

## Strengthening Access and Equity of TVET through Mahatma Gandhi's Nai Talim: with Special Reference to the Buniyadi Vidyalayas in Bihar

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### Abstract

The objective of this paper is to throw light upon Mahatma Gandhi's Nai Talim or Basic Education or Buniyadi Siksha and the emergence of Buniyadi Vidyalayas. Gandhi's principle of Nai Talim advocated handicraft centered education system and experiential learning that can make learners efficient in theoretical knowledge as well as practical skills leading to their holistic development. The paper critically reflects upon the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 through the lenses of Gandhi's *Nai Talim* and tries to underline the vision with which the *Buniyadi vidyalayas* were started versus its present struggle for survival. As the NEP 2020 and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 targets prioritize the re-imagination of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) along with increasing its access, the paper identifies the dire need of TVET in Bihar and the revamping of the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* required for strengthening the access and equity of TVET in the state. The paper concludes that the re-imagination of TVET on the basis of Gandhi's *Nai Talim* through *Buniyadi vidyalayas* will surely help the nation achieve its targets of vocational education as mentioned in NEP 2020. The purpose of the paper is to draw immediate attention towards the pitiable condition of the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* of Bihar and its intention will be truly served if it can influence and enhance the policies and programmes for the revival of these schools in achieving TVET targets in Bihar.

**Keywords:** TVET, NEP-2020, *Nai Talim*, SDG-4, *Buniyadi Vidyalaya*

### Introduction

#### Mahatma Gandhi's *Nai Talim*: A way towards TVET

Mahatma Gandhi envisioned India of his dreams through *Nai Talim*. At the all-India National Education Conference held in Wardha on 22–23 October 1937, Gandhi proposed the concept of *Nai Talim* or Basic Education or work-centric education where entire education can be integrated and imparted through some vocation. Gandhi's *Nai Talim* aimed for radical restructuring in the pedagogy of the schools in India one of whose cardinal principles was handicraft-centered education. Such education would address the cognitive, affective as well as psychomotor domains of an individual leading to the complete development of body, mind, spirit and drawing out the best in man. Gandhi mentioned in his article *Harijan*, that the highest development of the mind and soul is possible under the system of education where handicraft is taught not merely mechanically but scientifically so that the child can be well versed with the why and wherefore of every process.

*Nai Talim* was the manifestation of Gandhi's perception of an ideal society consisting of industrious, self-reliant, ideal citizens living in self-reliant cooperative communities. He wanted to inculcate the spirit of self-reliance among Indian students so that they can contribute to every aspect of life be it cultural, political, social, or economic. Gandhi conceived *Nai Talim* not merely as an instrument for revamping the education system but also to bring a social revolution by combating the injustices of caste and class-based distinctions. He therefore, aimed to develop a new social order through *Nai Talim* addressing the dignity of labor and encouraging the participation of locals and commons in education thus making it inclusive, equitable, and accessible to all.

### **Emergence of *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* in Bihar**

Gandhi's visit to Champaran for the Champaran Satyagraha on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1917, made him aware of the several other prevailing problems of the state like acute poverty, lack of proper education, unhygienic environment, etc. Therefore, to uplift the conditions of the people through *Buniyadi Siksha*, he laid the foundation of the first *Buniyadi Vidyalaya* in Baharwa, Lakhensan, East Champaran on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1917. Consecutively two more such schools were started by Gandhi in Bhitiharwa, West Champaran, on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1917 and in Madhuban, West Champaran, on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1918. Another *Buniyadi Vidyalaya* was started in 1939 by Gandhi himself in Vrindavan, West Champaran. These efforts further led to the inception of several other *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* and around 391 such schools were established in Bihar of which 43 alone are situated in the West Champaran district.

In 1938, at the Haripura session of Congress, the *Buniyadi Siksha Yojana* was approved but its implementation was hampered due to the resignation of congress provincial governments. Then after a decade of rigorous experimentations, suggestions, and discussions, in 1946 *Buniyadi Siksha* took the final shape and in 1956 the *Buniyadi Siksha* evaluation committee headed by G. Ramchandran recommended the transformation of all primary schools to *Buniyadi* set up. But no major actions were undertaken towards actualizing it and these *Vidyalaya* of Gandhi's dream were ruined.

### **Methodology of the study**

The present paper is totally on the basis of the data collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of the data obtained through the unstructured interview done with the secondary school students of the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* of East and West Champaran districts of Bihar their parents and teachers. Secondary data sources include research reports by national and international agencies, policy documents, academic literature, official reports of the central and state governments, and materials on their websites.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

1. To critically reflect on the National Education Policy 2020 through the lenses of *Nai Talim*.
  2. To identify the vision of *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* in actualising *Nai Talim*
  3. To identify the present scenario of the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* in Bihar
  4. To identify the need for TVET in Bihar
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5. To identify the ways to strengthen the access and equity of TVET in Bihar through the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas*

### Research Questions

The paper finds the answer to the following research questions:

1. How does the National Education Policy 2020 resonate with that of *Nai Talim*?
2. Why were the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* established?
3. What is the present scenario of the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* in Bihar?
4. Why is TVET necessary for Bihar?
5. How can TVET provisions through *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* be made more accessible and equitable for the people of Bihar?

### Critical Reflections on National Education Policy 2020 through the lens of *Nai Talim*

The NEP 2020 strongly emphasizes on re-imagination of vocational education as the percentage of Indian workforce in the age group of 19-24 that received formal vocational education is less than 5%. The primary reasons as mentioned in NEP 2020 for such low percentage of Indian students being formally trained through vocational education are: vocational education focused largely on Grades 11-12 and dropouts in Grade 8 upwards in the past, lack of well-defined pathways in higher education to continue with the chosen vocation for students passing out from Grades 11-12 and the perception of students considering vocational education inferior to the mainstream education. [National Education Policy 2020]. *Nai Talim* that envisions a work integrated handicraft centered education for all from the primary classes ensured that the learners can value the importance of manual work as well as the dignity of labor. One of the important reasons for considering vocational education inferior to mainstream education by students may be because vocational education in India was focused largely on dropouts and was not made the cardinal part of the mainstream education as envisaged by *Nai Talim*. Also the lack of well defined pathways for students with the chosen vocation in higher education is because the education based on the principles of *Nai Talim* did not fructify in India.

The NEP 2020 that recommends overcoming the social status hierarchy associated with vocational education, value the dignity of labor and the importance of Indian arts and artisanship along with other vocations now, has been the very essence of *Nai Talim* since its inception. *Nai Talim* aimed to make education the means to abolishing the social malice of caste-based vocations like weaving, spinning, pottery, crafts etc. and other social stigmas like untouchability.

Further NEP 2020 aims for the phase wise integration of vocational education programs into mainstream education in all educational institutions that would begin from middle school, secondary school and then smoothly into higher education. In addition to this the policy aims for at least 50% learners by 2025 through school and higher education to have exposure to vocational education. This also reverberates with Gandhi's *Nai Talim* that proposed the elimination of distinctions between academic and vocational streams. The very aim of this approach was to make the learners understand that manual work is not inferior but complementary to intellectual work. Furthermore through handicraft centered education Gandhi envisioned for a system of education that will pave the way for entrepreneurship making learners self-reliant and building self-sufficient society which the policy 2020 also envisages for the making of a self-reliant India.

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The important issues and measures recommended in the National Education Policy 2020 resonate very much with *Nai Talim*. NEP 2020 and *Nai Talim* can be the renewed hope for each other as the vision of Gandhi's *Nai Talim* can help NEP 2020 achieve its targets and likewise NEP 2020 can be the medium that can rejuvenate the idea of *Nai Talim* that has lost in the pages of history.

### ***Buniyadi Vidyalaya: The vision***

To realize the concept of *Nai Talim* led to the advent of the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas*. The important objectives for establishing these *Buniyadi vidyalayas* were:

- To integrate education with manual work through handicraft centered education like spinning, weaving, farming, horticulture, fishery, pottery etc. that would lead to the holistic development of learners.
- To provide an exposure of multiple skills and necessary livelihood skills to every child at primary level that can induce vocational competencies in them.
- To make the work-centric education accessible to all and dismantle the class and caste based injustices prevailing in the society that considered education for the upper class people while manual work for the disadvantaged sections.
- To ensure education that can make the learners aware of the societal needs and demands for their respective contribution towards its progress.
- To provide education that can render learners sensitive enough to value manual work and the dignity of labor.
- To provide experiential learning to the learners that can impart knowledge of related sciences along with the practical skills in them. Gandhi believed that pupil can even learn mathematics through handicraft by “learning by doing” approach and it is through experiential learning that one can learn 10 folds more than merely reading and writing.
- To inculcate the spirit of self-reliance and entrepreneurship through work integrated handicraft centered education.
- To build self sufficient village communities through education that makes the learners self-reliant and the schools self-supportive by the products made in schools.
- To ensure learning in close coordination with child's activities, their home, community as well as village crafts and occupation.
- To envisage the role of teachers not as professional to be constrained by abstract standards and curricula, but a person who establishes rapport, becomes one with their students and learns from them.

### ***Buniyadi Vidyalayas in Bihar: Present Scenario***

The present condition of the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* of Bihar is very pathetic. The data obtained from the unstructured interviews and observation of the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* of East and West Champaran showed that the “Mahatma ke schools” are struggling for their survival. The Rajakiya *Buniyadi Vidyalaya*, Bagaha, West Champaran lacked the minimum basic infrastructure needed for teaching-learning. The school that held pride for several alumni being doctors, engineers and in other jobs now struggles due to decades of neglect with unavailability of proper classroom, learning aids, vocationally trained teachers and instructors for the students.

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Another *Buniyadi Vidyalaya* in Barharwa Lakhansen, East Champaran, Bihar reported that initially the school was till Grade 8 and vocational provisions like spinning, weaving, pottery, farming and various handicrafts work were made available to the learners but now such vocational education has completely ceased in the school due to the unavailability of vocationally trained instructors and teachers. The school is now till Grade 12 and consists of more than 900 students but lack in the minimum basic educational facilities. Although there are classrooms for the students but they are devoid of the useful teaching aids required for proper education. Teachers in the school mentioned that the students are very much interested to learn craft centered education and vocational skills that was earlier the part of the school curriculum but presently the school lacks in both human and material resources to cater to the vocational needs of the students. The students reported that if the school provides them the education that can make them competent, self-reliant and skilled enough to create their own jobs, they will neither be absent nor think of dropping out from school. The parents of these students shared that if the school addresses to the career related needs of the children their future will be secured and will not have to migrate to other states for jobs.

Started with the objective of actualizing the vision of Gandhi's *Nai Talim* to promote vocational opportunities and handicraft centered education as a means to elevate the condition of the people of Bihar, almost all the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* of Bihar presently are in threat of their own existence. They lack the basic infrastructure, resources, vocationally trained teachers and even the optimum teaching-learning environment needed for learning. These schools need immediate attention from the state as well as central government so that TVET provisions in various forms can be made accessible to the people of Bihar.

## **Technical and Vocational Education and Training: A necessity in Bihar**

### ***Demographic dividend of Bihar***

Bihar with the highest population growth rate in India is the third-largest state by population and the twelfth largest by territory. 11.3% of the Bihar's population lives in urban area which after Himachal Pradesh marks the lowest in India. About 58% of the population of Bihar is below the age of 25 which gives Bihar the highest proportion of young population than any other Indian state. The TVET opportunities if utilized judiciously can transform this large workforce as an asset to the state.

### ***Migration of labor to other states***

Gandhi envisioned self-reliant villages through *Buniyadi Vidyalaya* in Bihar yet the state has the highest percentage of young laborers migrating to other states in search of work. One of the reasons for this may be the decrease in the demand of many traditional vocations through which the people earned their living. Technical and Vocational Education and Training thus becomes a necessity for the state as this would not only help to save the endangered vocational traditions of Bihar but also make the people vocationally efficient and skilled contributing to the progress of the state.

### ***Effect of COVID 19 pandemic***

As the state is mostly dominated by migrant laborers the people of Bihar were vastly affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. Had there been proper skill-based education and vocational training through formal education in the state the people would have been skilled enough to create their own jobs rather than being jobless and undergoing turmoil during the pandemic.

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### ***Status of TVET in Bihar state***

According to the report by the Ministry of Education [as cited in Vocational Education First State of the Education Report for India 2020 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)] on the List of state-government-run schools offering vocationalization of secondary school education it was seen that vocationalisation of secondary education was approved in 38 secondary schools of Bihar but none of them were implemented, resulting in zero enrollments of students. Lack of vocational education in secondary school can be a reason for uninterested students in the classroom resulting in their dropouts. Bihar already lags behind in social and economic development, it is the responsibility of the state government to take immediate measures for making TVET provisions accessible to all the students. This will definitely calibrate the progress and performance of Bihar in all aspects.

As per the 2019 data of NITI Aayog on “Performance of states and UTs on the SDG s” [NITI Aayog 2019, as cited in Vocational Education First State of the Education Report for India 2020 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)] It was seen that Bihar state performed lowest among all states in SDG 4 (securing only 19 out of 100 in its performance among other states) which keeps Bihar in the category of Aspirant (0-49) that too with very less score. This also acknowledges the fact that there is the need for immediate attention towards achieving SDG 4 and its targets especially targets 4.3 and 4.4 which aim to achieve quality TVET provisions that can be affordable and accessible to all.

As per the data of SDMS report dated 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 of PMKVY (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana) 2016-20 Centrally Sponsored Centrally Managed (CSCM) Short Term Training (STT) [NSDC 2019, as cited in Vocational Education First State of the Education Report for India 2020 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)] it was seen that 1, 98,405 people were enrolled, 1, 98,225 were trained, out of which 1, 85,389 were assessed and 1, 60, 401 were certified, among which 84,398 were reported to be placed. The data shows the high interest of the people of Bihar in the various vocational trainings.

### **Ways to strengthen access and equity of TVET in Bihar through the *Buniyadi Vidyalayas***

Analyzing the data mentioned in the previous section it is very evident that TVET provisions are a crucial need in Bihar. Thus TVET should be made accessible to the people of Bihar through its integration into the formal mainstream education as mentioned in the NEP 2020. The following mentions the ways to strengthen access and equity of TVET in Bihar.

- Reviving and revamping *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* based on Mahatma Gandhi's concept of *Nai Talim* to provide crucial livelihood skills to learners from the primary level.
  - Reformulating the recommendation given by the *Buniyadi Siksha* Evaluation Committee in 1956 by transforming all the schools into a *Buniyadi* setup with a well-defined pathway.
  - These schools should be restructured based on the principle of *Nai Talim*, recommendations of NEP 2020, and targets of SDG 4 for the re-imagination of TVET in Bihar as well as India.
  - The restructured schools would aim to actualize the vision of *Nai Talim* and achieve the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4 by ensuring equal access to quality affordable TVET to all (SDG 4, Target 4.3) and increasing the number of people with relevant skills for financial success. (SDG 4, Target 4.4).
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- Reformed curriculum and pedagogy along with proper infrastructure, trained teachers, and instructors in various vocations must be made available to ensure the quality of education in the schools. Continuous professional development of the recruited vocational teachers/ trainers also must be ensured.
- The schools should be continuously upgraded with the recent advancements made in the direction of TVET so that the best experiences can be made accessible to the students through offline, online as well as blended modes.
- As *Nai Talim* encouraged the participation of the local community through handicraft-centered education, these schools would be a way to strengthen access and equity of TVET by ensuring the participation of the local community and preserving the arts, artisanship, and traditional vocations of India. The introduction of indigenous startups through these schools would provide a vision to protect and preserve the tangible and intangible cultural treasure of India and also help the nation compete globally with the international market showcasing India's indigenous wealth to the world
- These schools can be the means to provide TVET in a way that can address the needs of all including the socially endangered groups as well as the disadvantaged sections of the society so as to empower them and lead to their emancipation by making vocationally competent and emerge as self-reliant individuals contributing to the making of self-sufficient societies.

Bihar which was once the hub for power, learning, culture, and the land of eminent universities like Nalanda, Vikram hila, and Odantapuri, will regain its lost glories through TVET made available by the reformed *Buniyadi Vidyalaya*.

## Discussion

The existing school curriculum is lacking utility in providing TVET provisions and means of livelihood to the learners. The present situation is so distressing that after the completion of the formal degree from school a student has to invest some more years to acquire professional skills in order to get a job. To keep in pace with the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world of artificial intelligence and machine learning and the transforming labor markets, the TVET provisions of UNESCO-UNEVOC recommend the need-specific upskilling and reskilling of the learners whereas our formal school education alone fails to make the learners even skilled enough to get jobs. The University Grant Commission also stresses the transformation of the rural villages of India through skill creation and rural industrialization. Thus in context to the present education system, Gandhi's *Nai Talim* through *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* can cater to the educational needs of learners, address the targets of NEP-2020 and lead to the emergence of self-sufficient societies.

## Conclusion

The fundamental principles of *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* are very much relevant and worthwhile. Thus the rejuvenated *Nai Talim* with re-structured *Buniyadi Vidyalayas* is essential for re-imagining TVET in Bihar and India. Revival of the *Buniyadi Vidyalaya* will serve the urgency of the spread of TVET and mainstreaming of vocational education as mentioned in NEP 2020. It will strengthen the access and equity of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Bihar and India setting an example for the whole world.

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