

Nai Talim and Education towards Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is central to 2020 Millennium goals of development. It is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs- World Commission on Environment and Development Report (1987). It is a process for meeting human development goals while maintaining the ability of natural systems to continue to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. The goals and targets of sustainable development envisage a society free of poverty and economic dependence on others, free of prejudice and irrational thinking, free of fear, discrimination, injustice, intolerance and violence and also free of insensitivity towards different forms of life and the environment. A society where the economic, academic, social and environmental needs of the present generations are so balanced that the needs of the future generations could be met with the same success. Now the question arises whether is our school education system capacitated to meet the demands of a sustainable society. Does it develop children as responsible and informed citizens with required knowledge, skills and values to participate effectively in sustainable development of the society? In this regard, Mahatma Gandhi's Nai Talim seems to be relevant and could be a successful alternative for education towards sustainable development. It stresses on indigenous scheme of education with due regard to the creative and constructive capacity of children and the needs of the locality. Hence, it is sought that Nai Talim system should be revisited and researched. The present paper describes how Nai Talim system could be a vital alternative for development of a just and sustainable society? It also highlights the possibilities of reframing the mainstream education around basic tenets of Nai Talim in terms of school curriculum, pedagogic and assessment practices, co-scholastic activities, school climate, school management and innovations.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Nai Talim

A self-reliant and rational society free of poverty and prejudices can be ensured if our education system can develop children with entrepreneurship skills along with rational academic inputs. These children enter the

society as productive man power who can successfully earn their livelihood and add progress to its economic development. Besides, they have the capacity to solve their life related and occupational problems with rationality. They can logically participate in eradication of various prejudices prevailing in the society. The society should have equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being are assured. The education should instill children with human values promoting secularism, tolerance, democracy, fellow-feeling, empathy, sacrifice for the

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society at large, non-violence and peace. It should help children understand the harmony among people and that between nature and people. It should develop affection towards the order, beauty and diversity of nature. It should help them understand the need of seamless blending among economic, intellectual, social and environmental needs of the people for sustainable development of the society with economic prosperity, intellectual persuasions, social justice and renewability of natural resource systems.

Thus, sustainable development of the society requires a kind of education which imparts liberal education, vocational education, science education, value education and environmental education in a correlated and blended manner. But, the existing mainstream education system encourages mainly rote memorization and brings in large number of so called intellectual individuals who merely have factual knowledge, inadequate skilled/productive man power and less sensitivity towards the environment as well as others' culture and livelihood.

On the other hand, Gandhi's Nai Talim system which is presently more or less neglected in the society could be revisited as a powerful alternative for education towards sustainable development. It stresses on indigenous scheme of education with due regard to the creative and constructive capacity of children and the needs of the locality. He thought of an education system which could integrate the intellectual work with physical labour for development of a society with a new order of equality of academic and livelihood opportunities at all its strata, self-reliance, co-operation among people, respect of others' culture and sensitivity towards the environment. He was of the view point that learning inputs should be spread over the entire surrounding environment and the society which can easily be harnessed. Knowledge and skills should be constructed in practical affairs of life. Hence, the entire education should be imparted through the medium of a productive craft/vocation correlated with appropriate scientific concepts and processes, social science education, liberal education, human values and environment education. This makes learning more concrete, insightful and applicable. Such education enables the individuals to solve the problems of their living and also develop the qualities of educated

and productive citizenship. The education rooted in the culture and life of the soil and having strong connection to the environment removes class and caste distinction, brings social solidarity and national integration and inculcates social, moral and aesthetic values in children.

Realizing the importance and relevance of basic tenets of Nai Talim in the present context of education, Anand Niketan, Nai Talim School has been re-started in July, 2005 at Sevagram, Wardha. Anand Niketan aims towards holistic development of a child i.e., head (the development of intellect), heart (development of sensitivity and respect for others' culture and occupations, different forms of life and the environment) and hand (development of skills for vocational/craft work). It believes in a transformative role of education - transformation towards a just and sustainable world. It also aims at rational, self-reliant/sustained, affective and value-based citizenship. It provides seamless blending among liberal education, science education, social science education, vocational/ craft skill education, value education and environment education. It uses the real world as the classroom and emphasizes on "Learning by doing" and "learning through life". At later stages "learning by doing" is linked with "learning through earning".

Thus, re-considering Gandhi's idea of Nai Talim could be a vital solution for education towards sustainable development and the main stream education should be reframed around the basic tenets of Nai Talim.

Nai Talim and Education towards Sustainable Development

The Education Commission (1964-66) fully recognised the importance of basic education (Nai Talim) and incorporated in its recommendations many of the fundamental features of basic education like work experience, community living, social service, integration of academic knowledge with experience, vocationalisation of education, education for moral and spiritual values. Iswarbhai Patel Committee (1977) had coined a new terminology as Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW), which demarcated a distinct curricular area and opined that education should be work-centered and socially useful and productive work must be given

a central place in the curriculum at all stages of school education and all academic subjects should be related to it. All these changing concepts originated from Gandhi's Basic Education. The UNESCO Commission on Education in its report known as "Learning to be" has adopted the term "Basic Education" for primary education and emphasised that "education must cease being confined within school house walls, and many forms of social and economic activity must be used for educational purposes". National Policy on Education (1992) and National Focus Group on Work and Education (2007) also envisaged the importance of vocationalisation of education and connect the academic inputs of school education with work experience to make it socially and economically contributing.

Despite of recommendations of various commissions, as mentioned above, Nai Talim could not get real appreciation to become an integral part of mainstream education till now due to its inadequate emphasis on academic/liberal education, less support in terms of money and man power from government and other agencies unlike main stream education and being acknowledged as the education of rural, socio-economically deprived and intellectually less potent group of people. Thus, its status in modern India has remained as an experimental/heritage education system running side by side to the mainstream education. In addition, recommendations of different committees on school education relevant to Nai Talim could not adequately be practised in the main stream education and thus, existed as an insignificant and neglected aspect of the school curriculum.

In the present scenario of demand of education for sustainable development where the mainstream education is found to be insufficient, Gandhi's idea of Nai Talim and the relevant recommendations of different committees on school education could be reviewed. Main stream education system should be reframed around the goals of sustainable development giving integral space to elements of Nai Talim into its curriculum and functioning. The government with collaboration of private and community organisations should work towards propagation of Nai Talim

Schools for reaching the universal goals of sustainable development.

Since it seems that incorporation of Gandhi's idea of Nai Talim with main stream education could be a significant step towards sustainable development, the idea of Nai Talim and the practices of existing Nai-Talim Schools in India should be extensively reviewed ,which could provide enlightened guidelines for reforming the mainstream education for sustainable development.

Reframing the Mainstream Education with Basic Tenets of Nai Talim towards Sustainable Development

- ❑ In order to reframe the mainstream education with basic tenets of Nai Talim the following questions should be addressed beforehand:
- ❑ How far Gandhi's idea of Nai Talim and its practices are compatible with the goals and targets of sustainable development?
- ❑ How far the mainstream education system is flexible to incorporate elements of Nai Talim into its own components?
- ❑ How can the mainstream education system be molded for Nai Talim towards sustainable development?

Taking into consideration the contemporary demands of Indian society particularly rural society for making it educated and self-reliant, the system of Nai Talim had been founded. In its original structure it had been organised around the handicraft with required academic inputs in its mantle. Over the time, it has, however, been reduced to the status of Talim of vocational skills and a Talim for poor and rural people due to inadequate implementation of its original scheme and now it is existing as an isolated system of education much distant from the mainstream society. In the present context of education for sustainable development, an urgent requirement of an education system like Nai Talim is strongly being felt. In this regard, Nai Talim system should be reviewed and restructured where the education of craft should include various occupations which are in demands in the locality where the school is situated. School should be given autonomy to choose and exercise the vocational skills in accordance with

the demands from its own locality. Sufficient academic inputs should be taught as far as possible in relation to the vocational skills and fulfilling minimum academic requirements of various subjects at par other schools of the State and Central Board of School Education. An integrated model of curriculum, where the various subjects are interwoven through handicraft or other vocational skills and there is sufficient scope of value, life-skill and environmental education through various subjects particularly craft should be outlined. This may be helpful for children develop themselves as individuals who can take sincere participation for sustainable development of the society. Thus, Nai Talim would actually rise to the status of Nai Talim towards sustainable development.

On the other hand, the existing mainstream education system may reform itself incorporating the basic tenets of the revived Nai Talim for sustainable development. Vocational skills should be incorporated with academic inputs of various subjects wherever possible. Development of models, charts, paintings, improvised apparatus for demonstrations in science, social science and other subjects should be given special emphasis. Among co-scholastic activities vocational skills should be given central importance. Value, life-skill and environment education should be integral part of these activities. Learners' culture, their livelihood, folk pedagogy, improvised teaching-learning materials, learning in the nature's lap like school garden, school park, nearby natural sites, group learning, service learning strategies should be essential part of pedagogic practices.

Assessment should be continuous and comprehensive. Equal weightage should be given for assessment of affective domain of learning and the co-scholastic activities. Alternative assessment techniques and value judgment should be integral part of the assessment system. 'Learning Community' involving both on-campus and off-campus learning should be the essential part of school climate and resources like school garden, school park, school pool, nearby natural resources and social institutions should be capitalized for learning. A participatory school management system, where the teachers, students, parents and the other community

members exercise reasonable rights and responsibility in decision making and its execution, must be pursued. A symbiotic relation should essentially be established between community and the school where the school may utilize community resources for various purposes and in return community gets benefitted from the service learning experiences of the students and teachers of the school. This will lead to development of a just and sustainable society.

Conclusion

The present paper disseminates certain fundamental ideas about the links between Gandhi's idea of Nai Talim and Education for sustainable development. It strengthens and gives a new status to Gandhi's idea of Nai Talim in the current context of education for sustainable development. It also provides guidelines to develop the conceptual framework of the school practices for mainstream education integrated with basic elements of Nai Talim towards sustainable development. It also guides different educational agencies to design curriculum and the learning materials including the text books with inputs of Nai Talim for sustainable development.

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