and Pose Arguments Against This Notion.

Shruti Hussain

Student

Department of Teacher Training and Non-Formal Education (IASE),
Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi, India

*“Only when the last tree has been cut down,
And the last river been poisoned
And the last fish been caught, will we realize
That we cannot eat money”*

-Cree Proverb

Abstract: Gandhi's vision of Basic Education, articulated in the 1930s, remains a timeless and relevant blueprint for contemporary times. The essence of his educational philosophy was to foster holistic development, emphasizing not only academic knowledge but also practical skills and moral values. In today's fast-paced and technology-driven world, the emphasis on character-building, ethical values and community engagement espoused by Gandhi is more crucial than ever. Gandhi's emphasis on learning by doing aligns with modern pedagogical approaches, promoting experiential and hands-on learning. Integrating vocational skills and ethical education into the curriculum can empower individuals to navigate complex challenges with resilience and integrity. This paper intends to understand the concept of Nai-Talim and the importance of physical knowledge along with intellectual knowledge.

Key terms – Gandhi, Nai-Talim, Hind Swaraj, Craft-based education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Industrialization in India has significantly impacted the environment, presenting a dual challenge of economic development and environmental sustainability. The rapid growth of industries has led to increased pollution levels, deforestation, and depletion of natural resources. Air and water pollution from industrial effluents pose severe threats to public health and ecosystems. The unchecked release of pollutants into water bodies has led to the degradation of aquatic environments, affecting both flora and fauna. The children of contemporary India inhabit a country where a total of 57.1 billion metric tons of carbon emissions has been produced since the Industrial Revolution more than 200 years ago. According to the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) report the rapid rise in the CO₂ emissions has made India now the seventh biggest carbon polluter in the world. With the dawn of the industrial age- burning of fossil fuels and deforestation- humans began to significantly add to the amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere causing in the increase in temperature of the planet. India, while striving for economic growth, faces the challenge of being one of the largest carbon emitters globally. The nation's reliance on coal for energy production, rapid industrialization, and a burgeoning population contribute significantly to its carbon footprint. Amidst this crucial juncture of planet-scale disaster where the survival of humanity is at its brink, there are many alternative approaches where not only the fate of this humanity and planet will survive but also it will flourish.

One such alternative was given by Gandhi. Over a century ago, he coined the term Swaraj. In his book "Hind Swaraj" (1909), Gandhi expressed his views on home rule, machinery, and modernization and among other matters, Education. It was this vision of Swaraj that gave him the conceptual understanding of an education system that does not serve the purpose of "modernity" and that helped him initiate Nai-Talim in 1937. Swaraj was directly opposite to Industrialization. Thus, Nai-Talim was a stark contrast to the state-approved school education that encouraged Industrialization. The Gandhian idea of handicraft education has long been under scrutiny for being inclined towards economic independence. However his idea of craft-based education was more than to gain monetary benefits. This paper intends to understand the concept of Nai Taleem and the importance of physical knowledge along with intellectual knowledge. In this article, we are going to discuss the principles of Nai-Talim and give arguments to refute the statement- "Craft Based Education is only based on the idea of economic independence"- attached to the handicraft education, all in a spirit of resistance to Industrialization.

In his book Hind Swaraj, Gandhi talks about his vision of a good society and that civilization is a mode through which man attains mastery over his mind- to control his passions and desires.

..the mind is a restless bird; the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions, the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. (Gandhi, 1909, p. 54)

Swaraj for Gandhi was control over the mind or self-control, which meant learning to overcome all the cardinal sins of greed, fear, pride, envy, lust, hatred and anger- the teachings and essence of all the great religions of the world. This vision of attaining Swaraj meant to create alternatives to Industrialism- an ideology of unlimited growth, by endless exploitation of nature, through cutting-edge technology and machinery, supported by large multi-national corporations and aided by mass schooling to create labors for a capitalist market (as cited by Bowles and Gintis, 1974). The current education system works to produce commodities like in a capitalist market. Bowles and Gintis, 1974 has critiqued this form of education where the schools replicate an environment of a capitalist workplace where the **people production process** is geared to earn profits rather than focusing on the human needs. The whole meaning of education has reduced to a pre-requisite of passing out and getting a job which further reduces our freedom; freedom from unnecessary burden, freedom of happiness and freedom to live our lives peacefully. Gandhi's idea of Nai-Talim or Basic Education was mainly described as education through handicrafts. The root of this new education went much deeper. It laid emphasis on truth and love towards ones varied activities. Love is for all and so education must also be accessible for every child in the country. The idea behind handicraft education where children learn a skill and then apply it to their everyday life came from the stance where Gandhi believed in the all round development of the child.

Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for the making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education. (H., 8-5-'37, p.104)

In Gandhi's basic school system, the children would learn to use tools first (here spinning the charkhi/wheel) than to draw, they will learn to see, intercept and read things faster than learning how to write, and when they do learn how to write it would not be carelessly smeared on paper. So, craft-based education includes the cultivation of creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, which are valuable beyond economic pursuits. It nurtures a well-rounded individual capable of contributing to various aspects of society. In contrast to the present-day education scenario, the schools prepare pupils for life in the capitalist system that prevents students from engaging in any kind of rebellion or revolution. The reason schools act in this way is because they work directly in the interests of the capitalist system and their principle purpose is to produce the workforce. The school corresponds to a capitalist workplace where there are uniforms, strict time keeping, hierarchy, rewards and punishments etc. Rewards in the form of grades/house points/stars are granted to students which according to Bowles and Gintis are often not because of the academically best work or not even the best effort but because the students were subservient, compliant, punctual, had perseverance etc.

Craft-based education frequently involves the preservation of cultural heritage. Many traditional crafts are deeply rooted in cultural practices and history. Educating individuals in these crafts helps preserve cultural identities, traditions, and craftsmanship, contributing to a rich tapestry of human heritage beyond economic motives. Both the NEP of 1986 and 2020 has put emphasis on learning a skill as a part of the vocational education. This denotes how Gandhi's craft-based education still has an impact and can help reform society. The recent National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) envisioned that at least 50% of our school students receive Vocational Education and Training (VET) by 2025, and to achieve this target the policy made several propositions and proposed different structural changes. However, the implementation of the policy has been a challenge as the larger population of the students in India chooses the path of general education and a very small proportion chooses VET (Ahmed). One of the reasons might be that the proportion of schools offering VET courses are less in comparison to the schools that provide general education. Another key challenge that needs to be addressed is the dignity of labor. It has been evident that both students as well as parents consider the track of VET inferior to general education. This is important as Gandhi's vision for Nai Talim was to address these socio-economic disparities between people in the name of caste and class (like some portion of the people was assigned to do certain jobs). The emphasis on intellectual knowledge is given more recognition than the physical knowledge which further reduces the dignity of labor attached to humble jobs. For instance, the skill of a Benarsi weaver that turns cloth production into an art is not to be found in any schools or vocational training institutes and hence needs to be preserved which is not properly addressed by the NEP 2020. The skill of the street side *mochis* that fix shoes at a minimal cost, how likely is the VET to introduce a program that teaches the students the skill with the level of seriousness that would actually make them utilize it as a vocation? Firstly, let suppose the students take up these vocational courses but given the present circumstances they are unlikely to provide a wage that would compete with jobs that other common courses provide. Secondly, the multiple exit points in these VET institutions is again a problematic proposition as it might create cheap labor in the society and the students from low socio-economic backgrounds will end up in a vicious cycle of low-paid jobs even though they have certified skills from recognized institutions. Unless these vocations are given the due recognition in the educational sphere at a national level and until the craftsmanship of these workers are waged properly, the dignity of labor will not enhance and the enrollment of students in the VET institutions will not increase.

Craft-based education fosters community building. In many instances, making crafts is a communal activity that brings people together. The Gandhian paradigm implied the learner's active involvement with his or her current living conditions with the society so that they could be free from the dull and exploitative nature of the education system under the state. As Gandhi stressed, "education is that which gives true freedom" which also includes freedom from the burden of being sieved and competing with each other to prove who is worthy of learning and who is not. Marjorie Skyes, one of those foreigners who became Indian because this land embraced her with a certain charm that she could not resist; worked as a teacher and principal in a small school in then Madras where she applied the teachings of Gandhi and saw it work. In her days of being the principal, she abolished all sorts of competition and prizes and the 'self-centered rivalry they provoked' (Jehangir & Marjorie, 1987). Teaching crafts in an educational setting promotes social interaction, collaboration, and a sense of belonging within a community. There will be harmony and understanding between the students and teachers. When students from all backgrounds will work together in order to learn a new skill and provide their services in the community like sweeping floors, cleaning the school building and tending to plants; the hierarchies of the society like caste, class and religion will hold no meaning as everyone will work for the welfare of each other. In Gandhi's basic-education, villages will become self-sufficient and will heed to cooperation. People will grow their own food, spin, weave, wear and the things that they cannot grow, they will buy from the other villages. This social aspect of becoming a self-reliant society extends beyond economic motives.

After becoming self-sufficient we shall use our spare time for the service of others. If all become self-sufficient none will be in trouble. In such a state of affairs there would be no need of serving anybody. (The Ideology of the Chakha, 1951, p.86-88)

Many craft-based practices are rooted in sustainable and environmentally friendly principles. Educating individuals in these crafts promotes eco-friendly practices, emphasizing the responsible use of materials and reducing environmental impact. This focus on sustainability is not solely driven by economic concerns but aligns with broader ecological goals. Gandhi's view on industrialization and how it is a curse on mankind can be related to the contemporary scenario where indigenous tribal communities are being displaced from

the lands and forests of their ancestors, exploitation of the natural abundance and unemployment lurking as a disease in the State. Due to industrialization there is mass production of everything as machines take place of human limbs and also take employment away. It is “urbanizing” small pockets of villages which are readily self-sufficient. This will open villages to market competition and exploitation of the small scale industries or craft-based societies being meagerly paid in order to earn their living at the cost of their skill.

Craft-based education promotes life-long learning. The skills acquired in craft education can be continually developed and refined throughout a person's life. This commitment to ongoing learning emphasizes personal growth and self-improvement beyond the immediate economic considerations. According to Gandhi, the system of craft-based education will not only help learners to become self-supporting but also impart knowledge about many different aspects of that particular skill. For instance, when a child spins the wheel he knows about cotton, from where it comes, how to make a meter of yarn out of it. He learns to count while spinning, understand the mechanics behind that simple machine and finally how to make his own clothes from that yarn. This entire process of craft-education fosters a feeling of accomplishment and love for one's own self. It becomes therapeutic and a cathartic experience which is beyond any economic measure.

Thus, in Gandhi's school of basic education there will be an all round development by drawing out the best potential of the child. He will not only be literate rather educated. So, Gandhi suggested that in order to fulfill the child's education, he must be taught a useful handicraft enabling him to produce from the moment of his training so that not only he learns to become self-supporting economically, but also become a part of the community building process where everyone lives in harmony and help each other with cooperation. Nevertheless, craft-based education still lacks the dignity and interest as it restricts one to a modest livelihood which the fast paced economy and tech-savvy generation do not desire. They are willing to comply and persevere at the face of low paying jobs with almost no freedom to pursue one's own interests. They become victim to drudgery and exploitation as they have to earn a living for the sake of their families. The Basic Education hence is a unique approach towards a child-centric pedagogy where learning a craft enables the child to use his or her maximum potential giving due recognition to the prowess of physical knowledge and safeguard our own craftsmen who work to preserve our cultural heritage against the burgeoning industries which are replacing handlooms with powerlooms.

References:

- Gandhi, 1909. *"Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule"* Navajivan Publishing House Ahmedabad India. Chapter-13: *"Nai Talim : Village Swaraj"* | Free Online Books (gandhiashramsevagram.org)
- Bowles and Gintis, 1997. *"Schooling In Capitalist America"*. *Sociology of Education* Vol. 75, No. 1 (Jan., 2002), American Sociological Association.
- Kamal Datta, 2009. *"NCERT Memorial Lecture Series: Marjorie Skyes Second Memorial Lecture"*. National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi.
- Jehangir P. Patel and Marjorie Sykes, 1987. *"Gandhi: His Gift of the Fight"*.
- Ahmed, Tutan. "Socio-Economic Impact of VET: Are Students Interested in Joining Vocational Education and Training in India – in the Context of Skilling Mission in India." *India: Preparation for the World of Work: Education System and School to Work Transition*, 2016, doi:10.1007/978-3-658-08502-5_16.
- Marjorie Skyes, 1987. *"The Story of Nai Talim: Fifty Years of Education At Sevagram"*. Internet Archive Organization. [THE STORY OF NAI TALEEM - FIFTY YEARS OF EDUCATION AT SEVAGRAM : MARJORIE SYKES : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)