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# Towards New Education: An analysis of Gandhian Philosophy on Education

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## ABSTRACT

*Gandhian philosophy on education in India forms an essential aspect of his teachings, yet the same is under-discussed and analysed. This research paper attempts to re-discover the essence of Gandhian philosophy on education and its similarity with National Education Policy 2020. The article briefly discusses Gandhiji's views on prospects of improvement at the school and college level while considering the responsibilities of the teachers, students, and parents. It further discusses his innovative insights on teaching discrimination (while learning) to students, the concept of National school and national teacher, equalisation of handicraft making to any scientific subject, the significance of character building, emphasis on cultural roots of India, primary teaching without books, etc. The paper has artificially created 27 headings to analyse his educational philosophy, followed by a conclusion discussing the imbibition of some of his insightful teachings in the National Education Policy of India, 2020.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This research paper briefly discusses the Gandhian view of education at school and college level, role and responsibilities of teachers, student's duties, need for Hindi as the national language, English as only a medium of transaction and diplomacy, women education, Harijan upliftment through education and self-reliance principle to be followed in the schools. The views above have been collected through his various reported speeches at Mahasabhas, lectures at sessions, his autobiography and his book on education named "*Towards a new education*". The following bifurcation into sub-sections has been made for the convenience of the reader and is not indicative of any breakage in the thought:

**1. Literary Training:** Mahatma Gandhi explicated that literary training is independent of the character-building characteristic of education and only with such activity, a person cannot attain moral heights and therefore education should be perceived as multidimensional<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, "Towards new Education," October 1953, Navajivan Mudranalaya, Ahemadabad, Navajivan Trust Publishers, available at [https://www.mk gandhi.org/towrds\\_edu/towrds\\_edu.htm](https://www.mk gandhi.org/towrds_edu/towrds_edu.htm) (pdf).

should not be focused only on literacy training he moreover criticises the government school as against the National School inside that the government schools have already on mad us and render helpless they have filled with this content as they provide no remedy against the military training and their pedagogy is solely focused on the literacy increment of an individual rather than character-building however the character is of utmost virtue, and therefore education bereft of character building attitude is of no value. By only literacy training, one can become a clerk or interpreter rather than an educated citizen. An educated citizen is well informed of its duties and rights; one has to teach character-building characteristics into the official Educational policy of India.<sup>3</sup>

**2. Higher Education:** Mahatma Gandhi was discontented with the higher education scenario of the country and said that that education in Baroda or any other city of our country is almost a slavish imitation of that of British Education, however, he emphasises the fact that the education should have a scope of inculcating indigenous taste, evident through the circumstances and socio-political situation of a country and therefore the policy should not be a mere imitation emanating the characteristics and pedagogy of a different country, instead it should be practically sensed. He also criticised English education and said that Britishers want to impose English education in India before even analysing and drafting policies based on the circumstances, culture and history of education in India, which will lead to a diminution of our rich cultural heritage as westernisation of education with lead to the formulation of clerks and interpreters who have a sense of English as per the west rather than delivering equity, justice and quality as per the demands of the country and respecting the diversities of the nation.<sup>4</sup>

**3. Education For Manufacturing Clerks:** Gandhiji was vehemently opposed to the westernisation of Indian education. He was sometimes seen criticising poet (R. N. Tagore) for his conceptual understanding and ardent support of internationalism. He said that such an education, devoid of indigenous hue, will lead to a cadet of job seekers and government employees or clerks in commercial offices. He said that the rulers could not impose their culture on us until we accept to abide by it. No amount of force and compulsion can bring us to the acceptance of foreign culture, and culture is for people's satisfaction; it brings the diversities closer enough for the origin of a sense of brotherhood and humility. English culture was never an indigenous set of customs; thus, the people cannot inculcate it to the extent of being called

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Young India, 1-6-1921.

<sup>4</sup> Supra note 2, Hind Swaraj (1908), Ch. XVIII.

“Indian”. Therefore, people should oppose the imposition of Anglicised culture and deny the acceptance of the same.<sup>5</sup>

**4. English Education:** Gandhiji called “*the process of displacing the vernacular has been one of the saddest chapters in the British connection*”.<sup>6</sup> He further gives the example of Indian luminaries like- Ram Mohan Roy and Lokamanya Tilak, who would have been greater reformers and more excellent scholars, if they had not started with the handicap of having to think in English and transmit their thoughts chiefly in English.<sup>7</sup> He says that no country in the world has reached its desired potential and progress by imitating culture, education, trends. Moreover, he explicitly stated that “*The English language is not necessary for imbibing ideas of liberty and developing accuracy of thought. The system of education is its most defective part. It was conceived and born in error, for the English rulers believed the indigenous system to be worse than useless. It has been nurtured in sin, for the tendency has been to dwarf the Indian body, mind and soul*”.<sup>8</sup> Thus, he believed that the tendency and inclination of Indians towards the English would lead to establishing an ecology without suitable and environment adapted beings. English education at the cost of Indian diverse culture will lead to unipolarisation of the minds of people, who will be goal-oriented with severing ties from the means (i.e. will be focused on attaining goals without laying proper recourse and attention to the means that is based on natural law and kindness).

To emphasise the same, he quoted, “the world is full of many a gem of priceless beauty, but then these gems are not all of English setting. Other languages can well boast of productions of similar excellence; all these should be made available for our common people, and that can only be done if our own learned men will undertake to translate them for us in our own languages”.<sup>9</sup> Thus, he laid emphasis on learning Indian languages that could help in translating the abandoned knowledge of our rich scriptures and books.

**5. Need for Experiments in Education-** Gandhiji said, “*The field of education which holds the seeds of the future of the children of the soil requires absolute sincerity, fearlessness in the pursuit of truth and boldest experiments*”.<sup>10</sup> He wanted the educational institutions to emphasise the need to nurture the generations as they will represent India yet to be seen.

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<sup>5</sup> “Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi “, pp. 312,313 ; 27-4-15.

<sup>6</sup> Young India, 27-4-’21.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Supra note 2.

<sup>9</sup> Supra note 2, pp. 426-28 ; 20-2-1918.

<sup>10</sup> Young India, 30-9-1926.

**6. Character Building:** He regarded character building as the utmost virtue “*Sheelam Param Bhushanam*”~ inspired by the same, the motto of Civil servants training centre at Mussoorie (LBSNAA) depicts the same spirit.<sup>11</sup> Mahatma regarded the character as the building block of any learning. Character helps in imbibing the right discipline and bend of mind needed for any service. He says that building character is the largest responsibility of teachers as other superficial and literal knowledge can be attained under the influence of peer group assistance. However, he defends himself against the criticism later and says that literacy training is essential but is incomplete without character building.<sup>12</sup> He also opines that character-building cannot be imparted through books as the subject itself is living, and thus, a living touch of a teacher remains a pre-requisite.<sup>13</sup>

**7. Freedom but under Discipline-** Gandhiji emphasised freedom of body, mind and soul, but the same cannot be provided at the cost of discipline. He requests the public to cease to be imitators of the western definition of freedom, which in his purview is absolute and devoid of discipline. He said that students must have innovation, initiative, free thoughts, new streams of questions and perspective, but the same should be disciplined on the universal principles of humility and kindness.<sup>14</sup>

**8. National Schools:** Gandhiji criticised the government school where “ *Out of 30,000 boys and girls hardly one thousand are spinning on 100 charkhas at the rate of ½ an hour per day. Hundreds of charkhas are lying idle and neglected*” and the ‘untouchables’ (Harijans) were very few in number along with Mussalman attendance being poor. He said that National schools should be established which would imbibe the cultural, caste-based, race-based diversity of the country; while being stiff in his proposition, he said, “*Parents who did not like their children to learn spinning or to mix with ‘untouchable’ children might if they chose to withdraw them*”.<sup>15</sup> He moreover said that the schools that function at the exclusion of minority sections should be closed down as they don’t fulfil the true essence of the school. He laid emphasis on a charkha (or yarn spinning) as the same would make students self-sufficient and disciplines with a feeling of serving the nation at its core. Furthermore, the inclusion of

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<sup>11</sup> “Modi Invokes ‘Sheelam Param Bhushanam’ on Civil Services Day, Wants an Energetic Team” , The New Indian Express, available at <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2015/apr/21/Modi-Invokes-Sheelam-Param-Bhushanam-on-Civil-Services-Day-Wants-an-Energetic-Team-745414.html> (Last accessed October 9, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Supra note 2.

<sup>13</sup> Young India, 1-9-"21.

<sup>14</sup> Young India, 3-6"2.

<sup>15</sup> Supra note 2.

untouchables in the classroom will gradually weaken the class divide existing among castes and will build a strong base of inclusive India.

**9. National Teacher-** As per Gandhi Ji- a national teacher must become a Swaraj missionary within his own sphere. The national teacher must know the history of their students so as to better understand their circumstances and situation. The teacher should be open, humble and towards all the students so as to mitigate the existing discrimination. He also emphasised the need to train all the students in Spinning so that they become self-reliant and have a fervor of nationalism and service of the people. He said that “we must insist upon the boys and girls playing the charkha for at least half an hour daily. It is an education of no mean sort for thirty thousand boys and girls and eight hundred teachers to be spinning, i.e., I was labouring for the country for half an hour every day. It is a daily practical lesson in patriotism, useful toil and giving. And to the nation, it means a gift of 1875 maunds of yarn per month. It will supply at least one dhoti each to 5,000 men.”<sup>16</sup>

**10. Spinning and the Sciences-** He regarded spinning and weaving as the necessary part of any national education system. He further quotes an example to substantiate his point and aid “*One of our students has gone to jail in Bardoli, and many more will go. They are the pride of the Vidyapith*”.<sup>17</sup> He asked if the students of government school dare to lay their life and go to jail for justice, if the answer is negative that there is no use of literary training, cramming facts and confining the critical applicability of the mind in times of national need. He said that “*It is not by making our brains a storehouse for cramming facts that our understanding is opened. An intelligent approach to industrial training is often a more valuable aid to the intellect than an indifferent reading of literature*”.<sup>18</sup> Thus, education should encompass the sphere of character building, humility, literary training, physical building, discipline and devotion towards the nation.

**11. New Education to be Rooted in the Culture and Life of the People-** He wanted the education in National schools to be associated with the surroundings and be practically touched by the teachers.<sup>19</sup> A better understanding of the social milieu will lead to applicable studies and enhance critical thinking in the youth. An education system rooted in the culture of the surrounding will flourish and lead to sustainable and desirable progress as per the expectations of the population.

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<sup>16</sup> Young India, 7-8-"24.

<sup>17</sup> Young India, 1-9-"21.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Harijan, 23-5-1936.

**12. Universalisation of Education-** Gandhiji shares Marxist interpretation in this regard and state that *“nothing short of a revolution can put education within reach of every child of school-going age”*<sup>20</sup> - herein he meant a revolution against internal inertia, the revolution of the hopes against negative opinions and a revolution against unprogressive forces that are ready to surrender the ever-widening ocean of knowledge that India is.

**13. Purity of Heart is Indispensable-** Mahatma said that *“purity of personal life is the one indispensable condition for building a sound education. In our languages, there is a beautiful word, equivalent to the word student, that is, brahmachari. It means searcher after God, one who conducts himself to bring himself nearest to God in the least possible time”*.<sup>21</sup> Thus, he means that the life of student should be simple, *“simple living and high thinking”*. A disciplined student with virtuous character will definitely serve the nation with sincerity; It is the firm determination and proactive actions to serve the country that will ultimately lead India to a higher footing. The future of India ultimately rests in the hands of its youth, whose will, discipline, devotion, and perseverance are built in the classrooms by national teachers. The end of all knowledge must be building up of character.

**14. Service as Part of Education-** Mahatma believed service to the nation was an inalienable part of the education system. Moreover, he says that acts of service at the expense of literary learning is more fruitful as service along with learning of culture, character building, arithmetic, literature, and vocational training is the permanent form of education.<sup>22</sup> *“The end of all education should surely be service, and if a student gets an opportunity of rendering service even whilst he is studying, he should consider it as a rare opportunity and treat it not really as a suspension of his education but rather its complement”*.<sup>23</sup> He believed that there exists no book that can teach humanity; thus, practical applicability of the knowledge in the form of service to the people will help in bringing out the best in the person.

**15. Students should Learn to Discriminate while Learning-** Mahatma emphasises that pupils should know to discriminate between what should be received and what is rejected. *“It is the duty of the teacher to teach his pupils discrimination. If we go on taking in indiscriminately, we would be no better than machines”*.<sup>24</sup> Thus, students should develop a critical faculty with the assistance of teachers to filter out unnecessary and irrelevant

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<sup>20</sup> Young India, 11-7-1929.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Harijan, 30-3-"34.

<sup>23</sup> Young India, 13-10-"27.

<sup>24</sup> Young India, 29-1-"25.

information and imbibe only what is appropriate. This would eventually help when one has to distinguish truth from untruth and the right path from the superficially enticing path.

**16. Role of Text-Books-** Mahatma was an ardent opponent of burdening the students with textbooks. A textbook may open up new avenues for the students but, at the same time, can expose them to radically unsuitable perspectives that can devastate the ability to think and act righteously. He moreover opined that textbooks should be created for the teachers and not students. The preliminary instructions should be vocally provided by the teachers; by doing so, a seven-year child eager to know the story of Ramayan will not have to wait until they are able to read and write properly.<sup>25</sup> He also argues that students who were inherently discriminated against based on caste, who are now taking their first steps towards formal education, will be deterred if textbooks are to be read by students. They do not carry any prior knowledge of reading and understanding textbooks. Thus the preliminary education and teachings should be done by teachers locally.

**17. To Teach Self-Reliance and Respect for Manual Labour** – Gandhi Ji treated the training of every youth in agriculture and hand-weaving as a necessary part of the curriculum. Knowledge of the laws of hygiene and sanitation, as well as the art of rearing children, should also form a necessary part of the Gurukula students. This would help in realising the needs of different occupations in the society and will assist in attaching similar dignity to all types of labour, be it physical or mental. The same can be evidently testified by his statement, “*I consider that a barber's profession is just as good as the profession of medicine*”.<sup>26</sup>

**18. The Duty of Spinning-** Mahatma wanted an education system that makes students self-reliant, so in his opinion, spinning must be a compulsory subject. “*Just as we cannot live without breathing and without eating, so is it impossible for us to attain economic independence and banish pauperism from this ancient land without reviving and without reviving home-spinning*”.<sup>27</sup> Thus, education should be self-supporting, train the bodies of the children as well as their minds, and pave the way for a self-reliant and independent country.

**19. To Promote All-Round Development-** Gandhi believed in Integrated Education and stated, “*I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, e.g. hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc.*”. By the afore quoted statement, Gandhi meant that mental health is as important as physical health. The development of bodily characteristics is complimentary to mental development. Thus, the development of

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<sup>25</sup> Young India, 16-9-1926.

<sup>26</sup> Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, pp. 388, 389 ; 16-2-"16.

<sup>27</sup> Young India, 15-6-1921.



the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul. Moreover, spiritual faculties of a child should also be developed while developing him/her physically. This approach can help in building a physically fit, spiritually active and mentally capable citizenry of the country.

**20. National School to be Craft-Centered-** Gandhiji believed that the teaching of village handicrafts was the pivot and centre of education. He also believed that the method of training the mind through village handicrafts from the very beginning as the central fact would promote the real, disciplined development of the mind resulting in conservation of the intellectual energy and indirectly also the spiritual.<sup>28</sup>

**21. Religious Education-** In his words, *“The Mullas, the Dasturs and the Brahmins hold the key in their hands, but if they do not have the good sense, the energy that we have derived from English education will have to be devoted to religious education”*.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, he clarified that religion means truth which includes ahimsa, being the necessary and indispensable means for its discovery of truth. Moreover, he said that the teachers should rigorously practice these virtues in their own life and motivate and inspire students to do the same. He also emphasised the need of including a curriculum of religious instruction to study the tenets of faiths other than one's own. This would help the students to cultivate the habit of understanding and appreciating the doctrines of various great religions of the world in a spirit of reverence and broad-minded tolerance.<sup>30</sup>

**22. Usage of Foreign Medium in Dispensing Knowledge:** As per Mahatma, *“The foreign medium has caused brain fag, put an undue strain upon nerves of our children, made them crammers and imitators, unfitted them for original work and thought, and disabled them for filtering their learning to the family or the masses”*.<sup>31</sup> Gandhiji believed that over-emphasis on the English language is making the youth foreign in their own homeland, devoid of aesthetic values and morals of ancient, heritage-rich India. The foreign medium has prevented the growth of our vernaculars and as the language of communication is the reflection of character, thus India should have a vibrant hue of our rich culture.<sup>32</sup>

**23. Technical Education through the Mother Tongue-** Gandhiji shared his experience of Champaran, where the village folks could fully express themselves with ease and without the help of a single foreign expression or idiom. As an illustration of their resourcefulness, he

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<sup>28</sup> Harijan, 5-6-'37.

<sup>29</sup> Hind Swaraj (1908), p. 107.

<sup>30</sup> Young India, 6-12-'28.

<sup>31</sup> Young India, 1-9-1921.

<sup>32</sup> Young India, 5-7-'28.

mentioned the word 'have gadi', which they had coined to denote a motor car.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the fallacious argument of some Indian scholars was evidently found baseless by Gandhiji, and he asked the citizenry to pro-actively utilise their knowledge of the vernacular language.

**24. The English Language cannot be Treated as National Language:** To explain the same, Gandhiji devised a test, as follows:

- (1) For the official class, it should be easy to learn.
- (2) The religious, commercial and political activity throughout India should be possible in that language.
- (3) It should be the speech of the majority of the inhabitants of India.
- (4) For the whole of the country, it should be easy to learn.
- (5) In considering the question, weight ought not to be put upon Momentary of short-lived conditions.<sup>34</sup>

As per his test, the English language does not fulfil any of the conditions above named. He moreover says that English is a language of international commerce, and it is the language of diplomacy. Thus, as per Gandhiji, English does not possess the force of disregarding the vernacular inheritance of our country or disregard Hindi (used by Mohammedans and Hindus of North India) as the national language.

**25. Adult Education-** Gandhiji emphasised an intensive rotational programme of driving out ignorance through carefully selected teachers with an equally carefully selected syllabus for the Adult population.<sup>35</sup> He considered "*Mass illiteracy is India's sin and shame and must be liquidated*"<sup>36</sup>, along with useful, practical knowledge of the society.

**26. Illiteracy Among Women-** Gandhiji said that the cause of illiteracy in women is not unwillingness but forced inertia of the society, inferiority associated with immemorial tradition, and unjustly branding women. He said that "Man has converted her into a domestic drudge and an instrument of his pleasure, instead of regarding her as his helpmate and 'better half!'"<sup>37</sup> ***The result is a semi-paralysis of our society.***<sup>38</sup> Thus, as per Gandhiji, women should be rightly treated as the mother of the human race and at par with men, and if by strength is means moral power, then the woman is already superior to man.

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<sup>33</sup> Harijan, 18-8-46.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Harijan, 5-6-1937.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Harijan, 18-2-1939.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

**27. Harijan Education-** Gandhiji laid extra emphasis on the preliminary training of Harijans under the aegis of Harijan Sevak Sanghas<sup>39</sup> scattered throughout India. He moreover said that the preliminary training is the bridging course before getting inducted into a national school. Thus, initial training should consist of teaching manners, good speech and good conduct.

Therefore, all the aforementioned points will hold relevance in the Indian context until we have caste, gender, sex, complexion and birth based inequalities in our society. Strict implementation and inclusion of the above recommendation of Mahatma Gandhi will help in building “Ram Rajya” as envisioned by Mahatma, where Ram stands for Justice, parity, equality, peace and brotherhood in the morality based State.

In conclusion, to overhaul the education system, India has established three national educational policies. The success of education initiatives is determined by the stakeholders involved. The government has taken numerous steps under the privileges of these policies, such as SSA, RMSA (Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan), RUSA(Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan), and so on. Despite these measures and changes, we have not made a significant difference. In its draught, the national education policy recommends re-organising primary education, but it fails to address the question of students' learning abilities. According to the Pratham-Annual Status of Education survey from 2018, 73 per cent of students in class 8 cannot read books above the second-grade level, and only 44 per cent can do simple arithmetic. The shortage of qualified teachers and the lack of teachers in schools are the leading causes in govt. Schools most of the students do not have the minimum required facilities to ensure quality education. The schools lack chairs, tables and sanitary facilities, especially for girls. In secondary education, the government has focused on skill education. Such schooling will cater to blue-collar work only and continue to deepen inequalities since these are at the bottom of the workplace ladder. The same was realised decades ago by Mahatma Gandhi, and he explicitly stated the repercussion of having such a system as – restriction of social mobility and limitation on intrinsic value and potential of students.

With increasing rural-urban divide, sanscritization, westernisation, inclination towards private education, decreasing standards of government schools, and increasing neglect of primary education at state levels in government schools has led to the demand for better standards, and thus the proliferation of private players and the lack of a fee cap can lead to education being inaccessible to all sections of society, especially the poor and marginalised. Poor states face

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<sup>39</sup> Supra note 2.

financial constraints, and they lack the necessary infrastructure to support digital education. During inclement weather, poor internet speed and accessibility are big issues in hilly areas. Moreover, given the immediate unplanned shift to virtual classrooms has furthered the economic, technological and social divide among students and has exposed the system to several practical difficulties. The technical know-how barrier and unfulfilled infrastructural demands lead to increasing inequality and degradation of learning outcomes among students of government schools.

The latest pan India measure taken by the government in the form of National Education Policy, 2020, comes as a rescue resort and promises for an inclusive education system.<sup>40</sup> It also reinstates the ever-growing relevance of Gandhian philosophy on Education. The new education policy provides for:

1. Access and equity in education, which was also the motto of Gandhian philosophy;
2. Quality education, which was also demanded by Gandhiji in a Harijan sabha where he raised the slogan of quality over quantity of citizenry;
3. Change in academic structure, similar to the propounding of integrated education idea of Gandhiji;
4. Pre schooling of children of age 3-5, even Gandhiji emphasised on laying down a strong foundation for formal education before schooling which would help in better imbibition of learning in the classrooms;
5. Early childhood care and learning and inclusion of 3-5 years of a child into formal education as provided in NEP was also envisioned by Gandhiji where he wanted to awake mid-teachers and teacher assistants to help the students in inculcating manners, etiquettes and discipline desirable for attaining education;
6. Credit based assessment with the inclusion of practical field assessment is provided in NEP, the same was idealised by Gandhi as a necessary part of National school where the teachers owed the duty to inculcate application-based skills in learning education;
7. No hard separation between arts and sciences, curricular and extra-curricular activities, vocational and academic streams to eliminate the hierarchical system of silos existential in the learning systems- such multidisciplinary approach was also targeted by Gandhiji when he equated spinning to a science subject and fieldwork to the literary training. He believed that

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<sup>40</sup> National Education Policy, Government of India, 2020, available at [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf) (Last accessed October 10, 2021).

character building is the foremost function of education. Thus, the un-compartmentalization and proactive steps towards inclusive education have re-instated the faith in the Gandhian ideology.

Moreover, in the unprecedented times of COVID, the government must recognise the role of establishing firm PPP (Public Private Partnership) with the private institution to build better and faster infra capabilities and provide for skilled man-force in the sector, along with an extra emphasis on vocational training, practical, applicable sessions and outcome-based learning as desired by Mahatma Gandhi, with particular focus on “*equity, equality and quality of education*”. Thus, as long as inequality exists in society and as long as a single voice against injustice exists, Mahatma Gandhi will be relevant for India and the world.

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