

Gandhian Philosophy on Social and Educational Development: Its Relevance in National Service Scheme (NSS).

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Abstract:

The idea of national service in India became much popular in the time of Mahatma Gandhi who always urged his followers for service to the common people. He calls upon the Indian youth to indulge their energy and spirit to the work of nation building. Later when India got independence, the Government of India introduced National Service Scheme (NSS), a student's social service scheme for youth and social development. In this study, I would like to establish the relation between educational and social development views of M.K Gandhi with the National Service Scheme. How Gandhian philosophy derived in to NSS?

Keywords: society, development, education, volunteerism, NSS.

The development of a nation or race is predicated upon the contributions and sacrifices of many stalwarts whose personal philosophy, ideas on education, and social change invigorate an entire race of people. From the second decade of the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi led this country to the goal of attaining independence through his path of non-violence. He dedicated his entire life to the welfare of humanity. He was the pioneer whose philosophy and leadership changed the entire world. He led India to the path of light from the darkness of superstition, oppression and medieval ideology. Before as well as after independence, Gandhi bestowed upon the students and youth of this country the responsibility of uplifting and developing the conditions of the poor working class farmers and all people belonging to backward socio-economic strata. He wisely gave this responsibility to the youth whose energetic participation in the Independence Movement ensured India's freedom. It has been 73 years since Independence, yet his ideals of education and social philosophy remains the only path for developing a strong ideological consciousness in today's youth. Mahatma Gandhi always dreamt about the spontaneous participation of students and youth in the construction of an ideal society (Probhu, 1947)¹. The youth is the repository of strength and courage. In order to turn this dream into reality and for the sake of social development and overall wholesome development of students and youth, the

Indian government started a social service based project for students named the National Service Scheme (NSS) on 24th September, 1969, nearing the centenary of Gandhi's birth. The main goal of this project is to engage school, college and university going students to develop communications with working class people in villages and cities. Students must be aware of village and slum people's problems, physically and intellectually engage in solving these problems, and develop their own self-confidence, positive outlook, leadership qualities, and moral values in order to participate in social development and contribute to building the country's future (NSS Manual, 2006)².

According to Gandhiji, education is the process through which a person develops in body, mind and values; the free and fair application of this process inspires the individual to be a part of the social body, participate in social change and rebel against societal exploitations. It is also the individual's shield for self-defense. The influence of these ideas can be evidenced from Mahatma Gandhi's own life (Munshi Supriya)³. The uniqueness of Mahatma Gandhi's thought lies in his positive outlook towards an understanding of the environment and the animal world within his goal of attaining a non-violent and truthful society devoid of exploitation and oppression. Gandhiji said, "Take the village people and slum dwellers in your hands and give them the benefit of your knowledge, skill, insight, constructive work and practice spirit" (Joshi, 2002)⁴

As Gandhiji was dedicated to improving quality of life and making life meaningful, he naturally directed his thoughts and perspective towards the development of backward classes. He never wanted the wealthy classes to retain socio-political power through education while a large percentage of the population remains forever poor and riddled with superstitions. Therefore, he always talked about making education a practical tool for the development of the common people (Behera,2016)⁵. He was interested in the thematic and methodological improvement of the education system. As a result, education will not only be intelligible and accessible to all, but correct application of educational processes will also remove social, economic, racial and caste-based inequalities to create an equal society where people from all classes will be able to access the same system.

He termed this method of practical education as 'Basic Education', the real world application of which will lead society to his desired path of development. Gandhiji said that primary education must start with parents. From 1937 he consistently started writing about basic education in the journal *Harijan*. In 1940 in the journal *Harijan* Gandhiji said, "The objective of Basic Education is the physical, intellectual and moral development of the children through the medium of handicraft," (Probhu,1947)⁶. Parents are a child's first teachers. In order to impart education to people from all stratas of society he talked about free education from the ages of 7 to 14. After becoming a barrister in London and practicing law in South Africa for many years, he realized for a strong educational base the medium of education should always be one's mother language. He felt that education does not only mean gaining bookish knowledge; it is the medium through which an individual develops his physical and intellectual faculties as well as personality. He used to say, "Education is not literacy but development of mind, body and soul", (Saxena,2003)⁷. He felt the need for not just knowledge in theory, but first hand practical education in the development of personality, social responsibility and patriotism. (Shah,2017)⁸. In his idea of development through education Gandhiji talked about the 3 Hs- "H- Head= knowledge, H- Hand= skill, H-Heart=attitude " Education is a process of training of hand ,head and heart. It is all

round drawing the best in child's to man's body mind and soul" (Tandon,2016)⁹. He remarked that the time for acquiring this education is spread from birth till death. He wanted to work towards dismantling colonial power and rebuilding the country at the same time. (Roy,1984.)¹⁰. He assigned the responsibility of leading the country out of the clutches of colonial power and system of exploitation towards a brighter future, to various personages from different parts of the country. He found the conventional system of education repelling because it excluded a large percentage of people. He believed that so many people were denied education due to the lack of financial support. That is why he wanted the education system to be self sufficient. Students should be given access to ways of earning a livelihood along with education. Hence, he talked about the importance of vocational and technical education and insisted upon the importance of individual self reliance (Patgiri,2018)¹¹.

Gandhiji talked about 'Nai Talim' or Basic Education as the medium for creating a new society. He wanted to see education as work centered and productivity oriented. He guessed that in the conventional system there is bound to be an inevitable clash between those with the privilege of education and the illiterate. So instead of treating education only as a qualification for getting jobs, he tried to establish it as the tool for development and attainment of social power for the marginalized people (Das, 2016)¹². If this idea can be turned to reality it would signify the end of class struggle, exploitation, inequality, conflict, and power grabbing; reduce greed and dependence on profit and make possible an ideal non-violent society. This requires changing in the curriculum of the education system to include values, honesty, health, nutrition, collaboration, social work and the knowledge to attain self-reliance.

The purpose and ideal behind Gandhiji's educational policies is the need to unify all people of India belonging to different classes, castes, religions, languages and cultures. This requires a consciousness of national solidarity, secularism, rejection of untouchability and mutual tolerance and non-violence. The main tenets of Gandhiji's educational ideology includes- love, brotherhood among all communities, freedom, reducing

dependence on others for living i.e. self-reliance, love for non-violence, self-expression through various creative acts, satyagraha i.e. interest in truth and protest against injustice and untruth, cleanliness and environment consciousness, beautification, health and hygiene, lessons on agriculture, food processing, information technology, need based lessons on art and sports for the purpose of development. The goal would be development of health, discipline and individuality in students. Activities like music, dance, acting, debate, magazine publication, literary society, educational tours etc. will help develop aesthetic potential in students (Rao, 2012)¹³.

During the early phase of Independence Indian educationists welcome Gandhi's ideals. They undertook transformation, refinement and reconstruction of the education system. The colonial British government had rejected traditional Indian values and knowledge system and installed a worthless system of English education that produced clerks who facilitated the plundering India's wealth. In order to rectify this after the end of the British Empire, in 1948 the University Education Commission was established under the leadership of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. The purpose of this Commission was to substitute Macaulay's system of producing clerks with an education system that will develop the Indian youth into future responsible citizens. Student life creates the base for one's future. The University Education Commission entrusted upon the youth of the country the responsibility of social development and construction of India as an independent country, along with the responsibility of getting an education. This proposal had a twofold purpose- 1) students will gain an education through social reconstruction. 2) therefore an exemplary relationship will develop between students, teachers and the society (NSS Manual, 2006)¹⁴.

However, it took 20 more years to decide the ways in which students may participate in social reform work along with their studies. During this time none of the measures taken, like various meetings of the National Education Commission initiated by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, several discussions with the states, C. D. Deshmukh's committee report, had any useful results. At last in 1961 Professor K. G. Saiyidain was appointed by the

Indian government and he presented a report titled "National service for Youth". He proposed a system where alongside studies students can volunteer for a 12 month long social service programme (Saiyidain, 1961)¹⁵. The Kothari Education Commission (1964-66) also discussed the importance of a connection between education and society in the report "Education and Development" and observed, "The destiny of India is now being shaped in her class room,"¹⁶ In the modern world of information technology, classroom based curriculum cannot ensure holistic development of students because they are going to be the future ideal citizens, administrators and executives. After innumerable discussions between the Education Minister, University Vice-Chancellors, the University Grants Commission and student bodies for almost a decade, on 24th September 1969 nearing the 100th anniversary of Gandhiji's birthday, the then Education Minister V. K. R. V. Rao inaugurated the project of voluntary national services in 37 Universities all over the country with 40,000 student volunteers. Their motto was "Not me but you"-working selflessly for others. The National Service Scheme adopted Gandhiji's ideal of selfless service. The main concern of Mahatma Gandhi's educational and social philosophy was service and development of social awareness. Service gives birth to love for the motherland. Gandhiji said, "The end of all education should surely be service". Students develop social awareness and responsibility through involvement in acts of social service. According to Gandhiji education is completed through three main subjects- Naturalism, Idealism and Pragmatism (Rukmini & Vasimalairaja, 2020).¹⁷

There can be seen a tendency to disconnect from the larger society in today's youth and students. Gandhiji said that in order to keep the body and mind healthy one needs work that instills happiness (Joshi, 2002)¹⁸. The goals of the National Service Scheme were to connect students with mainstream society, engage them in services for the benefit of maximum number of people, and give them the opportunity to form ideal villages and society. Along with higher education, it will inculcate a mentality of social service. During their 10+2, college or university education, students should be inspired to take an active role in reformation of society and nation.

Students would engage with common people in physical and intellectual activities and exchange of thoughts and ideas. In order to create the ideal village, country or citizen, students must be familiar with the problems and demands of the people of villages, colonies and slums because about 85% of the Indian population resides in villages. So students must be involved in the everyday lives of people with the aim of reforming and developing villages, colonies and slums. Real life experiences will change their perspective about society and strengthen the bond between students and the common people.

Therefore it can be said the National Service Scheme envisioned by the Indian government for the development of youth, students and society has its foundation firmly set in Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of service. Gandhiji was quite anxious about the divide between knowledge and work, and mind and body in the British education system. On 19th December, 1927 he wrote in *Young India*, "I ask you (Young man) to go to the villages & bury yourself there not as their masters or benefactors but as their humble servant", (Probhu,1947)¹⁹ He strongly appealed to the Indian students to reject the materialistic education system and avaricious work culture and become self-reliant and self-confident. Gandhiji inspired the youth and students to come out of institutionalized education, connect with the common people, understand their problems and create solutions. He called forth the youth to always be ready and courageously face all the problems that might endanger the youth and student body. Gandhiji imagined education as a powerful weapon that draws its power from a strong value system and helps the students fight against communalism, fatalism, mysticism, superstitions and all kinds of social backwardness. Hence after Independence the Indian government established the National Service Scheme based on Gandhiji's ideals to inculcate social values, citizenship ideals and social responsibility in students; inspire students to make connections with the larger society; teach them teamwork and responsibility; develop in them leadership qualities and democratic ideals; teach practice of communal harmony and protection of national solidarity; develop in them strong personalities, social consciousness, discipline, individual and social health; teach them to respect

labour, achieve self-sufficiency and look at physical labour from creative perspectives. In this was the National Service Scheme is intrinsically linked to Gandhian philosophy in its goals and methods. (Panwar,Jain,Rathi(2016)²⁰

On 30th March, 1980 Gandhiji said in *Harijan* magazine, "The true Indian civilization is in the Indian village. The modern city civilization you find in Europe and America and in a handful of our cities which are the copies of the western cities and which are built for the foreigners and by him," (Probhu,1947)²¹ India lives in her 7 lakh villages. To develop India villages need to be developed first. Gandhiji's ideal self-sufficient village will have no dust, rubbish, dirt, illiteracy, untouchability and discrimination. The National Service Scheme is the only way to build that dream society. In 1936 Gandhiji wrote about social reformation in *Harijan*- I have believed and repeated times without number that India is to be found not in its few cities but in its 700000 villages,"(Joshi, 2002)²² In 1937 in the same magazine he described his ideal village - "An Ideal Indian village will so constructed as to lend itself to perfect sanitation. It will have Cottages with sufficient light and ventilation build of a material obtainable within a radius of five miles of it. The village lanes will be free of all avoidable dust. It will have well according to its nodes and accessible to all", (Probhu,1947)²³.

Currently all over the country 40 lakh NSS volunteers work in 50 thousand villages/colonies/slums on education, health, environment, different awareness programmes, response to natural disasters and many other developmental areas. The University Grants Commission expressed satisfaction after reviewing the work of NSS for almost the last 50 years in the development of students and society and declared "National Service scheme as an Extension under the third dimension of the university system" (UGC,1985)²⁴. It is also recommended the Vice-Chancellors of all Universities in the country to include NSS as an optional subject in the curriculum. The service oriented institution that was created following Mahatma Gandhi's ideology of social and educational development, has successfully progressed for 50 years. In a recent survey by the government it is found that - "National service

scheme has been a well introduced and ideologically motivated Scheme of the Government of India and that NSS is one of the greatest experiment in the field of youth work in the world”(TISS,2008-2009).²⁵ In conclusion it can be said that Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of social and educational development lies at the core of the aims and directives of the National Service Scheme; and the proud volunteers are forever working towards fulfilling them.

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