

A Comparative Study on Gandhiji's Buniyadi Shiksha & NEP 2020

Lekha Anil¹, Dr. S.K. Tripathy²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Research and Planning Shri Venkateshwara University, Gajraula, Amroha, Uttar Pradesh, India.

²Research Supervisor, Associate professor, Shri Venkateshwara University, Gajraula, Amroha, Uttar Pradesh, India.

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Abstract: This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of two seminal educational frameworks in India: Mahatma Gandhi's Buniyadi Shiksha (Wardha Scheme, 1937) and the contemporary National Education Policy 2020. While separated by over eight decades, both policies emerge as transformative responses to the perceived inadequacies of the existing education system, aiming to decolonize the Indian mind and create an education system rooted in national context and humanistic values. The study identifies and examines the profound philosophical convergences between the two, particularly their shared emphasis on holistic development (head, heart, and hands), the integration of vocational training and practical skills with academic learning, the focus on mother-tongue based instruction in foundational years, and the vision of education as a tool for social transformation and character building. Both frameworks explicitly reject a rigid, rote-learning-centric model and advocate for an education that is flexible, experiential, and connected to the real world.

Keywords: Buniyadi Shiksha, NEP 2020, Gandhi, Holistic Education, Vocational Training, Experiential Learning,

1. Introduction

Education is a light which guides us through our life. Education prepares a man to face life realities with its essence. Life without education is meaningless. Education is a progressive process and countries which give importance to educational developments and adopting changes according to social needs are growing to the status of developed nation at a vigorous speed. Education of a nation should try to meet the changing socio-cultural needs of every society. Since the needs are changing, policies of education also should change according to the need of the time. Here, we are to discuss two different policies, Gandhiji's Buniyadi shiksha (Basic Education) and the present NEP2020.

Looking back at the history and the strengths of our educational systems and the policies of our education in the past, we can focus upon the five guiding principles in Gandhiji's Buniyadi Taleem, which focused on the development of mind, body and soul. They are:

- 1) Connecting Knowledge to outside world.
- 2) Shifting focus from rote learning
- 3) Enriching curriculum beyond text books
- 4) Making evaluation flexible and integrated
- 5) Nurturing and caring concerns.

If we analyse the guidelines of NEPs, we see that constructivism is given importance. It is belief in child's ability to construct the knowledge. That is nothing but learning by doing. The principle in NEP2020, mandate is to make the educational system, holistic, flexible and multi-disciplinary. NEP 2020 lays emphasis on the development of creative potential of every individual. It is envisioned at transforming Indian Education system by 2040, building it as Global best Education System, rooted in Indian values, thereby transforming India into a Global knowledge super power. If we analyse the features of both policies we can understand both are both sides of the same coin. Let us analyse them:

2. Features of Gandhiji's Buniyadi Shiksha (Basic Education)

1. **Craft-centered education** – Learning through productive handicrafts like spinning, weaving, agriculture, carpentry, etc.
2. **Self-reliance** – Education should make students economically independent.
3. **Learning by doing** – Practical work and experiences as the foundation of learning.
4. **Free and compulsory** – For all children between 7 to 14 years.
5. **Mother tongue as medium** – Education in the child's own language for better understanding.
6. **Holistic development** – Focus on physical, mental, moral, and spiritual growth.
7. **Dignity of labour** – No work is inferior; manual labour must be respected.
8. **Value-based education** – Emphasis on truth, non-violence, discipline, and cooperation.
9. **Integration with community life** – Education linked with the needs of the village and society.

3. Features of NEP 2020

1. **Holistic and multidisciplinary** – Blends academics, skills, sports, arts, and values.
2. **Skill development focus** – Vocational education and internships from school level.
3. **Mother tongue/regional language** – Strongly encourages teaching up to Grade 5 (and preferably Grade 8) in the child's own language.
4. **Flexibility and choice** – Students choose subjects based on interest, no rigid streams.
5. **Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE)** – Strong foundation from ages 3–6.
6. **Experiential learning** – Hands-on projects, practical work, and discovery-based learning.
7. **Equity and inclusiveness** – Ensures education for all, bridging social and gender gaps.
8. **Technology integration** – Digital learning, online education, and modern tools.
9. **Emphasis on values & ethics** – Strong character building, constitutional values, and global citizenship.
10. **5+3+3+4 structure** – Replacing 10+2 with a new flexible school structure.

4. Similarities between Buniyadi Shiksha and NEP 2020

1. **Mother tongue as medium** – Both stress education in the child's own language.
2. **Skill-based learning** – Gandhiji emphasized craft; NEP emphasizes vocational skills and internships.
3. **Learning by doing** – Practical, experiential learning is central to both.
4. **Holistic development** – Both aim at physical, mental, and moral growth, not just academics.
5. **Value-based education** – Gandhiji's truth and non-violence; NEP's ethics, constitutional values, empathy.
6. **Integration with life** – Gandhiji connected education with village life; NEP connects it with real-world problems, employability, and innovation.
7. **Equity & inclusiveness** – Both aim to make education accessible to all sections of society.
8. **Respect for labour** – Gandhiji's dignity of labour is echoed in NEP's vocational education and recognition of skills.

Gandhiji's Buniyadi system and NEP 2020 both reject rote learning, emphasize hands-on experience, skill development, and value-based education in mother tongue. The main difference is that Gandhiji's model was rooted in rural crafts and self-reliance, while NEP 2020 adapts these principles to a modern, global, and technological context.

5. Comparison of Gandhiji's Buniyadi Shiksha and NEP 2020

Aspect	Gandhiji's Buniyadi Shiksha (Basic Education)	National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)
Medium of Instruction	Emphasis on mother tongue as the medium of education	Strongly promotes mother tongue/regional language up to Grade 5 (preferably till Grade 8)
Core Philosophy	Learning by doing ; education should be productive and self-reliant	Experiential learning ; education must be holistic, flexible, and skill-oriented
Skill Development	Focus on crafts like spinning, weaving, carpentry, agriculture	Focus on vocational training, coding, internships, life skills
Economic Goal	Education should make a child self-reliant and capable of earning	Education should make students employable, innovative, and globally competitive
Holistic Development	Physical, mental, moral, and spiritual development through simple living	Multidisciplinary growth: academics, arts, sports, technology, values, and ethics
Value System	Based on truth, non-violence, dignity of labour, cooperation	Based on ethics, constitutional values, empathy, environmental awareness
Integration with Society	Education linked with village life and community needs	Education linked with 21st-century needs, real-life applications, global context

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Aspect	Gandhiji's Buniyadi Shiksha (Basic Education)	National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)
Equity & Inclusiveness	Free and compulsory education for all children (7–14 years)	Access, equity, and inclusion for all, with special focus on disadvantaged groups
Approach to Labour	Manual labour as a central part of learning (dignity of labour)	Vocational education respected equally with academic pathways
Methodology	Practical work, hand-on activities, moral teaching	Projects, critical thinking, problem solving, digital learning
Education Structure	Suggested basic education cycle (7–14 years)	Introduces 5+3+3+4 school structure covering ages 3–18

Key Similarities

- Both emphasize mother tongue, skill-based learning, value education, and holistic growth.
- Both reject rote learning and aim for practical, life-oriented education.
- Both seek to make education inclusive and socially relevant.
- Both stress respect for work and dignity of labour.

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