

Original Article

Mahatma Gandhi's Vision on Education

Dr. R. M. Sangashetti

Department of History, Sangameshwar College Solapur

Manuscript ID:

Abstract

JRD -2026-180316

ISSN: 2230-9578

Volume 18

Issue 3(B)

Pp. 68-69

March - 2026

Submitted: 18 Feb. 2026

Revised: 28 Feb. 2026

Accepted: 19 Mar. 2026

Published: 31 Mar 2026

Mahatma Gandhi envisioned education as a holistic process that develops the body, mind, and spirit of an individual. His philosophy of education, popularly known as Nai Talim or Basic Education, emphasized learning through productive work, moral values, self-reliance, and character formation. Gandhi believed that true education should be rooted in Indian culture and should prepare individuals for social responsibility and national development. He advocated craft-centered education where students learn.

Practical skills alongside intellectual growth, thereby bridging the gap between manual and mental labor. According to Gandhi, education should promote truth, non-violence, dignity of labor, and communal harmony. His vision aimed at creating an egalitarian society based on ethical values and sustainable living. Gandhi's educational ideas continue to remain relevant in contemporary times, especially in discussions on value-based education, vocational training, and experiential learning.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Nai Talim, Basic Education, Holistic Development, Craft-centered Learning, Self-reliance, Value-based Education, Experiential Learning, Moral Education, Dignity of Labor

Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi's values and his vision of what constituted a truly civilized and free India, it was not surprising that he developed firm views on education. Education not only moulds the new generation, but reflects a society's fundamental assumptions about itself and the individuals which compose it. His experience in South Africa not only changed his outlook on politics but also helped him to see the role education played in that struggle. He was aware that he had been a beneficiary of Western education and for a number of years while he was in South Africa he still tried to persuade Indians to take advantage of it. However, it was not until the early years of this century, when he was in his middle thirties, that he became so opposed to English education that he could write about the rottenness of this education and that to give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them.. That, by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation. He was enraged that he had to speak of Home Rule or Independence in what was clearly a foreign tongue, that he could not practice in court in his mother tongue, that all official documents were in English as were all the best newspapers and that education was carried out in English for the chosen few. He did not blame the colonial Powers for this. He saw that it was quite logical that they would want elite of native Indians stop become like their rulers in both manners and values. In this way, the Empire could be consolidated. Gandhi blamed his fellow Indians for accepting the situation. Later in his life he was to declare that: "Real freedom will come only when we free ourselves of the domination of Western education, Western culture and Western way of living which have been ingrained in us. Culture would mean real freedom for us". Emancipation from this as we have seen, Gandhi had not only reject4ed colonialEducation but also put forward a radical alternative. So what was this alternative? What was so radical about it? Within this context of the need for a machine less society, Gandhi developed his ideas on education. The core of his proposal was the introduction of productive handicrafts in the school curriculum. The idea was not simply to introduce handicrafts as a compulsory school subject, but to make the learning of a craft the centrepiece of the entire teaching programme.



Quick Response Code:



Website:

<https://jrdrvb.org/>

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21154166



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Address for correspondence:

R. M. Sangashetti Department of History, Sangameshwar College Solapur

How to cite this article:

Sangashetti, R. M. (2026). Mahatma Gandhi's Vision on Education. *Journal of Research and Development*, 18(3(B)), 68–69. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21154166>

Many of them belonged to the category of untouchables. India's own tradition of education as well as the Colonial education system had emphasized skills such as literacy and acquisition of knowledge of which the upper castes had a monopoly. Gandhi's proposal intended to stand the education system on its head. The social philosophy and the curriculum of what he called 'basic education' thus favoured the child belonging to the lowest stratum of society. In such a way it implied a programme of social transformation. It sought to alter the symbolic meaning of education and to change the established structure of opportunities for education. Why Gandhi proposed the introduction of productive handicrafts into the school system was not really as outrageous as may appear. What he really wanted was for the schools to be self-supporting, as far as possible. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, a poor society such as India simply could not afford to provide education for all children unless the schools could generate resources from within. Secondly, the more financially independent the schools were, the more politically independent they could be. What Gandhi wanted to avoid was dependence on the state which he felt would mean interference from the centre. Above all else, Gandhi valued self-sufficiency and autonomy. These were vital for his vision of an independent India made up of autonomous village communities to survive, it was the combination of swaraj and swadeshi related to the education system. A state system of education within an independent India would have been a complete contradiction as far as Gandhi was concerned. He was also of the opinion that manual work should not be seen as something inferior to mental work. He felt that the work of the Craftsman or labourer should be the ideal model for the good life. Schools which were based around productive work where that work was for the benefit of all were, therefore, carrying out education of the whole person—mind, body and spirit. The right to autonomy that Gandhi's educational plan assigns to the teacher in the context of the school's daily curriculum is consistent with the libertarian principles that he shared with Tolstoy. Gandhi wanted to free the Indian teacher from interference from outside, particularly government or state bureaucracy. Under colonial rule, the teacher had a prescribed job to do that was based on what the authorities wanted the children to learn. Textbooks were mandatory so that Gandhi found that

"The living word of the teacher has very little value. A teacher who teaches from textbooks does not impart originality to his pupils". Gandhi's plan, on the other hand, implied the end of the teacher's subservience to the prescribed textbook and the curriculum. It presented a concept of learning that simply could not be fully implemented with the help of textbooks. Of equal, if not more importance, was the freedom it gave the teacher in matters of curriculum. It denied the state the power to decide that teachers taught and what they did in the classroom. It gave autonomy to the teacher but it was, above all, a libertarian approach to schooling that transferred power from the state to the village. For informal educators, we can draw out a number of useful pointers. First, Gandhi's insistence on autonomy and self-regulation is reflected in the ethos of informal education. Gandhi's conception of basic education was concerned with learning that was generated within everyday life which is the basis on which informal educators work. It was also an education focused on the individual but reliant on cooperation between individuals. There is also a familiar picture of the relationships between educators and students. Mahatma Gandhi had, earlier in his career, stated, like Ruskin, that "Speed is not always progress, and according to that idea he had resolutely set his face against accepting all type of education as of equal importance. So, education, according to Mahatma Gandhi, was not exactly a pursuit of freedom of expression, but a modified method to specifically suit the goal of nation building of the new India. He was thinking of a revolutionary type of education for up-liftment of the vast rural India as a prime goal, and due to his insistence National Educational Conference was held at Wardha in as early as 1937 to set the ball rolling. A Committee of distinguished educationists, headed by Dr. Zakir Hossain, was entrusted with planning a syllabus was published in 1938. In 1938 the Indian National Congress at its 51st session at Haripura accepted, certainly under guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, the principle of Basic National Education, and authorized the formation of an All India Board to work out a practical implementable program. National Attitude on Mahatma Gandhi's Principle on Basic

Education: - First of all, the sudden death of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 definitely put his idea on basic education to a halt. There were of course quite a few critics of Mahatma Gandhi's idea of a utilitarian type of basic education, but nevertheless it was accepted by the Congress as a national policy to be implemented in post-independence India and a great deal of interest was shown to put the revolutionary idea at work. But in reality, after Mahatma Gandhi's demise, the whole idea was quietly buried, never to be reopened at any stage in post independent India till date. Whether it was buried because the later generation didn't like the idea, or it was buried for simply logistic problems, or whether the Government of India at that point of time did not have the will and power to dismantle the running education system inherited from the colonial rulers and initiate the gigantic change, can be a matter of debate. But in reality a great vision was left to rot rather unceremoniously. In effect India could not establish an Indian concept of education, as was the dream of Mahatma Gandhi.