RESEARCH ARTICLE **OPEN ACCESS**

INDIAN VALUES AND ETHICS IN EDUCATION: FOUNDATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study examines the philosophical foundations, historical development, practical challenges, and current relevance of Indian values and ethics in education. This article argues that India's value traditions are dynamic ethical resources, drawing from classical sources like the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gītā, contemporary thinkers like Gandhi, Tagore, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, and Ambedkar, and policy frameworks like the National Policy on Education 1986, 2005 National Curriculum Framework 2005, and National Education Policy 2020. This study synthesizes dharma-centered ethics, pluralism, holistic development, and social justice to provide an integrated curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation framework. It addresses implementation issues like value fragmentation, assessment limits, teacher preparation gaps, and disparities and proposes ethical inquiry across topics, reflective and community-based learning, and formative disposition evaluation. The study finds that Indian ethical traditions, when evaluated critically and inclusively, can help develop character, civic duty, and ecological sensitivity, advancing contemporary education aims.

INTRODUCTION

India has traditionally viewed education as a process of self-cultivation toward truth, character, and social duty, not just facts or skills (Radhakrishnan, 1927; Vivekananda, 1893/1989). From the gurukula ideal to Santiniketan, Indian education has linked knowledge to ethical formation, *dharma* (righteousness/duty), and self-restraint, compassion, and discernment (Tagore, 1917/2001; Gandhi, 1909/1997). This normative ideal aligns with global calls for holistic, humanistic, and future-focused education (UNESCO, 2015).

On the other hand, in mass education, values and ethics are frequently pushed to the side due to the pressures of exams, pressures of economic competitiveness, and social stratification. Contemporary policy seeks to alleviate this inequality. In contrast to the National Education Policy (NEP), which places an emphasis on character development, constitutional values, and ethical reasoning (Government of India, 2020), the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) places an emphasis on values as being essential to learning (NCERT, 2005). What are some ways that Indian values and ethics can have an impact on education in the modern day without resorting to moralism, cultural essentialism, or exclusion?

On this document, there are four stages. Through the utilization of a variety of sources and ethical topics, Section 2 reconstructs the Indian educational philosophy. In the third section, historical customs are connected to contemporary reformers and the policy of the nation.

The implementation problems are discussed in Section 4. It is stated in Section 5 that there is a practical framework that combines curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, as well as their contemporary relevance. A framework for contextually sensitive and ethically sound value teaching is provided by the conclusion.

Philosophical Foundations: An Indian Ethical Tapestry

Dharma, discernment, and ethical agency: Dharma, which is not a predetermined law but rather a context-sensitive rightness that demands the application of wisdom (*viveka*) (Radhakrishnan, 1927), is the fundamental principle that underpins Indian ethical theory. It is the cornerstone of Indian ethical philosophy that dharma is based on. In accordance with Radhakrishnan's interpretation, the *Bhagavad Gītā* places ethical agency inside the realm of *svadharma*, which is a phrase that refers to the obligations that are imposed upon a person (Radhakrishnan, 1948). This endeavor is based on the ideas of self-knowledge and a lack of connection, which are the guiding principles. They should be able to reason about their obligations in the midst of a range of pressures, finding a balance between their own personal progress and their commitment to society (Gandhi, 1909/1997). Students should be able to explain their responsibilities to others. When it comes to education, this includes cultivating a sense of moral awareness rather than merely satisfying the requirements of rules.

Knowledge as self-realization and service: According to the Vedānta and Bhakti flows, the purpose of knowledge is to achieve self-

realization (*Ātma-vidyā*) and compassionate service (seva) (Vivekananda 1893/1989). Tagore reformulated this concept by proposing that it is the freedom of the mind that is in harmony with both people and nature (Tagore, 1917/2001). Aurobindo (1998) envisioned an education that would encourage the development of whole-person learners by including all parts of a person, including the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual aspects of a person. As a consequence of this being the case, educational programs are geared at fostering self-awareness, interdependence, and the common good.

Pluralism, critique, and social justice: There are so many different ethical traditions in India that it is impossible to put them all into a single category. There are orthodox and heterodox, devotional and rationalist, classical and reforming ideals. Ambedkar (1936/2014) places a strong emphasis in his writings on the moral necessity of eliminating inequities and making certain that everyone is treated with respect and equality. There is a requirement for value education that is not only inclusive but also constitutional and emancipatory (Ambedkar, 1936/2014 and the Government of India, 2020). This education should take into consideration caste, gender, religion, language, and ability categories. This plural, critical inheritance serves as a warning against glorified versions of the past.

Ecological connectedness: Tagore's schooling that is based around nature, as well as the classical concepts of *ṛta* (cosmic order), provide hints to an ecological ethics that acknowledges the embeddedness of individuals within larger systems (Tagore, 1917/2001). Education in the modern era that has an emphasis on sustainability connects with these foundations, merging ethical concerns on a global scale with the traditions of India (UNESCO, 2015). The implication is that the most effective values education in India is one that encourages moral discernment, whole-person development, inclusive justice, and ecological stewardship, all of which are sustained by a dialogical plurality. This is the most effective values education in India. Based on the information that has been provided in this article, this is the conclusion that can be taken.

Historical Evolution: From Gurukula to National Policy

Pre-colonial and early modern lineages: The gurukula model was a way of life that included living, learning, and ethical practice as components of its overall structure. Within the framework of community life, it placed a significant focus on *śraddhā*, which is a term that means respect, as well as discipline and duty (Radhakrishnan, 1927). The multiple epistemic and ethical traditions that existed in various locales were represented by organizations such as Nalanda and other medieval centers, as well as vernacular schools that formed later.

Colonial encounter and reformist responses: A shift in the site of education occurred in colonial societies as a consequence of the shift toward utilitarian goals, bureaucratic knowledge, and certification. This transition provided the door for reformist critiques and exploratory projects to be undertaken. He is attributed with being the first person to propose the concept of *nai talim*, which he defined as "basic education through productive craft that is infused with dignity, cooperation, and self-reliance" (Gandhi, 1909/1997). Gandhi is credited with being the first person to present this concept. Tagore established Santiniketan, a place that fostered cosmopolitanism, freedom, and aesthetic sensitivity (Tagore, 1917/2001). Santiniketan was a site that provided these opportunities. The concept of "man-making education" was something that Vivekananda advocated for during his lifetime (Vivekananda, 1893 1989). He was of the opinion that educational opportunities of this nature would foster both character and service. Aurobindo's integrated education was not only to reach intellectual perfection by means of the nurturing of mental and spiritual growth, but also to accomplish the goal of achieving intellectual perfection (Aurobindo, 1998). In addition to advocating for education to be the fundamental weapon of social democracy, Ambedkar focused on the significance of equality, dignity, and critical reasoning (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). He was a prominent figure

in the field of education. He proposed that education should "educate, agitate, and organize." This was his idea.

Post-independence policy frames: A great amount of emphasis was placed on the inculcation of values such as scientific temper, secularism, and social justice in accordance with the National Policy on Education, which was implemented in the year 1986. Peace education, gender sensitivity, and constitutional principles were all incorporated into the National Curriculum Framework (2005), which was implemented throughout all academic areas. The implementation of constructivist pedagogy and reflective practice was the means by which this objective was attained (NCERT, 2005). According to the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which stresses the need for foundational literacy and diversity while also placing a priority on character building, critical thinking, Indian knowledge systems, multilingualism, and ethical reasoning, this tendency is reinforced (The Government of India, 2020). When taken as a whole, these frameworks contribute to the establishment of a relationship between the democratic citizenship that is currently in place and the capabilities that are available on a global scale, as well as the ethical principles that are held in India.

Persistent and Emerging Challenges

Fragmentation and tokenism: Many educational institutions promote "values" as extras, such as occasional lectures or assemblies, rather than as the ethos that is actually applied in the classroom and in evaluation. This is because "values" are not an integral part of the educational experience. As a consequence, the curriculum that is produced is not in accordance with the objectives that have been declared (NCERT, 2005). If it is not integrated, moral education runs the risk of becoming ritualistic or moralism like other forms of education.

Assessment misalignment: On high-stakes examinations, the ability to remember material is rewarded, but the ability to reason ethically or to have dispositions is not. Teachers frequently lack the skills essential to evaluate students' progress in the areas of empathy, integrity, and civic participation (Government of India, 2020). This is attributable to the fact that these concepts are multidimensional and dependent on the context in which they are being discussed. When grades are given an inordinate amount of weight, it can be difficult to exercise moral agency.

Teacher preparation and support: In order to differentiate education for students who come from a range of backgrounds, educators need to have intellectual clarity as well as practical implementation abilities. This is necessary in order to encourage ethical dialogue, deal with controversy, and differentiate instructional methods. There is typically very little training in ethics pedagogy, reflective practice, or community-based learning that is included in pre-service and in-service programs (NCERT, 2005). All of these are domains that are connected to the field of education.

Social inequality and exclusion: It is not possible to disentangle the concept of values education from the inequalities that are connected to caste, gender, disability, language, and economic status. Ethical curricula are utterly ineffectual when they foster bias or hierarchy in the educational system (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). This is the case when they are implemented. There is no such thing as an add-on; rather, inclusion is the ethical foundation upon which education is built.

Pluralism and polarization: Despite the fact that India's variety is a source of educational value, it also has the potential to be a source of division in the country. Pedagogies should be developed to encourage debate across differences, with a focus on constitutional principles and critical inquiry, in order to avoid sectarianism while simultaneously honoring cultural roots (Government of India, 2020).

Digital and ecological crises: Disinformation, incivility on the internet, and the harms produced by algorithms are all factors that have contributed to the emergence of new ethical challenges for

young people. The urgency of ecological ethics and sustainable living is also intensified as a result of climate change (UNESCO, 2015). This is a situation that demands immediate attention. As a consequence of this, it is essential for value education to encompass both digital citizenship and environmental stewardship.

Contemporary Relevance and a Practical Framework

Why Indian values matter now: Within the framework of Indian value systems, there is a significant emphasis put on ethical agency (discernment), interdependence (service), holistic flourishing, and justice. The goals of education in the twenty-first century include critical thinking, collaboration, global citizenship, and sustainability (Government of India, 2020; UNESCO, 2015). Not only do these provide narratives and practices that are important to the local community, but they also correspond with the goals of education in the twenty-first century. Indian ethics, when articulated in the appropriate manner, has the potential to imbue classrooms with meaning and purpose, thereby providing a challenge to instrumentalism and alienation (Tagore, 1917/2001; Gandhi, 1909/1997). This is due to the fact that Indian ethics possesses the capability to triumph over both of these problems.

Design principles: That the following design principles, which are grounded on philosophical and policy underpinnings, have the potential to affect not just the curriculum but also the culture of the school is something that is a possibility.

1. ***Dialogical pluralism:*** It is more effective to teach Indian ethical standards through debate than it is to teach them by indoctrination. This is the conclusion reached by both of these organizations. It is essential that these ideas be taught from a variety of perspectives, including those that are traditional and contemporary, religious and secular, Indian and foreign (Radhakrishnan, 1927 and NCERT, 2005).
2. ***Whole-person development:*** The content of the academic curriculum should be connected to socio-emotional learning, artistic expression, and physical well-being, as per the tenets of integrated education (Aurobindo, 1998; Government of India, 2020). The idea of integral education is supported by this theory. This aligns with the principles that support the idea of integrated education.
3. ***Justice-centered inclusion:*** It is feasible to make the constitutional morality, which encompasses equality, liberty, and fraternity, more transparent by putting Ambedkar's theories into reality to battle prejudice and hierarchy (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). This would increase the transparency of the constitutional morality.
4. ***Situated ethics:*** In order for students to make links between their education and other elements of their lives, such as the environment, crafts, and the communities in which they inhabit, it is essential for them to build these connections. (Gandhi's *nai talim*; Gandhi, 1909/1997; UNESCO, 2015).
5. ***Reflective practice:*** Tagore places a strong emphasis on the significance of promoting the growth of self-awareness through the utilization of aesthetic education, writing, and mindfulness as means of accomplishing this primary objective. (Tagore, 1917/2001)
6. ***Ethical agency and action:*** Vivekananda and the Government of India are both advocates for the translation of values into projects that serve public goods. This is something that both of these organizations believe in. Specifically, this method is referred to as service learning. As a consequence of this, the development of bravery, responsibility, and cooperation among individuals is made easier. cooperation (Vivekananda, 1893/1989; Government of India, 2020).

Curriculum integration: across subjects and stages

- ***Language and literature:*** We will conduct organized conversations on empathy, justice, and obligation; we will explore narratives of moral conflict from Indian literature and current writing; and we will analyze the narratives of moral conflict (Tagore, 1917/2001).
- **Social sciences:** Through the simulation of deliberative assemblies and the study of case histories of social reform and civic disputes, constitutional reasoning can be practiced (Ambedkar, 1936/2014; Government of India, 2020). Examine the case histories of social reform and the battles of civic organizations.
- **Science and mathematics:** Civic projects that are led ought to integrate the incorporation of ethical standards in scientific activity, such as honesty and reproducibility, as well as sustainability issues, such as energy and waste. This is something that ought to be done (UNESCO, 2015).
- **Arts and physical education:** According to Aurobindo, the utilization of music, visual arts, theatre, and athletics can aid in the development of self-discipline, the ability to work together with others, and an appreciation for aesthetics. In each of these domains, ethical dispositions are manifested in their many forms. (Aurobindo, 1998).
- **Indian knowledge systems:** Modules should be curated on topics such as logic, Ayurveda's ethics of care, craft histories, and environmental practices, and they should be taught in a critical and inclusive manner (Government of India, 2020).

Pedagogical strategies aligned with Indian ethics

1. **Ethical inquiry circles:** Small-group conversations that make use of challenges that have their origins in local contexts (for example, trash segregation and fairness in group work), with the principles of respectful listening and reason-giving serving as guides (NCERT, 2005).
2. **Reflective journaling and mindfulness:** The daily thought that develops self-awareness, non-harm, and gratitude is a brief idea that occurs every day. According to Aurobindo, this line of thinking derives from contemplative traditions that do not position themselves in a sectarian manner (Aurobindo, 1998).
3. **Service learning:** It is important for community initiatives to contain systematic thought that establishes a connection between action and the concepts of *seva* and citizenship. Among the projects that fall into this category are making improvements to school cleanliness, planting trees, and teaching classmates (Gandhi, 1909/1997; UNESCO, 2015).
4. **Aesthetic and nature education:** With the goal of establishing a sense of connection and concern among individuals, Tagore recommended the development of eco-clubs in addition to the integration of arts and outdoor education. This was done with the objective of fostering a sense of community (Tagore, 1917/2001).
5. **Socratic-cum-dialogical method:** The teacher is responsible for acting in a manner that encourages students to participate in inquiry rather than acting as a figure of authority who provides answers. This is the job of the instructor. In addition to the job of requiring pupils to take responsibility for their acts, teachers are also burdened with the responsibility of assisting students in developing their own sense of autonomy (Radhakrishnan, 1927; NCERT, 2005)
6. **Peer mediation and restorative practices:** It is a method of dispute resolution that does not entail the use of punishment but rather focuses an emphasis on accountability, healing, and community. Rather than using punishment, it utilizes these components. A reflection of the embodiment of *dharma* as relational rightness, this technique is a reflection of that embodiment (Government of India, 2020).

Assessment of values and dispositions: The task of analyzing the process of developing ethical norms is a difficult one to undertake. An approach that is balanced can mix the following when it comes to strategy:

Formative observation rubrics are utilized to assess a wide range of traits, such as perseverance, honesty, empathy, and collaboration, to mention a few (NCERT, 2005).

Instances such as entries from a diary, thoughts on a project, and comments from members of the same group are examples of the kind of evidence that are included in portfolios. Some examples of performance tasks are activities that require ethical decision-making, such as arranging a fair resource allocation. There are several other instances. conferences that are held under the direction of students and in which students will articulate areas of growth and commitments to the organization. Instead of character evaluations with high stakes, feedback, narrative evaluation, and self-evaluation should be prioritized in accordance with the National Education Policy's emphasis on competency (Government of India, 2020). Character evaluations should be avoided.

Teacher preparation and school culture

- Additionally, it is essential for the education of teachers to incorporate both theoretical underpinnings and practical experience:
- Educators' philosophical ideas and perspectives: The modules encompass a range of ethical frameworks, including Indian ethics such as dharma, *ahimsā, seva*, and constitutional morality, as well as global frameworks such as care ethics and human rights.
- The pedagogy of dialogue and inclusion includes training in enabling tough talks, universal design for learning, and trauma-informed practices. These are all components of the pedagogy (NCERT, 2005).
- Communities of practice that foster introspection and thoughtfulness: The integration of values is the topic of discussion in professional learning circles as well as in lesson investigation projects.
- The ideology of the entire school: Institutions such as democratic student councils, community alliances, rituals of gratitude, and standards of behavior that were formed in partnership with students are examples of such institutions.

Safeguards against misuse

- It is imperative that the following steps be taken in order to forestall the development of ethical education that is moralistic, exclusive, or discriminatory:
- An illustration of constitutional anchoring is the practice of explicitly referring to constitutional ideals as the shared civic bedrock (Government of India, 2020).
- Teach a wide variety of customs and points of view, including dissent and reform (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). The teaching of diverse traditions and points of view is an essential component of plural sourcing.
- According to UNESCO, the rights and autonomy of children should be preserved by ensuring that they are included in all aspects of the learning process, receiving their agreement, and valuing the diversity of learners (UNESCO, 2015).
- Evidence-based practice that includes the following: Programs should be tested for unanticipated implications, and appropriate improvements should be made in an iterative way.

Illustrative Vignettes

Vignette 1: Community water ethics (upper primary): Students investigate the amount of water that is consumed in the region, conduct interviews with locals, and map the sources of pollution as well as any concerns that may exist. In addition to putting out a plan for conservation, they also present it to the panchayat and take the initiative to lead an awareness campaign against the issue. What duties do we have with regard to resources that are shared? This is a question that inspires thoughtful reflection. How will we ensure that all of the different users are treated in a fair and equitable manner? There are linkages between *seva, dharma*, and sustainability (Gandhi, 1909/1997; UNESCO, 2015).

Vignette 2: Literature circle on dignity (secondary): Students have conversations about freedom, equality, and dignity when they read texts from Tagore and Ambedkar. These passages are utilized to facilitate these conversations. The method of review includes the formulation of a position statement that provides a connection between a school policy (for instance, uniform regulations) and constitutional values and the inclusion of peers (Ambedkar, 1936/2014; Tagore, 1917/2001; Government of India, 2020). This statement is a component of the evaluation process.

Vignette 3: Integrity in science (secondary): During a lab sequence on measurement and error, students research previous incidents of misconduct and then construct a "ethics charter" for the class to follow in order to ensure that the data is accurate and that they collaborate with one another. One of the things that they do is make use of open lab notebooks and conduct collaborative reviews (UNESCO, 2015)

DISCUSSION

Synthesizing Foundations and Practice: Commitment and compassion, self-realization and social justice, appreciation for nature, and critique of hierarchy are all themes that are included in the Indian ethical tradition, which is not a single thing but rather a collection of many different components. It is stated by both Radhakrishnan and Ambedkar that a contemporary education might potentially draw from this repertoire in order to cultivate attitudes that are essential for democratic existence. Empathy, responsibility, courage, and critical reasoning are some of the dispositions that fall under this category (Radhakrishnan, 1927; Ambedkar, 1936/2014) Despite the fact that the policy's aim is consistent, its implementation requires a significant amount of work. This work includes the development of teachers, the reform of examinations, and the involvement of the community (NCERT, 2005; Government of India, 2020). Through the teaching of values through discourse and the social practice of those values, schools can be transformed into ethical ecosystems in which students learn to contemplate, to care, and to act. This transition is made possible that schools can become ethical ecosystems.

CONCLUSION

It is feasible to reimagine education on the basis of Indian principles and ethics, which provide a foundation that is rich, diverse, and dynamic. This is something that may be done successfully. *Dharma*, which is defined as rightness that is sensitive to the context;*seva*, which is defined as compassionate service; integral views of human flourishing; and commitments to equality and dignity all converge on an educational vision of ethical agency in the community (Radhakrishnan, 1927; Aurobindo, 1998; Ambedkar, 1936/2014). Dharma is defined as rightness that is sensitive to the context. The term "dharma" refers to a form of rightness that is sensitive to external circumstances. Over the course of history, reformers such as Gandhi, Tagore, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo have incorporated these principles into educational initiatives that are centered on freedom, character, creativity, and service (Gandhi, 1909/1997; Tagore, 1917/2001; Vivekananda, 1893/1989; Aurobindo, 1998). These initiatives have been centered on the principles of freedom, character, creativity, and service. These reformers have incorporated these values into educational programs that they have established in their own institutions. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 and the National Education Policy 2020 are two examples of contemporary policies that demonstrate the importance of character development, constitutional values, and holistic learning. These policies are at the forefront of contemporary policymaking. (NCERT, 2005; Government of India, 2020). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) worldwide goals for humanistic and sustainable education, this is a viable strategy. (UNESCO, 2015) When all of these factors are taken into consideration, aspiration on its own is not enough. In order to overcome the primary obstacles, which include the tokenistic management of values, misaligned evaluation, limits in teacher preparation, and societal injustices, it is necessary to take a

comprehensive strategy. In order to attain complete success, it is necessary to find solutions to these challenges. Throughout the course of this inquiry, a framework that is applicable in practice was suggested. This framework comprised of the following components: dialogical pluralism; whole-person development; justice-centered inclusiveness; contextual, community-connected initiatives; reflective practices; and formative evaluations that capture improvement in ethical dispositions. Because of these design choices, Indian ethical norms are operationalized without sanctifying the past or marginalizing differences of opinion. This is accomplished without sacrificing their integrity. Their integrity is not compromised in the process of accomplishing this goal. In order to guarantee that value education will continue to be non-sectarian, critical, and inclusive, one of the most important things that can be done is to safeguard constitutional morality and plurality. One of the things that can be done is this particular thing. Young people in this age of rapid technological and ecological change demand more than just access to knowledge; they want ethical imagination and civic daring as well. It is not enough for young people to have access to information. Having both of these characteristics is essential. In the context of education, values and ethics have the ability to cultivate precisely these capacities, so assisting students in becoming wise, compassionate, and responsible co-creators of a future that is equitable and sustainable. There is a chance that this will occur. Despite the fact that India is open to dialogue with other nations, the educational ideas and ethics that are followed in the country are deeply rooted in the various traditions that are practiced there.

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