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## **TOWARDS KNOWLEDGE SOCIETIES Gandhian Perspectives**

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## STABLE AND SUSTAINABLE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETIES: A Gandhian Perspective

Jeff Shawn Jose<sup>♦</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper examines Gandhian philosophy and practice to reinterpret UNESCO's educational vision towards establishing stable and sustainable knowledge societies. The uniqueness of the Gandhian perspective is its ability to withstand the dominant political, philosophical and religious challenges with its contextually rooted, spiritually oriented, socially responsible and human person centred reinterpretations. UNESCO's educational vision - *Learning: The Treasure Within* published in 1996 is a catalyst in establishing stable and sustainable knowledge societies. Consistent changes and challenges in knowledge societies necessitates the reinterpretation of this educational vision. The four pillars of learning in this educational vision are analysed together with four aspects of Gandhian philosophy and practice: 'learning to know' and *Nai Talim*, 'learning to do' and ashrams, 'learning to live together' and constructive programme and 'learning to be' and *swaraj*. The paper discusses this confluence of the UNESCO's theoretical approach of four pillars of education with Gandhian pragmatic philosophy and practice to offer a contextually rooted and future-oriented outlook for reinterpreting the educational vision for establishing stable and sustainable knowledge societies.

**Keywords:** Constructive Programme, Education, Four Pillars of Learning, Gandhian Ashram, Jacques Delors, Knowledge Societies, Mahatma Gandhi, *Nai Talim*, *Swaraj*, UNESCO.

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## 1. Introduction

Knowledge societies present the contemporary world with opportunities and risks. Knowledge is the prime focus of the knowledge societies as opposed to agricultural and industrial societies. Acquiring, processing, and analysing information and their implementation in the technical, social and virtual arena have become productive and fast-paced, leading to overarching changes across disciplines. A plethora of possibilities, which knowledge societies offer, however, do have challenges such as manipulating information for tweaking the output, exploiting information for individual and social discrimination, vulnerability of Internet of Things (IoT) systems and devices in compromising sensitive personal data, harvesting personal information for 'psychographic micro-targeting' especially to influence public opinion during elections and referendums. Together with exploring the immense opportunity offered by knowledge societies for optimum output, there is a need to address the manifold and sophisticated challenges adequately. Legislating laws is only a peripheral solution to confront this challenge. Beyond an external imposition of laws, the education and formation of a human person have to be the focus of stable and sustainable knowledge societies. One such approach identified by UNESCO for the formation of a human person is the four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. It can not only be treated as a pedagogical system but also as a guide for lifelong learning. The demanding context of knowledge societies calls for re-interpretation of these four pillars. Gandhian philosophy and practice will be discussed through the structure of these four pillars to reinterpret them and to establish stable and sustainable knowledge societies.

In this analysis, Gandhian basic education programme called *Nai Talim*<sup>1</sup> is the focus of learning to know, the life and activities

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<sup>1</sup>The word *Nai Talim* can be translated literally as new education. It is also known as basic education. Gandhi presented this educational vision during the Wardha Education Conference held from 22 to 23 October 1937.

in Gandhian ashrams are the focal points of learning to do, Gandhian constructive programme is the focus of learning to live together, and Gandhian vision of self-rule called *swaraj* is the central aspect of learning to be. In exploring the potential of Gandhian insights for the knowledge societies, I will begin by contrasting the idea of knowledge societies with industrial societies based on the perspective of prominent scholars in this field and documents of the United Nations. Then I will shortly discuss the necessity to re-interpret educational vision for knowledge societies from the perspective of UNESCO and the relevance of Gandhi in this re-interpretation. Finally, the four pillars of learning are discussed together with Gandhian philosophy and practice providing insights for establishing stable and sustainable knowledge societies.

## **2. From Industrial to Knowledge Societies**

Knowledge societies rely on the potential of information and infrastructure of the information and communications technology (ICT) in revolutionizing the way of life. The knowledge society is distinct from agricultural societies and industrial societies. While agricultural societies depended on natural resources to produce food, industrial societies focused on the resource of physical labour with the use of machines to manufacture industrial goods and services. The knowledge societies use the intellectual capability as a crucial resource and ICT as the tool to produce data, information, knowledge and ideas.<sup>2</sup> Knowledge societies are also distinct from information societies. Whereas information societies are static with passive and inert information, knowledge societies are interactive with interpretation and processing of information with cognitive capability.<sup>3</sup> Access to education enables one in a knowledge

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<sup>2</sup>Debal K. Singha Roy, *Identity, Society and Transformative Social Categories: Dynamics of Construction, Configuration and Contestation*, New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2018, 129-130.

<sup>3</sup>Marije van Braak, "On the Influence of Knowledge Societies on the Internal Structure, Content and Purpose of Current Academic Education," *Social Cosmos* 5, no. 1, (2014): 95-101, 95.

society "...to master the available information with critical judgement and thinking, and to analyse, sort and incorporate the items they consider most interesting in a knowledge base."<sup>4</sup>

The shift from an Industrial society to knowledge society has been characterized differently by different authors such as 'post-industrial society,' 'information society' and 'networked society.' Daniel Bell terms the shift as the 'post-industrial society.' He contrasts the shift from industrial to post-industrial society: "Broadly speaking, if industrial society is based on machine technology, post-industrial society is shaped by an intellectual technology. And if capital and labour are the major structural features of industrial society, information and knowledge are those of the post-industrial society."<sup>5</sup> Yoneji Masuda, a visionary and project manager in charge of realising Japan's post-Industrial transformation in the 1970s identifies the new society as the 'information society'<sup>6</sup>. Focusing on technology, he contrasts the differences in the use of technology in the industrial era and information society.

Past systems of innovational technology have always been concerned with material productive power, but the future information society must be built within a completely new framework, with a thorough analysis of the system of computer-communication technology that determines the fundamental nature of information society.<sup>7</sup>

After listing several comparisons of information society and industrial society, Masuda concludes it with what constitutes the spirit of information society. He states, "The spirit of information

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<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, *Towards Knowledge Societies*, Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2005, 19.

<sup>5</sup>Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, New York: Basic Books, 1999, xci.

<sup>6</sup>Even though Masuda uses the term 'information society' he meant 'knowledge society'. It was used during the initial phase when there was no strict distinction between the terms 'information society' and 'knowledge society'.

<sup>7</sup>Yoneji Masuda, *The Information Society as Post-Industrial Society*, Bethesda: World Future Society, 1981, 29.

society will be the spirit of globalism, a symbiosis in which man and nature can live together in harmony, consisting ethically of strict self-discipline and social contribution."<sup>8</sup> Manuel Castells approaches the new society from the perspective of technology and terms it as the 'networked society.' According to him,

All of them have something essential in common: while mainly based on previously existing knowledge, and developed in prolongation of key technologies, they represented a qualitative leap forward in the massive diffusion of technology in commercial and civilian applications because of their accessibility and their decreasing cost with increasing quality.<sup>9</sup>

One of the critical features of this society is that it is a network: "Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture."<sup>10</sup> He argues that even though the networking aspect of society previously existed, what makes it different now is the fact that "... the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure."<sup>11</sup> Even though diversely perceived, all these authors converge on the fact that the society has taken the next step from industrial society to the creation of knowledge society where knowledge and its supporting technology play the prominent role.

The United Nations identifies the potential and challenges in conceiving and nurturing knowledge societies. It clarifies the use of the term knowledge society stating that "The term is rooted in the firm conviction that it is knowledge, not information per se or modern ICT alone, that will redefine and enrich our lives."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Masuda, *The Information Society as Post-Industrial Society*, 33.

<sup>9</sup>Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed., Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 57.

<sup>10</sup>Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 500.

<sup>11</sup>Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 500.

<sup>12</sup>United Nations Division of Public Administration and Development Management, *Understanding Knowledge Societies: In*

Equal and universal access to knowledge and genuine sharing is the cornerstone of knowledge societies to ensure human and sustainable development. Technological developments and internet as public network provide fresh opportunities to strive towards this goal.<sup>13</sup> Developing 'capabilities to identify, produce, process, transform, disseminate and use information to build and apply knowledge' assures human development. The social vision has to empower the society by encompassing 'plurality, inclusion, solidarity and participation.'<sup>14</sup> Together with the opportunities, knowledge society also brings up various challenges such as digital divide and commoditization of knowledge. The digital divide widens the knowledge divide and adds to the already existing gap "...in the main areas that make up knowledge (access to information, education, scientific research, and cultural and linguistic diversity) and is the real challenge facing the building of knowledge societies."<sup>15</sup> The commoditization of knowledge can result in selling knowledge for unauthorised surveillance and also replace the diversity of cognitive cultures with uniformity of scientific and technological knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Taking into account the potentials and challenges UNESCO lists four elements on which a knowledge society must build on: "freedom of expression; universal access to information and knowledge; respect for cultural and linguistic diversity; and quality education for all."<sup>17</sup> The four pillars of education is a prerequisite and a preliminary step in realising these broader goals in a knowledge society. It also helps to develop a learning society which goes beyond the confines of 'a set and settled space and time and ensures 'continuous process

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*Twenty Questions and Answers with the Index of Knowledge Societies*, New York: United Nations, 2005, 4.

<sup>13</sup>UNESCO, *Towards Knowledge Societies*, 17.

<sup>14</sup>UNESCO, *Towards Knowledge Societies*, 27.

<sup>15</sup>UNESCO, *Towards Knowledge Societies*, 22.

<sup>16</sup>UNESCO, *Towards Knowledge Societies*, 22-23.

<sup>17</sup>UNESCO, "Building Knowledge Societies," <<https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies>> (14 November 2018).



of knowledge acquisition and communication.<sup>18</sup> The pillars of education aim at the holistic formation of a human person, which is a lifelong pursuit beyond the confines of school education.

### 3. Education for Knowledge Societies

The UNESCO report titled *Learning: The Treasure Within* outlines the education vision for the twenty-first century.<sup>19</sup> Among other aspects of educational vision, the report identifies four pillars of education, namely, learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. The report states that these four pillars of education are not limited to a particular phase of life but "...areas of education must be thought and must complement and interpenetrate one another, so that all can derive the greatest benefit throughout their lives, from an ever-broadening educational environment."<sup>20</sup> The UNESCO document *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good*, published in 2015, refers to the need for reinterpreting and protecting the four pillars of education. "Their generic nature allows for interpretation of the type of integrated learning required in response to different contexts and time. The pillars themselves might need fresh interpretation ..."<sup>21</sup> Knowledge societies require a renewed interpretation of the four pillars of learning to explore new opportunities and face complex challenges. Even though information and technology are significant players in the knowledge society, it is ultimately the human person who has to adapt to changes and garner resilience. Thus, there is a need of renewed interpretation of the pillars of learning to bring the focus back to education and

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<sup>18</sup>UNESCO, *Towards Knowledge Societies*, 60.

<sup>19</sup>Jacques Delors, et al., *Learning: The Treasure Within: Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*, Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1996.

<sup>20</sup>Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 96.

<sup>21</sup>UNESCO, *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good*, Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2015, 39.

formation of the human person rather than submitting oneself to rapidly growing and pervasive technology.

The concepts and insights of Gandhian philosophy and practice are illuminative guides in the renewed interpretation of four pillars of education in the context of knowledge societies. It is one of the ideal contenders in this pursuit because it was a re-interpretation of the tradition and context to respond to the needs of the hour. It provides an alternative vision rooted in Indian context rather than confirming to the then dominant western vision of education, human person and technology implemented by the British in colonial India. The particularities of Gandhian alternative vision might be limited to the historical context, but the spirit of his vision escapes the bounds of history. The spirit of his vision consists of undertaking four discoveries, which can guide the attempt for a renewed interpretation of four pillars for knowledge societies. These four discoveries are: creative and contextual discovery of academic subjects and vocational training, committed discovery of technical and life skills, the open-minded discovery of the other and diligent discovery of the self. These four discoveries can enrich one's response to diverse situations. Nico Stehr defines knowledge "as capacity for action,"<sup>22</sup> and argues, "The definition of knowledge as capacity for action strongly indicates that the material realization and implementation of knowledge is open, that it is dependent on or embedded within the context of specific social, economic and intellectual conditions."<sup>23</sup> Gandhian vision focuses on the individual who is situated within the context and envisions plans, creates situations and shares insights that would actualise the potential to act in an ideal manner. Well-formed and informed individuals can share and execute a stable and sustainable vision in the knowledge society. The individual plays a prominent role in giving life to a lifeless program code, which can result in the destruction or development of a

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<sup>22</sup>Nico Stehr, "Modern Societies as Knowledge Societies," in *Nico Stehr: Pioneer in the Theory of Society and Knowledge*, ed. Marian T. Adolf, Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018, 309-331,309.

<sup>23</sup>Stehr, "Modern Societies as Knowledge Societies," 316.

knowledge society. Gandhi states, "I have been reading Emerson, Ruskin and Mazzini. I have also been reading the *Upanishads*. All confirm the view that education does not mean a knowledge of letters but it means character building, it means a knowledge of duty."<sup>24</sup> Gandhi listed "Knowledge without character" as one among the seven social sins.<sup>25</sup>

Education for Gandhi was a lifelong process. One of the oft-quoted words of Gandhi on education summarizes his vision: "By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated."<sup>26</sup> I will begin each of the following four sections with a brief sketch of UNESCO's each of the four pillars of education, and then discuss the Gandhian vision of education based on each of these pillars toward creating a stable and sustainable knowledge society.

### 3.1 Learning to Know and *Nai Talim*

Knowledge is the central focus of knowledge societies. Learning to know calls for an educational approach that is rooted in tradition but is open to innovation. The UNESCO report focuses on learning to know as that which goes beyond rote learning. As a means, it enables one to live with dignity by understanding their environment, equipping them with occupational and communication skills. The pleasure of understanding, knowing and discovering are the ends conceived in this approach. Together with a contextual approach, it also emphasizes on embracing scientific methods and inter-disciplinary approach. In

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<sup>24</sup>M. K. Gandhi, "Letter to Manilal Gandhi," in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 09, New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1963, 208. [Hereafter *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* is abbreviated as CWMG.]

<sup>25</sup>M. K. Gandhi, "Notes" *Indian Opinion* 7, no. 43, (October 22, 1925): 358-360, 360.

<sup>26</sup>M. K. Gandhi, "Criticism Answered" *Harijan* 5, no. 25, (July 31, 1937): 196-198, 197.

the context of the free flow of information across various media platforms the focus is also on developing the power of concentration, memory and thought. Additionally, the understanding of acquiring knowledge as a never-ending process calls for life-long learning together with work and other life experiences.<sup>27</sup> In a short article written fifteen years after the report, Jacques Delors, the president of the commission, identifies two present-day challenges in learning to know: first, sustaining the thirst for knowledge after leaving school, and second, the large number of school dropouts. Pointing to the thirty per cent school dropouts in Spain, he cautions against normalizing the narratives of high profile school dropouts. He states, "Of course, on television, you will hear that one in every hundred thousand of them becomes a top chief executive in the USA and this means you can make it on your own, without going to school ... But one person's dream come true is not a solution for everyone."<sup>28</sup>

*Nai Talim* expresses the Gandhian vision of learning to know. It is a contextual, experiential, academic, vocational and self-supportive learning system, which has the potential to encourage and sustain the thirst for learning. It provided an alternative to an academic-oriented and English language-based elite British educational system in India and was open to all students irrespective of caste and creed. The focus was on enriching not only rational faculties but also the soul. As Gandhi remarks, "I hold that the highest development of the mind and the soul is possible under such a system of education."<sup>29</sup> Shaping the moral output of students was also his priority. He states, "An education which does not teach us to discriminate between good and bad, to assimilate the one and eschew the other is a

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<sup>27</sup>Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 86-88.

<sup>28</sup>Jacques Delors, "The Treasure Within: Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Live Together and Learning to Be. What is the Value of that Treasure 15 Years after its Publication?" *International Review of Education* 59, no.3 (September 2013) 319-330, 322.

<sup>29</sup>Gandhi, "Criticism Answered," 197.

misnomer."<sup>30</sup> *Nai Talim* was the fruit of Gandhi's experience in education combined with his experiments with truth in Ashrams. As Wojtasik observes, "The educational ideas are joined with experiences of Phoenix and Tolstoy farms in South-Africa or Sabarmati and Sevagram ashrams in India. It is important to consider *Nai Talim* as part of continuous further development according to 'experiments with truth.'"<sup>31</sup>

Blending of vocational and academic training was a unique feature of *Nai Talim* system of education. Students attained knowledge through the medium of handicrafts. Mahadev Desai reports the Gandhian vision: "The core of his emphasis was not the occupation but education through manual training - all education, of letters, history, geography, mathematics, science, etc., through manual training."<sup>32</sup> The twin advantage of such a system was that the students receive both theoretical academic education and practical vocational training. Furthermore, the finished products can be sold to make education self-supporting. Gandhi states that it is a 'fatal mistake' to consider vocational training as separate from education; instead, he insists that vocational training must 'co-relate' knowledge to the craft. He gives the example of spinning to describe this approach. The students have to learn mathematics to report the different aspects such as the amount of yarn produced and the standard rounds it takes to produce it. Moreover, analysing the origin, trade and developments of cotton industry helps to understand subjects such as Geography, History and Economics easily. This can be done explaining the history and geography of those countries associated with cotton production, the economic

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<sup>30</sup>M. K. Gandhi, "Wardha Scheme under Fire," *Harijan* 7, no. 2, (February 18, 1939): 13-15, 15.

<sup>31</sup>Gregor Lang Wojtasik, "Transformative Cosmopolitan Education and Gandhi's Relevance Today," *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning* 10, no. 1 (June 2018) 72-89, 82.

<sup>32</sup>Gandhi shared this vision during an educational conference organized to commemorate the silver jubilee of Marwari Shiksha Mandal, held under the presidentship of Gandhi. Gandhi, "Speech at Educational Conference - I," in CWMG, Vol. 66, 1976, 264.

aspects associated with the necessity to import cotton, the history of the arrival of East India Company, the destruction of local spinning industry and history of India during and before this period. Scientific reasoning develops as the student understands the progress from wooden disc to brass disc and steel spindle. The type of education Gandhi envisioned is a revolution that requires educationists with an original vision. Gandhi states,

What we need ... is educationists with originality, fired with true zeal ... use his own faculties of observation and thinking and impart his knowledge to the children through his lips, with the help of a craft ... This means a revolution in the method of teaching, a revolution in the teacher's outlook.<sup>33</sup>

Holzworth observes, "Gandhi envisioned an 'education for life' consisting of five stages: 'pre-basic' education (under age 7), 'basic' education (ages 7-14), 'post-basic' education (ages 15-18), rural universities and 'social' (adult) education."<sup>34</sup> Hindustani Talimi Sangh, an independent national educational council, was formed at Sevagram for development and implementation of this project. Mukerji states that the mission of the Sangh was

... to build a cooperative self-sufficient community; a community which will produce its necessities in food, clothing, shelter and tools, not a process of production and commerce but as educational process for a balanced life ... and above all a community where man will be respected as a man and there will be no distinction of caste, class or creed; where all religions and faiths of mankind will be equally honoured.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Gandhi, "Wardha Scheme under Fire," 15.

<sup>34</sup>Simone Holzwarth, "A New Education for 'Young India': Exploring Nai Talim from the Perspective of a Connected History," in *Connecting Histories of Education: Transnational and Cross-Cultural Exchanges in (Post) Colonial Education*, ed. Bagchi Barnita, et al., New York: Berghahn Books, 2014, 126.

<sup>35</sup>S. N. Mukerji, *Education in India: Today and Tomorrow*, Baroda: Acharya Book Depot, 1960, 394.

He also adds that "Sangh has succeeded in its mission." Thus, together with offering news insights, the Gandhian education vision of *Nai Talim* upholds the spirit of UNESCO's vision of learning to know with its contextual and innovative approach that sustains the quest for lifelong learning which is an essential constituent of a knowledge society.

The essence of *Nai Talim* educational vision in the context of knowledge societies is its emphasis on the creative and contextual discovery of academic subjects and vocational training. It cautions against the blanket implementation of a global system of education across the globe expecting similar results and advocates the necessity to protect, nurture and impart contextual knowledge. The contextual implementation requires understanding the challenges associated with a particular context such as social taboo and poverty. The educational system has to ensure accessibility to all and enable the society to overcome social taboo. Knowledge societies thrive on continually updating technology. Many nations would find it infeasible to implement digital classrooms and updated learning methods leading to a widening digital divide and subsequent discrimination. In such situations, Gandhian education model calls for identifying the abundance of contextual resources rather than inaccessible global technologies. A self-supporting contextual vocational training combined with academic learning would be attractive, experiential, economically viable, reduce dropouts and would sustain the quest for knowledge all through their lives. The developed nations and organisations can offer customizable open-source software and technology for contextual learning rather than implementing and enforcing a one size fits all approach. Furthermore, such a system has the potential to bring diverse traditional knowledge and wisdom to the global arena to enrich knowledge societies.

### **3.2 Learning to Do and Gandhian Ashrams**

Given the reality of constant changes and requirement of consistent updates in knowledge societies, learning to do equips individuals with technical and life skills to respond to changes. It

focuses on adapting individuals to an unpredictable situation of their future work in a continually innovating environment. The two significant aspects of learning to do are equipping individuals with employability in work situations and adaptability to innovations. In contrast to the industrial society where occupational skills with physical tasks were paramount, the knowledge society requires personal competence and more intellectual and mental work. It calls for a blend of technical skills and life skills. Together with technical education, the individuals have to develop an acceptable social behaviour, aptitude for teamwork, nourish a stable and effective interpersonal relationship, ability to take risks, effective communication and conflict resolution skills. There is an increasing number of opportunities for people with few or no formal qualification based on their behavioural or life skills than intellectual skills. It also emphasizes on blending the scientific culture and access to modern technology with innovations and creativity found in the local context. Furthermore, both developing and developed countries face the challenge of helping people learn to adapt to an uncertain future.<sup>36</sup>

Gandhian ashrams are also education centres equipping the members to confidently face the uncertain future not only with technical skills but also with life skills.<sup>37</sup> Life skills have a significant role to play in determining the professional and moral outlook of individuals in exercising the technical skills. The Gandhian ashrams were pragmatic education centres oriented towards experience and practice of life skills and technical skills equipping one to face an uncertain future. As centres of experience, the ashrams offered the opportunity to interact, pray, eat, live and work together with members of different religions, caste and regions. In the ashram school moments of praying together and experiencing other religions,

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<sup>36</sup>Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 88-91.

<sup>37</sup>Even though the analysis of Gandhian ashrams seem to be meaningful from the perspective of 'learning to live together', its ingenuity in imparting life skills and technical skills makes it ideal for analysing from the perspective of learning to live together.



preparation of food in public kitchens, dining, and working together were occasions to shape one's life skills. The Gandhian ashrams in South Africa and India were exemplary centres of experiential interaction. One such occasion for interaction was the schools run in the ashrams. The school in Tolstoy farm, one of the first ashrams in South Africa had students from different religions and regions of India. The session on religions and reading from various scriptures equipped the students in such a way that "...while they must remain absolutely true to their own faiths, they should regard with equal respect those of their fellow-pupils."<sup>38</sup> Prayers in the ashrams was yet another occasion to experience other religions. Mark Thomson explains the practice of inter-faith prayer practised in the Tolstoy farm, "Before retiring at nine o'clock every night the settlers would join Gandhi in reading from the *Bhagavad Gita* and other religious scriptures, to pray and to sing devotional songs in English, Hindi and Gujarati."<sup>39</sup> The public preparation and eating food together in the ashram was a significant step in overcoming the sectarian, class and caste practices followed by the people in the privacy of their home. The practices such as eating from a common kitchen, cleaning of one's dish, taking turns to clean common pots touched the nerve of caste purity and pollution and the members of the ashram overcame the boundaries through these practices. The ashrams also imparted technical vocational skills. Gandhi also made efforts to impart technical training to members of ashram such as in tailoring and making sandals in South Africa and spinning to produce *khadi* (hand-woven cotton cloth) in India. Surendra Bhana highlights the initial efforts, "There was a "tailoring department" responsible for producing clothes generally suitable for outdoor life: trousers, and shirts made up of coarse blue cloth ... He specially dispatched Kallenbach to the Marianhill monastery near

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<sup>38</sup>Gandhi, "Public Letter to Ratan J. Tata," CWMG, Vol. 11, 1964, 252.

<sup>39</sup>Mark Thomson, *Gandhi and his Ashrams*, Popular Prakashan, 1993, 82 <<https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/gandhiebooks.htm>> (14 March 2018).

Pinetown to learn the skill of sandal-making.”<sup>40</sup>Effective teamwork was possible only by the formation of one's character, establishing an inter-personal relationship and equipping oneself to face the problems and finding means to resolve it fearlessly. The practice of life skills and technical skills disciplined the individual to discharge his duties towards himself, others and nature efficiently. Furthermore, the political actions during the time of Indian Independence were hands-on experience to display the discipline acquired.

The ashram communities were centres of disciplined political actions expressed through passive resistance in South Africa to *satyagraha*<sup>41</sup> in India. The long gaps in major political movements<sup>42</sup> led by Gandhi point to such a disciplined formation period. Weber argues that to treat these long periods as ‘lulls in Gandhi’s life’ provides a ‘limited view’ of reality. The focus during this period was on “self-discovery or anti-untouchability and other social works ... .”<sup>43</sup> The ashrams also equipped the *satyagrahis* to undertake the road to consensus. Joan Bondurant states, “The claim for *satyagraha* is that through the operation of non-violent action the truth as judged by the fulfilment of human needs will emerge in the form of a mutually

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<sup>40</sup>Surendra Bhana, “The Tolstoy Farm: Gandhi's Experiment in ‘Co-operative Commonwealth,’” *South African Historical Journal*, 7, no. 1, (1975): 88-100, 95.

<sup>41</sup>*Satyagraha* in the literal sense means 'holding firmly to truth'. It can also mean 'truth-force' or 'love-force'. *Satyagraha* consist of actions based on truth and non-violence practised in individual and societal level in diverse ways. Political campaigns during Indian freedom struggle was one such way. The one who practises *satyagraha* is called *satyagrahi*.

<sup>42</sup>The major political movements are: non-cooperation movement in 1921-22, civil disobedience movement in 1930-33 and quit India movement in 1942-43.

<sup>43</sup>Thomas Weber, “Gandhi Moves: Intentional Communities and Friendship,” in *Rethinking Gandhi and Nonviolent Relationality: Global Perspectives*, ed. Debjani Ganguly and John Docker, Oxon: Routledge, 2007, 83-99, 83.

satisfactory and agreed-upon solution."<sup>44</sup> Basing on Bondurant, Pantham identifies three operating principles of *satyagraha* that leads to consensus: admission of truth as relative, nonviolence and toleration, and the self-suffering of the *satyagrahis*.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the ideal experiences and insights of ashram life were shared with the world at large through various modes of communication. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, which contains all the writings and transcripts of speeches consist of 100 volumes with 50,000 pages, covers a period from 1884 to 1948 making it one of the largest collections written by any individual.<sup>46</sup> Together with literary, other forms of outreach such as the use of travelling bards, forming choirs and teaching patriotic songs in villages, use of magic lanterns, handwritten posters and graffiti were also used by *satyagrahis* to share the insights from ashram intended towards transforming the society.<sup>47</sup> Thus the ashram formation perspective equips one to respond to personal and societal challenges, especially during unfavourable circumstances and confront discrimination and injustice.

The essence of Gandhian ashrams in reinterpreting the pillar learning to do in knowledge societies is its emphasis on the committed discovery of technical skills and life skills. Knowledge societies rely heavily on technology and attaining technical skills is of high priority. Gandhian vision cautions against an educational approach that prioritises technical skills over life skills. It calls for a balance between technical skills with life skills. Life skills give necessary orientation to work in groups, nurture creativity, create social responsibility and to adapt to rapid changes. Just as Gandhian ashrams were meeting

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<sup>44</sup>Joan Valérie Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, Berkely: University of California Press, 1969, 195.

<sup>45</sup>Thomas Pantham, "Thinking with Mahatma Gandhi: Beyond Liberal Democracy," *Political Theory* 11, no. 2, (May 1983): 165-188, 179.

<sup>46</sup>Peter Gonsalves, *Clothing for Liberation: A Communication Analysis of Gandhi's Swadeshi Revolution*, Los Angeles: Sage Publication, 2010, 4.

<sup>47</sup>Nikhil Chakravarty, "Mahatma Gandhi: The Great Communicator," *Gandhi Marg* 16, no. 4, (January 1995): 389-397, 393.

points of the other with a diversity of region, religion, philosophy and character, imparting education should also create such occasion in schools to understand the other. These interactions orient the individuals to overcome prejudices and discriminations, choose consensus than combat and above all to use technology for the betterment of society. Furthermore, it emphasizes the centrality of the human person in the uncertain future of the constantly evolving knowledge societies. In moments of challenges, it is the warmth of human interaction that can lead us to the shores of hope.

### **3.3 Learning to Live Together and Constructive Programme**

Learning to live together is an essential focus in education to ensure peaceful coexistence in a knowledge society. It explores the possibility of resolving conflicts and establishing peace by developing respect for individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures and upholding various spiritual values. Teaching non-violence in schools is one of the means to overcome prejudice. However, a competitive spirit, quest for individual success, ruthless economic warfare, and the increasing rich and poor division pose more challenges. Education should face these challenges by the twin foci of enabling the gradual discovery of others and create occasions that could enhance the experiences of shared purposes throughout life. Subjects such as geography, foreign languages and literature have to be taught in such a way that it creates awareness about the diversity, similarities and interdependence of the human race. It also calls for helping the individual to know oneself so that they could better understand the other. Teachers have to be role models who can guide students to encounter others through dialogue and debate. Learning to live together also encourages collective efforts such as involvement in sports, cultural and social activities, which has the power to erase the tensions between social classes and nationalities. Educational organizations and voluntary bodies have to provide occasions for these joint efforts even after the

students leave school to facilitate the quest for peaceful coexistence.<sup>48</sup>

Gandhi offers the pragmatic vision of learning to live together in the constructive programme that is oriented towards gradual discovery of the other and working together towards shared purposes. The constructive programme conceives the overall development of society taking into account the spiritual, social, and economic aspects. The spirit of truth and non-violence pervades this initiative too. According to Gandhi,

The constructive programme may otherwise and more fittingly be called construction of *poorna swaraj* or complete Independence by truthful and non-violent means...[it] means the independence of every unit, be it the humblest of the nation, without distinction of race, colour or creed.<sup>49</sup>

Hardiman outlines the principles associated with the constructive programme: "The programme incorporated principles such as *swadeshi* (home based production), in which a village, locality or nation would be as self-reliant as possible, *sarvodaya* (commitment to public welfare) and *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness)."<sup>50</sup> It also focused on several aspects such as communal unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, *khadi*, other village industries, village sanitation, new or basic education, adult education, women, education in health and hygiene, provincial language, the national language, and economic equality.

The spirit of identifying shared purposes in life consists not only in ensuring communal harmony but also in ensuring economic prosperity and social justice. The gradual discovery of the other and identifying the shared purposes in Gandhian context was necessitated to overcome the lingering suspicion, mutual contempt, dangerous rivalry and widening divisions among religious communities. Thus communal unity appears

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<sup>48</sup>Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 91-94.

<sup>49</sup>M. K. Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, 1941, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2014, 5.

<sup>50</sup>David Hardiman, *Gandhi in his Time and Ours*, London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2003, 77.

first in the list of constructive programme. This unity is not an externally imposed political unity but 'unbreakable heart unity'. As a practical means, he asks the members of the Congress to 'cultivate personal friendship' with persons of other faith. It is this personal friendship and not creation of separate electorates that would bring 'living unity' in India and would remove the despicable practices of segregation practised in the society. Achieving this communal unity will lead to attainment of political unity as its natural fruit.<sup>51</sup> The Gandhian constructive programme also includes programmes for ensuring social justice such as *swadeshi*, *sarvodaya* and the concept of trusteeship. Gandhi states that his idea of *swadeshi* emphasizes on decentralization and the self-sufficiency of villages. He states, "The broad definition of *swadeshi* is the use of all home-made things to the exclusion of foreign things, in so far as such use is necessary for the protection of home-industry, more especially those industries without which India will become pauperized."<sup>52</sup> Emphasizing on the second point of the constructive programme namely Khadi or homespun cloth, Gandhi says, "It means a wholesale *swadeshi* mentality, a determination to find all the necessities of life in India and that too through the labour and intellect of the villagers."<sup>53</sup> Gandhi's idea of trusteeship consists of bridging the disparity of labour and capital, and which leads to a better relationship between the rich and poor. Patil and Lokapur state that "His trusteeship theory involved the transfer of accumulated private wealth to community ownership, where labourers and peasants are co-partners with capitalists and landlords."<sup>54</sup>

The essence of Gandhian constructive programme is the open-minded discovery of the other to reinterpret learning to live together for knowledge societies. Technology in knowledge

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<sup>51</sup>Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, 6.

<sup>52</sup>Gandhi, "Some Knotty Points," in CWMG, Vol. 31, 1969, 248.

<sup>53</sup>Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, 9.

<sup>54</sup>V. T. Patil and I. A. Lokapur, "Gandhi's Concept of Decentralisation: An Analysis," *Studies on Gandhi*, ed. V. T. Patil, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1983, 120-151, 116.

societies has created a situation where it is possible to remain disconnected from real human persons and stay connected virtually and get things delivered to our doorsteps. The Gandhian constructive programme emphasizes on the need to remain connected with human persons in real and virtual social networks. Education in a knowledge society would remain incomplete without a proper understanding of social reality. It is the interaction and understanding of the other that plays a vital role in ensuring social harmony. The real-world social networking should motivate the human person not only to connect but to make the world a better place to live in. Rather than using global technology as a tool to exploit local resources for corporate profit, it should be used to ensure economic prosperity by exploring local resources. Thus, Gandhian vision provides the valuable insight for knowledge societies that learning to live together should be thought together with ensuring societal harmony, economic prosperity and social justice.

### **3.4 Learning to Be and *Swaraj***

Contrary to the importance given to physical abilities in industrial societies, knowledge societies require all-round development of the individuals, which includes mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibility and spiritual values. With the risk of dehumanization by technology and the multitudes of challenges posed by media, education has to enable people to remain in control of their lives and develop their talents by ensuring freedom of thought, judgement, feeling and imagination. Response to these challenges of alienating systems can also be a ground for progress. The source of safeguarding creativity and innovation are the ability to get provoked by the challenges, diversity of people's personalities and their independence and initiative. The quest for social and economic innovation must not be at the cost of imagination and creativity. There is a need to provide the opportunity for discovery and experiment in the fields of aesthetic, artistic, sporting, scientific, cultural and social fields

and making them aware of the creations of the contemporary and earlier generations. Education should lead one to a continuous maturing of personality and successful working life by ensuring a gradual development, which begins by knowing oneself and then opening to the reality of the other.<sup>55</sup>

Gandhi's idea of *swaraj* captures the vision of learning to be in its fullest. The overall development of the individual by the discovery and disciplining of the self is the focus of *swaraj*. It is only through knowing oneself that one can open oneself to the other or dream of acquiring complete independence of the society or *poorna swaraj*. In the context of struggle for Indian independence, Gandhi states, "...if we become free, India is free. And in this thought you have a definition of *Swaraj*. It is *Swaraj* when we learn to rule ourselves ... *Swaraj* has to be experienced, by each one for himself."<sup>56</sup> Experiencing *swaraj* involves individuals attaining self-mastery through self-discipline. Attainment of self-mastery involves the practice of vows,<sup>57</sup> which also displays and inculcates a sense of respect for the traditions. Manisha Barua highlights the fact that together with the traditional vows, Gandhi gave a new outlook and socio-religious context to them by the addition of six more *niyamas* (casual virtues): "*shrma* (bread labour), *aswad* (non-attachment to taste or palate), *swadeshi* (use of the product nearest to one's place), *sarvatra bhaya varjana* (fearlessness), *sparsha bhavana* (removal of all kinds of untouchability by birth or race), *sarva*

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<sup>55</sup>Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 94-95.

<sup>56</sup>M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 1909, Delhi: Rajpal & Sons, 2009, 53.

<sup>57</sup>*Yamas* (cardinal virtues) and *Niyamas* (casual virtues) are the traditional vows. "*Yamas*, the cardinal virtues, according to Yoga Shastra are: *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-possession); and the *niyamas* or the casual virtues are, according to the same authority: *shaucha* (bodily purity), *santoshya* (contentment), *tapa* (forbearance), *swadhyaya* (study of scriptures), *iswarapranidhana* (resignation to the will of God)." Gandhi, "Hinduism of Today," CWMG, Vol. 29, 1968, 444n1.



*dharma samanatva* (equal respect for all religions).<sup>58</sup> Thus Gandhi was both rooted in tradition and open to changes.

The practice of vows helps one to take control of oneself. Gandhi states, "To do at any cost something that one ought to do constitutes a vow."<sup>59</sup> Bindu Puri comments on this statement linking vows to virtues, "...Gandhian virtues were also vows or rather one could cultivate virtues by taking vows that is, by strengthening the individual will to do the right thing."<sup>60</sup> Approaching it from a different perspective, she states that virtues are not vows but dispositions of character. The right disposition of character is necessary "...to develop the intellectual ability to 'see' things and others clearly without the distortions caused by self-deception."<sup>61</sup> She also makes an interesting observation on taking the vows and the individual's free will. She states that Gandhi "... was not recommending mindless conformity to a law or moral rule but advising them to take the help of vows in order to strengthen their will and avoid the temptation, which prevented the practice of virtue."<sup>62</sup> Gandhi would seek full commitment and not 'as far as possible' in taking and persisting with the vows and not "...doubt the necessity of vows for the purpose of self-purification and self-realisation."<sup>63</sup> This leads to the experience of *swaraj*, which escapes the scrutiny of reason. "The reader will not ask me or himself how these vows can possibly advance *swaraj*. It is not a matter for demonstration through reason."<sup>64</sup> Gandhi connects the idea of *swaraj* and *satyagraha* in connection with individual and collective freedom. Identifying this relation, Puri observes

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<sup>58</sup>Manisha Barua, *Religion and Gandhian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2002, 63–64.

<sup>59</sup>M. K Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir: Ashram Observances*, 1932, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1992, 30.

<sup>60</sup>Bindu Puri, *The Tagore-Gandhi Debate on Matters of Truth and Untruth*, New Delhi: Springer, 2015, 54.

<sup>61</sup>Puri, *The Tagore-Gandhi Debate on Matters of Truth and Untruth*, 54.

<sup>62</sup>Puri, *The Tagore-Gandhi Debate on Matters of Truth and Untruth*, 55.

<sup>63</sup>Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, 30.

<sup>64</sup>Gandhi, "Notes," CWMG, Vol. 45, 1971, 249.

that Satyagraha is essential to realize and protect *swaraj*.<sup>65</sup> Dalton observes that *satyagraha* as the way to realize *swaraj* also shows the unity of means and end relation, which Gandhian philosophy insists.<sup>66</sup> The realization of *swaraj* as collective freedom through individual self-rule is possible “only by a practice of virtues with pre-eminence given to *ahimsa*/non-violence.”<sup>67</sup> Gandhi makes this clear when he writes, “This *satyagraha* is India’s distinctive weapon ... It is an unfailing source of strength ... He who knows its power cannot but use it. Even as the eyelashes automatically protect the eyes, so does *satyagraha*, when kindled, automatically protect the freedom of the soul.”<sup>68</sup> Another transformation that individual experience in the relation of *swaraj* and *satyagraha* is fearlessness. Puri states, “To pursue truth by non-violently resisting the opposing other one had to completely disregard the concern for oneself or one’s possession. In this view, *satyagraha* led an individual to experience freedom from fear for her body, possessions and attachments.”<sup>69</sup> Thus *swaraj* equips individuals to take control of their lives and assert their freedom rather than surrender to external influences.

The essence of the Gandhian idea of *swaraj* to reinterpret learning to be is the diligent discovery of the self. A striking feature of the knowledge societies is the free flow of information. Maintaining the veracity of information and implementing proper checks and balances are continuously turning out to be ineffective. The human person is increasingly externally controlled to influence public and private decision making by manufacturing and propagation of disinformation and fake news and unethical breach into personal information for user-specific advertisements. The Gandhian idea of *swaraj* is an

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<sup>65</sup>Puri, *The Tagore-Gandhi Debate on Matters of Truth*, 147-153.

<sup>66</sup>Dalton, Dennis. *Gandhi’s Power: Nonviolence in Action*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, 25.

<sup>67</sup>Puri, *The Tagore-Gandhi Debate on Matters of Truth*, 149.

<sup>68</sup>Gandhi, “Speech at Gujarat Political Conference-I,” CWMG, Vol. 14, 1965, 64.

<sup>69</sup>Puri, *The Tagore-Gandhi Debate on Matters of Truth*, 150.

essential reminder for human persons to regain control of themselves in the context of knowledge societies. Educational systems in knowledge societies have to focus on human persons and nurture their ability to take control of their lives and attain self-mastery. Contextual and pragmatic means have to be explored to practice self-discipline and attain self-mastery. Rather than making one ease into the enormity and uniformity of the global village, they have to be taught to explore the uniqueness and diversity of the local context.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Gandhian philosophy and practice, when analysed through the prism of four pillars of education, refracts with hues of insights for education in knowledge societies. These insights inspire and prepare one to undertake four discoveries essential for a human person in a knowledge society based on UNESCO's four pillars of education and Gandhian *Nai Talim*, ashrams, constructive programme and *swaraj*. The four discoveries are: creative and contextual discovery of academic subjects and vocational training, committed discovery of technical and life skills, the open-minded discovery of the other diligent discovery of the self. Rather than being passive spectators and meek collaborators of the technological marvels of the knowledge society, these discoveries assist the human person to be actively involved with inner freedom, confidence, skills, creativity and openness to the other. Moreover, these discoveries assist in response to unprecedented challenges posed by the knowledge societies. The contextual discovery of academic subjects and vocational training encourages one to systematically update oneself to the regular and novel innovations in academic and technological fields. This also helps one to remain rooted to context yet open to change rather than getting washed away by the dominant global narratives. The discovery of technical and life skills enable one to research the available information and explore the potential of technology to manage the present better, plan and envision the future of humanity in areas such as urban and rural planning, healthcare, employment opportunities and social security. An

open-minded discovery of the other can control individual, national and corporate temptations to manipulate information from the big data in the knowledge societies for discrimination based on race, region and religion. Being faced with 'psychographic micro-targeting' based on digital footprints to externally influence opinion, on being provoked by the flurry of sensational fake-news and various other innovative marketing strategies, it is the discovery of the self, which equips one for a considered response that maintains one's individuality and freedom. The insights of visionaries such as Gandhi have to be reinvented to hold up the sail to harness the winds of opportunities and weather the storm of challenges in the knowledge societies. Thus, we can envision a stable and sustainable knowledge society with morally upright, socially responsible, environmentally conscious, academically updated, technically innovative, contextually situated and globally open citizens.