

# PHILOSOPHY OF MAHATMA GANDHI ON ARTS/PERFORMING ARTS IN EDUCATION – HIS EXPLANATION OF THE METACOGNITIVE ARTISTIC PROCESS VALIDATED BY 21<sup>ST</sup>-CENTURY RESEARCH AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE POST COVID- 19 WORLD

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## Abstract

*The processes of reflection which the artist goes through, as he starts from raw material towards shaping his work, polishing and perfecting - is at the center of much scientific research. "It is fundamental to know the neuro-function processes behind this inevitability of autonomous cognitive change through engagement in art, that is, when the mind engages itself metacognitively from block clay to sculpture or from story to dramatized play or dance" (Merlin, 2006). But it may take decades to obtain clear-cut scientific answers. Based on the educational explanations of eminent philosophers like the most prominent Indian nationalistic figure, Mahatma Gandhi - this paper analyzes the metacognitive artistic process which is being validated today by 21<sup>st</sup>-century research. In this modern world, Arts/Performing Arts education have been for very long discarded in education because firstly - these disciplines are among the most unmarketable subjects in education; and secondly, but most importantly - they yield too long-term results, specially, in this present world context where results are required at a 'fast-food' pace even at the cost of artificiality. Yet two direct offshoots of the Arts/Performing Arts in education are Creativity and Ethical Values which work towards the capacity for Re-Invention and a spirit for Global Collaboration, respectively - two key requirements for the essential functioning of the Covid 19 and post-Covid 19 world.*

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**Keywords:** *Metacognitive Artistic Process, Arts/Performing Arts Education, Educational Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, Re-Invention, Global Collaboration*

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The Covid-19 pandemic has been interpreted by many, as a grudge and therefore a revenge on the part of nature or the planet against its excessive exploitation by man. Whatever way this phenomenon is being explained, interpreted or defined - the fact remains that Mother Nature is not the only one suffocating under excess production and consumption, but man is equally suffocating under the pressure of growing inequalities and poverty worldwide.

The Covid-19 struggle is making it crystal-clear that a holistic and global approach is the key to proceed on, with the evolution of the human species. Empathy and humanness must be at the core heart of production and consumerism. Therefore the greatest question at the very start of this pandemic age is - how do we replace global competition by global collaboration? The holistic approach of Mahatma Gandhi to education relates directly to this Covid-19 master key requirement i.e. 'Global Collaboration', through his philosophy of the all-round development of the Inner and the Outer man. The second even more suffocating question is - how do we rethink, how do we re-invent the world? - a world now where there is no predictability possible - a world where what is wrong and what is right changes day by day. It seems that in no way can we foresee the consequences of something so devastating where we have passed beyond 1 million deaths. Yet we all know that in order to redefine the future world, we are compelled to rethink it in-depth and be as creative and re-creative as possible, through a strategy of adaptation and re-adaptation. A second Covid-19 master key requirement which is 'Re-Invention' relates directly also to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of the development of the "creative urges innate in every human breast".

Mahatma Gandhi perceived arts/performing arts in education - which he called "aesthetic education", as a compulsory balance with literary/academic pursuit. Decades back, explanations of Mahatma Gandhi given about the metacognitive artistic process is being today validated through research studies. "Working on a craft or the arts [Gandhi-ji explains] will involve planning, experimenting and reflection - hence, will accustom the child to look closely, to attend to details and to measure correctly, thus developing observation. It also develops

the child's imagination, for he must visualize in advance what he expects to make. It develops his reflection and encourages the ordination of the process by putting to work all the senses and organs" (Bhatia, 1996). In line with Gandhi-ji's above explanations of the artistic process, the Ohio Department of Education in US today advocates the Arts/ Performing Arts to be strong tools because they involve the metacognitive artistic process which Anderson (2004) describes as consisting of "careful consideration of intents, purposes, techniques and processes;" where students "learn to take control of their own learning by understanding how to set goals, monitoring their progress, hence developing the metacognitive capacity of knowing and understanding their own thinking processes and strategies in order to continuously improve them." Below is a brief summary of the above main features of Gandhi-ji's explanations of the metacognitive artistic process and their corresponding 21<sup>st</sup>-century research evidences:-

## THE METACOGNITIVE ARTISTIC PROCESS

### Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Research Evidences

(Anderson, 2004)

- "Planning, Experimenting, Reflection" ..... "Careful consideration of intents, purposes, techniques & processes"
- "Imagination & Visualization in advance" ..... "Learn to take control of one's own learning"
- "To look closely" ..... "Understanding how to set goals"
- "To attend to details" ..... "Monitoring progress & develop strategies to continuously improve oneself"
- "To measure correctly" ..... "Developing metacognitive capacity of knowing one's own thinking processes"
- "Developing observation, reflection" ..... "Understanding one's own thinking processes"

There are also astounding parallels between those same (above) explanations of Gandhi-ji given on the metacognitive artistic process of an arts or craft-centered education and 21<sup>st</sup>-century research evidences in the field of music. Researchers in the field have pointed that self-regulatory practices form an important component of effective instrumental practice (Bartolome, 2009; Oare, 2011). According to McPherson & Renwick (2011), advanced musicians are able to monitor their practice by focusing on aspects of their playing that can be improved and by seeking help from others when facing difficulties. Other self-regulating strategies are also used (Oare, 2011) : setting clear, measurable and timely goals; creating effective strategies for practice; developing ways of self-monitoring progress and adjusting accordingly; structuring optimal learning conditions; seeking out advice and information as needed; and displaying persistence during times of struggle. These acquired habits of practice through the engaged study in the arts/performing arts can be deliberately put to use when transferred to other contexts of learning - hence the link between bridging the arts/performing arts and academic studies. Below is a brief summary of the above main features of Gandhi-ji's explanations of the metacognitive artistic process and the corresponding 21<sup>st</sup>-century research evidences on Advanced Musicians:-

## ADVANCED MUSICIANS

### Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Research Evidences

(Bartolome, 2009; Oare, 2011)

- "Planning, Experimenting, Reflection" ..... "Self-regulatory practices as important component of effective instrumental practice"
- "Imagination & Visualization in advance" ..... "Setting clear, measurable, timely goals"
- "To look closely" ..... "Developing ways of self-monitoring progress & adjusting accordingly"
- "To attend to details" ..... "Seeking out advice & information as needed & displaying persistence during times of struggle"
- "To measure correctly" ..... "Structuring optimal learning conditions"
- "Developing observation, reflection" ..... "Creating effective strategies for practice"

Another set of striking parallels exist between the above explanations of Mahatma Gandhi given on the metacognitive artistic process and studio habits which have been captured as resulting benefits of Visual Art classes (Hetland et al., 2007): i) **Envisioning** – a process of mental formation of images towards solution and guidance to problems, including the planning of steps to move ahead.

ii) **Reflection** – art-working is characterized by stepping back repeatedly to cast a new look, each time re-analyzing with self-judgment and an auto-critical eye, to the point of having to re-conceive entirely the achieved production, if needed.

**iii)Expression** – the student’s move beyond technicalities of a work of art which call for a capacity to transcend the depth and intensity of emotions and moods, hence shifting the entire focus of expressions on the core of one’s individuality, through voice or vision.

**iv)Persistence** – i.e. sustainability in the effort over uninterrupted spans of time, hence demonstrating a capacity to persevere beyond meaningful problems and frustrations.

**v)Observation** – the students maintain a precise and neutral perception during their training in continuous observation, whilst spelling out totally the element of expectation – in other words, allowing involvement in a process of just ‘seeing’.

**vi)Innovation** – students extrapolate their acquired creative sense so as to move beyond what they have known i.e. using his central skill to explore the unknown to the extent of deliberately allowing for the possibility for mistakes to bring about unexpected discoveries.

**vii)Making connections** – establishing a connecting bridge between schoolwork and the world outside classroom, hence drawing parallels between their own art and professional work.

‘Transfer’ hypotheses resulting from the above study, remain to be tested i.e. the extent to which the out-coming habits acquired through art-learning transfer to non-artistic domains. Below is a brief summary of the main features of Gandhi’s explanations of the metacognitive artistic process and the corresponding 21<sup>st</sup>-century research evidences on Visual Art Classes:-

## VISUAL ART CLASSES

### Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Research Evidences

(Hetland et al., 2007)

“Imagination & Visualization in advance” .....”Envisioning=mental formation of solutions to problems & steps to move ahead” “To look closely” .....”Reflection=auto-critical eye to the point of

re-conceiving entirely the achieved work”

“To attend to details” .....”Expression=student’s move beyond technicalities of artwork”

“To measure correctly” .....”Observation=maintain neutral perceptions”

“Developing observation, reflection” .....”Innovation=students use creative sense to move beyond from known to unknown”

“Balance between intellectual &.....”Making connections=connecting bridge practical phases of experience” between classroom & outside world”

Therefore Mahatma Gandhi was much ahead in his avant-gardist philosophical explanations of the metacognitive artistic process in the mind of the one who receives an arts/performing arts education. Although Gandhi-ji did not himself call his explanations in a scientific way, as the ‘metacognitive artistic process’, the term being used by today’s 21<sup>st</sup>-century research, but he believed that intellectual progress was possible only through activity which is purposive and productive - hence his belief in aesthetic education as the core of his educational philosophy for the cultivation of the imagination and the creative urge of man.

A master key-requirement of the Covid 19 and after-Covid 19 world is Re-invention. The first and foremost requirement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for quality and innovation has been accelerated by the Covid and post-Covid world. Mahatma Gandhi emphasizes the cultivation of imagination through the arts/performing arts education which develop the creative urge for self-expression. He says that “Creative urges are innate in every human breast”. Shri Aurobindo Ghose had made a very clear distinction between the individual with a rich and varied storehouse of information and the individual who uses these units of information in both an original, constructive way – this is called ‘creative’ (Pani, 1997). In the present 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of America’s foremost experts on Learning Organization, Peter Senge says that from a very early age, we are taught to break problems apart, to fragment the world. We can no longer see the consequences of our actions; we lose our intrinsic sense of connection to a larger whole....After a while we give up trying to see the whole altogether. Education in arts/performing arts can make the contribution of developing the ability of students to see and think in wholes. “Arts/performing arts in education is a groundwork, it is a valuable tool which students need so as to be successful in a world where ability to produce knowledge, to create, is at greater premium than before” (Business week, 1996). Decades back, Mahatma Gandhi had said exactly the same thing which applies to today’s urgency in the Covid and after-Covid world – he said that the arts and craft-centered education will give greater concreteness and reality to the knowledge acquired by children. The principle of correlation inherent to the study of the arts (& performing arts) will relate knowledge to life and other forms of knowledge. As children are to learn by doing, they will be able to satisfy many of their urges and achieve a balance as it were, between the intellectual and practical phases of experience. But the Mahatma’s philosophy of education is founded and functions directly on the underlying principle of Ahimsa i.e. non-violence against each other – in other words, this is a call for global collaboration rather than global confrontation & competition.

The other urgent master key-requirement of the Covid-19 world is Global Collaboration which requires an educational upbringing into the basic development of ethical values. In Mahatma Gandhi's explanation about a balanced education with the components of arts/performing arts, he points out that the child will thus acquire not the superficial literacy, but the real literacy of the whole personality. It was to be a starting point of other subjects as well as a "meeting point of both physical and social environment represented by such subjects as general science, social sciences and creative and expressional arts (Art work, Music). "Its effect on character in general is very wholesome, irrespective of the fact whether the craft or the art form is going to be one's vocation for life or just an antidote to that lethargy, listlessness and weakness of will which is not inconsistent with and which is very often generated by too much intellectual work" (Bhatia, 1996). Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy on the arts/performing arts in education can be applied universally since it also aligns with perceptions of philosophers/educationists from different world civilizations. For e. g. The Chinese philosopher Confucius perceives learning of the arts as a process whereby individuals grow in virtue and cultivate human goodness while becoming in tune with other people (Miller, 2012). In the Western civilization educational system which draws its essence from ancient Greece: Plato viewed singing, acting, dancing and drama as means of primary education for a child since they are forms of play which are in symbiosis with a child's natural impulses (Bury, 1937). Therefore, lessons taught through these mediums, help to keep interest and attention, leading to meaningful learning. To Socrates, rhythm and harmony (i.e. whether in color, sound, form, movement etc.) touch directly the soul (Dillon, 2004). Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi - 13th century Persian poet, a Sufi mystic and one of the greatest spiritual masters - was for the arts in education to restore equilibrium between the spiritual and physical existence. And this is exactly Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy about the training of the inner and the outer man whereby a balanced global approach to education must imperatively include the art/performing art subjects.

Way back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of education reflected his own philosophy of life – which is totally relevant to the present Covid-19 world. "The material possessions must be regarded only as a means, never an end in themselves. They are necessary for the advancement of the individual up to a certain point. Any inordinate hankering after them hinders rather than helps growth. After certain limits, they tend to work for the slavery of the individual" (Bhatia, 1996). In parallel to what Gandhi said, it is seen that the Covid-19 world is showing evidences that we have since long trespassed the limits; and now, Nature is imposing that we not only have to re-work things anew and be Creative but above all, this has to be done with Respect to the Basic Principle of Ahimsa, in other words, Togetherness/Global Collaboration - not global (unhealthy) competition - as this goes against the Natural Laws of Construction. Mahatma Gandhi is one of the greatest "avant-gardists" who brought profound thoughts about and pointed out in-depth effects of an arts & performing arts education on both the inner man and outer man - for e.g. through his explanations of the metacognitive artistic process. The two main offshoots of an arts/performing arts in education are vital because the development of ethical values will work towards implementing attitudes of 'Global Collaboration' while creativity development will work towards furthering one's capacity for 'Re-Invention', these are two urgent key-requirements of the post Covid-19 world - hence the gist of a Covid-19 message behind Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of education, which rests on these beliefs that formed the copingstone of his educational theory - the theory that worked out the shape of his Basic Scheme of Education.

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