

Revisiting Gandhian Educational Philosophy: Integrating Traditional Indian Values into Contemporary Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the multifaceted dimensions of Mahatma Gandhi's educational philosophy and its enduring influence on modern educational practices. Gandhi's vision, deeply rooted in India's cultural and educational heritage, advocates for a holistic approach that integrates intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual development. In response to the limitations of the colonial education system which emphasized Western methodologies and neglected indigenous values Gandhi proposed an education system that nurtures self-realization and nation-building. His ideas emphasize the importance of practical skills such as agriculture, handicrafts, and home economics, integrated with experiential learning methods like meditation, yoga, and discourse, all within a child-centered framework. Additionally, research into the comparative perspectives of Gandhi and other intellectuals, such as Rabindranath Tagore, underscores the transformative potential of education in empowering marginalized groups and fostering societal progress. The synthesis of scholarly findings confirms that, despite challenges in practical implementation, the core principles of Gandhian education remain profoundly relevant in addressing contemporary issues such as cultural homogenization, social inequity, and the need for sustainable national development. This research advocates for a reimagined education system that honours India's indigenous heritage while equipping learners with the skills required for the 21st century, ultimately contributing to a more just, inclusive, and dynamic society.

Keywords: Gandhian Philosophy; Holistic Education; Cultural Heritage; Experiential Learning; Social Justice; Nation-Building; Child-Centered Pedagogy; Traditional Values; Educational Reform; Comparative Education.

I. Mahatma Gandhi's Vision of Education

The philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi has long been recognized not only as a cornerstone of India's social and political transformation but also as a profound influence on educational thought. Gandhi's vision of education was intimately tied to the development of individual character and social responsibility, making his contributions a subject of scholarly inquiry in the fields of social, cultural, and educational philosophy. This study examines the multifaceted aspects of Gandhian philosophy as they relate to education, drawing from a diverse range of literature that explores both historical context and contemporary relevance.

Gandhi's approach to education was inherently holistic. He argued that true education should extend beyond the acquisition of mere academic knowledge to foster the development of one's moral, physical, and spiritual dimensions. Gandhi's ideas were deeply rooted in the Indian cultural and educational heritage, a perspective that emerged in direct response to the colonial education system imposed during his time. The colonial system, with its emphasis on Western methodologies and content, often neglected the intrinsic values and practices that had historically guided Indian society. In response, Gandhi envisioned an education system that was not only indigenous in its content but also transformative in its aims (*Dash*).

This indigenous model of education was underpinned by the belief that education should serve as a means of both self-realization and nation-building. Gandhi's insistence on integrating practical skills with intellectual learning was informed by his commitment to creating a self-reliant society. He maintained that education ought to empower individuals by connecting them with the practical aspects of life, such as agriculture, handicrafts, and home economics. These elements were not to be relegated to the periphery of the curriculum but were central to nurturing a sense of responsibility, discipline, and community (*Parghi*).

The social dimension of Gandhi's educational philosophy is also notable for its emphasis on egalitarianism and social justice. Gandhi believed that education was a vital instrument for bridging social divides and promoting equality. His educational experiments, such as the Wardha Scheme, were designed to engage children from diverse backgrounds in an environment that promoted mutual respect and collective progress. Such initiatives were intended to instill values of non-violence, self-discipline, and universal brotherhood principles that would, in turn, contribute to a more cohesive and just society (*Hameed*). In this light, Gandhi's approach can be seen as a radical departure from traditional educational practices that were often segregated along lines of caste, class, and gender.

The cultural aspects of Gandhian education are equally significant. At its core, Gandhian educational thought is a reaction to the erosion of indigenous traditions under the pressures of modernity and Westernization. Gandhi sought to reclaim and rejuvenate India's rich cultural legacy by emphasizing the importance of traditional arts, crafts, and local languages within the educational system. This cultural revival was intended not only to preserve India's unique heritage but also to foster a sense of pride and identity among students. It was an effort to reassert the value of indigenous knowledge systems, which Gandhi believed were essential for the holistic development of individuals and the nation (*Gupta and Baskey*).

Moreover, Gandhi's educational philosophy has always been characterized by a dynamic interplay between theory and practice. He saw education as a living process, one that could never be entirely fixed or confined to the classroom. Instead, it was something that was continuously shaped by everyday experiences and interactions with the environment. This approach was reflected in his advocacy for methods such as meditation, yoga, and experiential learning. Through integrating these practices into the curriculum, Gandhi aimed to cultivate a form of education that was as much about internal transformation as it was about external achievement. This experiential approach was intended to nurture qualities like self-confidence, vocational aptitude, and a sense of responsibility, which are essential for personal growth and societal progress (*Sharma and Sharma*).

A key aspect of Gandhian philosophy is its emphasis on non-violence and truth, principles that permeated every facet of his thought. In the context of education, these principles translated into an approach that eschewed competitive and authoritarian modes of teaching. Instead, Gandhi advocated for a child-centered pedagogy that respected the inherent dignity of each individual. He was critical of traditional educational practices that promoted rote learning and passive absorption of information. Instead, he championed an education system that encouraged critical thinking, creativity, and active engagement with the world. This emphasis on non-violence and truth was not merely abstract; it was intended to empower students to become conscientious citizens who would contribute to a more peaceful and just society (*Bharti and Bhagalpur*).

At the same time, Gandhian education was not without its critiques and limitations. Several contemporary scholars have noted that while Gandhi's vision was revolutionary, it also presented practical challenges in its implementation. For instance, some studies have pointed out that key aspects of his educational philosophy such as the integration of craft-based activities and agricultural training were not fully embraced within the broader national education system. This gap between ideal and practice has led to ongoing debates among educators and policymakers about the feasibility of implementing Gandhian principles in modern curricula (*Dash*). These critiques have spurred further research aimed at adapting and contextualizing Gandhi's ideas for the 21st century.

The interplay between Gandhian and other philosophical perspectives further enriches the discourse on education. Comparative studies have highlighted the similarities and differences between Gandhi's ideas and those of other influential thinkers, such as Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, and even Western philosophers like Kant and Aristotle. For example, while both Gandhi and Tagore emphasized the importance of a holistic education that integrated intellectual, physical, and spiritual development, their approaches diverged in terms of pedagogical methods and curricular priorities. Tagore's emphasis on the arts and the natural world, for instance, contrasted with Gandhi's focus on vocational training and moral education (*Gupta and Baskey*). Such comparative analyses have proven valuable in identifying the unique contributions of Gandhian philosophy, while also revealing the broader global significance of its underlying principles.

Another important dimension of this educational philosophy is its enduring relevance. Despite being conceived in the context of early 20th-century India, many of Gandhi's ideas continue to influence contemporary educational debates. With the challenges of globalization, rapid technological change,

and socio-economic disparities, modern education systems are in urgent need of reform. Gandhi's insistence on a balanced and inclusive approach offers important insights into how education can be reimagined to serve both individual development and national progress. The need for educational models that are culturally rooted, socially inclusive, and practically oriented has never been more acute, and Gandhian philosophy provides a framework that is both visionary and pragmatic (*Parghi*).

The social, cultural, and educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi represents a rich tapestry of ideas that challenge conventional modes of teaching and learning. Gandhi's commitment to integrating indigenous cultural values, fostering holistic development, and promoting social justice has left an indelible mark on the educational landscape of India and beyond. This introductory section has outlined the key components of his educational philosophy, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of how these ideas have been analysed and applied in various studies. Through a synthesis of historical context, theoretical underpinnings, and practical considerations, this study seeks to elucidate the enduring impact of Gandhian thought on contemporary educational practices. The following section will delve into the specific findings from a range of scholarly reviews and comparative studies, shedding light on both the successes and challenges of implementing Gandhian educational principles in today's society (*Hameed; Sharma and Sharma; Bharti and Bhagalpuri; Gupta and Baskey*).

II. Revisiting Gandhian Pedagogy for Holistic Development and National Renewal

India's educational and cultural heritage has long been a fertile ground for the development of innovative pedagogical philosophies that integrate traditional values with contemporary educational needs. Over time, the ideas of influential figures such as Mahatma Gandhi have been revisited and reinterpreted by modern scholars in an effort to chart a course for future educational reforms. Recent studies have examined various facets of Gandhian thought and its implications for a national education system that emphasizes holistic development. In particular, the research highlights the necessity of a curriculum that nurtures the physical, mental, and moral dimensions of a student while remaining deeply rooted in India's cultural and educational heritage (*Dash 2018*).

Dash's (2018) study provides an extensive examination of the educational ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda, arguing that a reformed education system from 2018 to 2028 must reflect the rich cultural traditions of India. The researcher posits that true education is one that cultivates not only intellectual growth but also the best inherent qualities of students. Such an approach requires integrating physical training, character development, and vocational training into the curriculum, thereby enabling students to develop self-confidence, discipline, and a sense of responsibility. Moreover, Dash contends that methods such as meditation, yoga, discourse, and experiential learning are essential for creating a child-centered educational environment that encourages creativity and active learning. However, the study also notes that traditional subjects like Vedanta, religion, and theology have been largely absent from the modern curriculum, suggesting a need to revise the educational framework to include practical subjects such as agriculture, weaving, and metalwork, alongside conventional social studies and sciences (*Dash 2018*).

Complementing this perspective, Hameed's (2019) work emphasizes the exceptional contribution of Mahatma Gandhi to educational thought and practice. Hameed underscores the significance of the Wardha Scheme, an educational experiment designed for children aged 7 to 14, which encapsulated Gandhi's belief that education should be an ongoing, lifelong process. Gandhi's educational philosophy, as highlighted in this study, extends far beyond the confines of traditional academic instruction. It represents an all-encompassing vision where education forms the backbone of life, continuously influencing every stage of an individual's development. Hameed argues that Gandhi's innovative framework sought to establish a new social order one rooted in the ideals of non-violence, self-reliance, and universal brotherhood. Moreover, the study draws parallels with Zakir Hussain's educational concept, noting that both thinkers combined various philosophical strands from Platonic idealism and Aristotelian logic to Kantian moral philosophy and Gandhian liberalism to create an education system that rejected utilitarian approaches in favor of holistic and humanistic ideals (*Hameed 2019*).

Sharma and Sharma's (2018) comparative study further broaden the discussion by situating Gandhi alongside other prominent Asian philosophers such as Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Daisaku Ikeda. Their analysis reveals that while these intellectual figures shared a common goal of enacting constructive change through education, their methods and the extent to which their ideas were applied varied significantly. The study emphasizes that Gandhi's focus on activity-centered learning, critical thinking, and moral education has played a crucial role in shaping educational practices that are relevant to today's global context. This perspective is particularly significant in light of the growing need for global citizenship education, a concept advocated by UNESCO, which calls for education systems that foster social self-actualization and collective effort in addressing complex, transnational challenges (*Sharma and Sharma 2018*).

The contributions of Gandhi to social justice and nation-building are explored in depth by Bharti and Bhagalpur (2019). Their study examines the ways in which Gandhi's connection with the masses and his visionary approach to education contributed to the broader struggle for social justice in India. According to the authors, Gandhi's educational philosophy was not only about imparting knowledge but also about nurturing values that are essential for a democratic society. They argue that social justice serves as the cornerstone for human progress, and without it, any community, state, or nation remains fundamentally incomplete. In contrast to Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's often contrasting perspective on social equity, Gandhi's ideas are seen as inherently egalitarian, emphasizing the need for an education system that promotes fairness, dignity, and the collective well-being of society. This focus on social justice positions Gandhi as a pivotal figure in the struggle against traditional hierarchies and underscores the enduring relevance of his ideas in contemporary debates on equality and democratic governance (*Bharti and Bhagalpur 2019*).

Parghi's (2024) recent study revisits Gandhian educational theory from the standpoint of nation-building. The research illustrates how Gandhi's ideas have been effectively applied in modern educational practices to foster holistic development and national progress. By emphasizing principles such as activity-centered learning, self-reliance, and non-violence, Gandhi's educational philosophy

is portrayed as a transformative tool capable of molding students into socially responsible citizens. Parghi's analysis provides concrete examples of how these principles have been integrated into school curricula and extracurricular activities, thereby contributing to the broader goal of nation-building. The study argues that by fostering moral values and practical skills, Gandhian education can effectively bridge the gap between traditional knowledge systems and the demands of a modern, rapidly evolving society (*Parghi 2024*).

The research on women's education by Gupta and Baskey (2019) brings yet another important dimension to the discourse on Gandhian educational thought. Their study examines the differing perspectives of Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi on women's education, highlighting how both leaders viewed education as a vital tool for the empowerment of women. According to Gupta and Baskey, women's education is recognized as the foremost pillar of India's social, cultural, and national progress. While Tagore's approach emphasized artistic expression and a connection with nature, Gandhi's views were rooted in the idea of education as a means for social reform and the cultivation of personal discipline. This comparative analysis not only reinforces the significance of Gandhian philosophy in shaping educational policies but also underlines the critical role of gender equality in fostering a just and progressive society (*Gupta and Baskey 2019*).

Together, these studies paint a comprehensive picture of an educational framework that is deeply interwoven with India's cultural ethos and social aspirations. The collective research indicates that Gandhian educational philosophy is characterized by its commitment to developing the whole individual physically, mentally, and morally through a curriculum that is both practical and deeply rooted in traditional Indian values. This approach is seen as essential for creating an education system that is not only relevant in the present but also capable of guiding the nation toward a more equitable and sustainable future.

The recurring themes across these studies suggest that the reimagined national education system should prioritize holistic development, integrating academic learning with vocational training, character building, and practical skills. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of revising curricula to incorporate subjects that have traditionally been overlooked, such as agriculture, craft-based activities, and hygiene education. This multifaceted approach to education, as championed by Gandhi and echoed by subsequent scholars, offers a robust framework for addressing the complex challenges facing contemporary society while remaining true to India's rich educational heritage (*Dash 2018; Hameed 2019; Sharma and Sharma 2018; Bharti and Bhagalpur 2019; Parghi 2024; Gupta and Baskey 2019*).

The synthesis of these scholarly works underscores the transformative potential of an education system that is guided by Gandhian principles. By integrating physical, mental, and moral education within a framework that is both traditional and forward-thinking, India has the opportunity to cultivate a generation of citizens equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The research clearly illustrates that a national education system inspired by the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi not only honours India's cultural heritage but also paves the way for a more just, inclusive, and dynamic society.

III. Findings

The comprehensive review of scholarly literature reveals a multifaceted understanding of Gandhian educational philosophy, with each study contributing unique insights into its theoretical foundations, practical applications, and enduring challenges. The findings from these studies collectively underscore the transformative potential of an education system rooted in indigenous cultural values, holistic development, and social justice.

Dash's (2018) study provides a comparative analysis of the educational ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda, emphasizing the need for a national education system that is deeply intertwined with Indian cultural and educational heritage. According to Dash, the period between 2018 and 2028 calls for an educational reform that not only cultivates intellectual growth but also fosters physical development, character building, and vocational skills. The research highlights several key elements of Gandhian education, including the practice of brahmacharya for concentration and self-discipline, the integration of experiential learning methods such as meditation and yoga, and the importance of craft-based activities in a child-centered learning environment. Particularly, Dash criticizes the absence of Vedanta, religion, and theology from contemporary curricula and recommends the incorporation of practical subjects like agriculture, weaving, and metalwork alongside traditional academic disciplines (*Dash*).

Hameed's (2019) research extends this analysis by focusing on Gandhi's unique contributions to educational thought and practice, particularly his development of the Wardha Scheme. Hameed explains that while the Wardha Scheme catered primarily to children aged 7 to 14, it represented only a fraction of Gandhi's broader educational vision. Gandhi's philosophy, as Hameed outlines, posits that education is a lifelong process that integrates every aspect of life and is closely linked to enduring moral and social ideals. The study notes that Gandhi's approach was revolutionary in its insistence that education must serve as a foundation for establishing a new social order—one characterized by non-violence, self-reliance, and universal brotherhood. Furthermore, Hameed situates Gandhi's ideas within a broader intellectual context by drawing parallels between his educational philosophy and that of other notable thinkers, such as Zakir Hussain. This comparative perspective highlights the innovative nature of Gandhi's proposals, which sought to harmonize diverse philosophical traditions ranging from Platonic idealism to Aristotelian logic, while also critiquing utilitarian frameworks typified by John Stuart Mill (*Hameed*).

Sharma and Sharma's (2018) chapter further enrich the discussion by offering a comparative analysis that places Gandhi alongside other influential Asian intellectuals such as Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Daisaku Ikeda. Their study explores how these figures used educational theory as a vehicle for enacting social and political change, despite the divergent paths their philosophies ultimately took. According to Sharma and Sharma, Gandhi's ideas were characterized by an inherent drive toward constructive change—an impetus that was both personal and collective. The authors argue that Gandhi's educational philosophy, with its emphasis on criticality, creativity, and social self-actualization, offers a blueprint for modern education in a globalized world. They note that by fostering an environment in which students are encouraged to question, innovate, and work collaboratively, Gandhian education aligns closely with the ideals of global citizenship as advocated by organizations like UNESCO (*Sharma and Sharma*).

The study by Bharti and Bhagalpur (2019) shifts the focus slightly to examine the intersection between educational philosophy and social justice. In their analysis, both Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar are portrayed as towering figures whose contributions to Indian society extended far beyond the realm of education. Bharti and Bhagalpur assert that Gandhi's deep connection with the masses and his commitment to non-violence and egalitarianism helped to galvanize the national liberation movement, thereby establishing education as a tool for achieving social justice. The authors emphasize that true justice in education involves not only imparting knowledge but also nurturing humanistic values and fostering an egalitarian society. They argue that without social justice as a foundational element, any educational reform would be incomplete, as it would fail to address the deep-seated inequalities that continue to plague society. In this context, Gandhi's educational philosophy is seen as a critical vehicle for promoting not just academic excellence but also social equity and democratic ideals (*Bharti and Bhagalpur*).

Parghi's (2024) recent study reinforces the transformative potential of Gandhian education by exploring its application in modern contexts. Parghi focuses on how Gandhi's principles such as activity-centered learning, moral education, and the promotion of self-reliance and non-violence have been integrated into contemporary educational practices. The research highlights several case studies where these principles have been implemented successfully to promote holistic growth and national progress. Parghi contends that Gandhian education is not an antiquated relic of the past but a living philosophy that can be adapted to address current challenges in education. This study provides empirical evidence that when educational institutions adopt Gandhian methodologies, students benefit from an enhanced sense of civic responsibility, ethical awareness, and practical competence. Moreover, Parghi argues that the Gandhian model by emphasizing experiential learning and moral development—has the potential to transform education into a truly liberatory process that empowers individuals to contribute positively to society (*Parghi*).

Finally, Gupta and Baskey's (2019) work offers a focused examination of women's education through the lens of Gandhian and Tagorean philosophies. Their study underscores the pivotal role that women's education plays in the overall social, cultural, and national development of India. Gupta and Baskey contend that both Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore recognized the transformative power of education for women, albeit through slightly different ideological frameworks. While Tagore's approach was characterized by an emphasis on artistic expression and connection with nature, Gandhi's perspective was rooted in the idea of education as a means for social reform and the empowerment of the marginalized. Their comparative analysis reveals that women's education, as envisioned by both thinkers, is not only a matter of individual empowerment but also a cornerstone for societal progress. By advocating for gender equality and the inclusion of women in all spheres of life, both Gandhian and Tagorean philosophies contribute to a more equitable and progressive society. This study thereby highlights the broader social implications of Gandhian educational thought, emphasizing its relevance in addressing contemporary issues of gender and social justice (*Gupta and Baskey*).

Collectively, the findings from these diverse studies underscore the comprehensive nature of Gandhian educational philosophy. They reveal that Gandhi's ideas continue to inspire debates about the purpose and practice of education in modern society. His insistence on integrating indigenous cultural values,

practical skills, and moral development into the educational curriculum challenges both traditional pedagogical methods and modern reform efforts. The synthesis of these studies shows that while there are challenges in fully realizing Gandhian ideals such as the underrepresentation of practical subjects in current curricula or the difficulties in adapting his methods to a rapidly changing world—the core principles of his philosophy remain profoundly relevant.

Moreover, the research findings suggest that the application of Gandhian educational philosophy requires a re-examination of the relationship between education and society. Education, in this framework, is not merely a process of knowledge transmission but a transformative endeavour that shapes the character of both individuals and communities. It is through this lens that Gandhi's contributions can be seen as not only educational reforms but as broader social interventions aimed at cultivating a more humane and just society. As the studies indicate, modern educational systems can benefit immensely from embracing aspects of Gandhian thought especially in an era marked by global challenges such as inequality, cultural homogenization, and the erosion of traditional values.

The findings from this body of research illustrate that the social, cultural, and educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi is a dynamic and evolving field of study. The collective evidence points to a model of education that is deeply intertwined with the ideals of social justice, cultural authenticity, and lifelong personal development. Whether through the comparative lens of Dash (2018) and Hameed (2019), the analytical perspectives of Sharma and Sharma (2018), or the critical insights provided by Bharti and Bhagalpur (2019) and Gupta and Baskey (2019), the enduring relevance of Gandhian thought in education is unmistakable. As contemporary educators and policymakers grapple with the challenges of modernizing education while preserving cultural heritage, Gandhi's vision offers both a challenge and an inspiration a call to rethink education as a holistic, liberatory process that empowers individuals and transforms society (*Parghi*).

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