



Revisiting Gandhi through Feminist Pedagogy: Crafting Gender-Just Classrooms in Higher Education

Daksh

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Haryana, India. Email ID –dakshdahiya360@gmail.com

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18213956>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 15-12-2025

Published: 10-01-2026

Keywords:

Gandhi, Feminist Pedagogy, Gender Justice, Higher Education, Ahimsa.

ABSTRACT

The issue of gender injustice in higher education does not find its way out of structural exclusion, but also in the daily pedagogical efforts that perpetuate hierarchy, authority and epistemic marginalization. The paper comes up with a critical dialogue between Gandhian academic ethics and the feminist pedagogy to find out ways of providing an ethically based, gender-just teaching in modern day universities. Instead of judging Mahatma Gandhi as an ethical as well as a moral figure, the paper treats this leader as an ethical-pedagogical philosopher, whose messages on education, character building, dignity of labour and the form of non-coercive authority have some direct bearing on feminism. Based on the principal publications of Gandhi as well as the high-impact scholarship in feminist education, this paper recognizes convergences within the domain of non-domination, dialogic learning, and the moral responsibilities of educational practitioners though they are intermittent and quite limited, whereas the paper explicitly admits the critique of Gandhian paternalism, gender normativity, and sexual ethics by feminism. The paper will develop an argument that leverages the attributes of feminist pedagogy, namely, reflexivity, intersectionality, and institutional critique to offer the key framework by which it can engage the Gandhian ethics without the



insistence on romanticism. The paper also applies this interaction to practical pedagogical codes related to curriculum design, interpersonal relationship between teachers and students, and the culture of the institutions. The arguments of pedagogy, ethical responsibility, and the productive tension between ethics and feminism make the paper an addition to existing discussions on gender justice, pedagogy, and ethical responsibility in higher education.

Introduction

Gender injustice in higher education takes a cyclical nature akin to the current times where educational institutions are gradually being characterized by a network of gender injustices that have become apparent in the way the curriculum is designed, classroom culture, institutional hierarchy, and daily pedagogy. Although universities are supposed to be equal and inclusive, they tend to replicate androcentric knowledge systems, or discriminate the experiences of women, and perpetuate unspoken processes of epistemic exclusion, which disproportionately impacts students on gendered, caste, and class locations (Ahmed, 2017; Morley, 2013). As a result, female scholars have stated that gender injustice in education is not only a matter of access or representation but derives deeply out of the ethical and relational basis of teaching and learning.

In such terms, feminist pedagogy is depicted as a critical intervention and threat to hierarchical teacher-student relations, the subjugation of lived experience in Favor of knowing, and predicts care, reflexivity and dialogical relations as pedagogical values (hooks, 1994; Weiler, 1988). In place of providing a fixed approach, feminist pedagogy is an educative ethic that attempts to bridge the power dynamics in the classroom and includes the possibilities of learning as an extension of social justice struggles beyond the classroom.

Revolting Mahatma Gandhi in the context of this pedagogical discussion is not a matter of respect or even the unyielding transposition of his thought into present conditions. Rather, this paper presents Gandhi as an ethical-pedagogical philosopher whose musings regarding education, self-discipline, truth and moral accountability provide a unique, although contradictory, source of feminist enquiry. Writings in *Hind swaraj* and educational cogitations in *Young India* and *Harijan* reflect Gandhi vision of learning that was based on ethical self-formulation, non-dominant control and inseparability of means and the end (Gandhi,



1909/2009; Gandhi, 1958/1994). These concepts are considerably tackled and not so hagiographically, especially when they are confronted with the feminist criticism of power, embodiment and agency.

This paper aims at exploring how Gandhian educational ethics could be put into a dialogue with the feminist pedagogy to deal with gender injustice in tertiary education. It is restricted to conceptual and written analysis which is based on the main writings of Gandhi and selective feminist pedagogic scholarship to explain possibilities and some contradictions in such an encounter.

Gandhian Educational Thought: Ethics, Equality, and the Moral Classroom

The educational philosophy of Gandhi cannot be separated and analysed outside of his larger ethical and political philosophy. In *Hind swaraj*, *Young India*, *Harijan*, as well as the *Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, education is always structured not in terms of imparting of information but as a process of moral self-formation one that will produce responsible self-disciplined and socially conscious people (Gandhi, 1909/2009). The eventual aim of education to Gandhi was the attainment of character, *Nai Talim* was designed to bring together intellectual, manual and moral capabilities, working against the colonial standpoint between mind and body that discriminated against the physical labour and moral restraint.

The key component of this vision was the dignity of labour. Gandhi continuously contended that manual labor was not a subsidiary of learning but a fundamental element in the process because he considered it an essential part of gaining humility, interdependence and respect towards socially marginalized forms of labor (Gandhi, 1958/1994). In a sense, the classroom, in this case, was envisaged as a moral space where authority was based on example and not the coercive deed and where pedagogical practice was dictated by moral consistency between means and end.

The answers of Gandhi to the question about women and his education can be seen as having the progressive desires and the undetermined contradictions. He advocated strongly in female education and public roles, moral responsibility of women, and their ability to self-rule and equal right to education which was based upon dignity, and self-respect (Gandhi, 1958/1994). In *Young India* he also denied the idea of women being intellectually inferior and attributed women liberation to moral renewal in the society. Meanwhile, his repetitive links women with moral purity, self-sacrifice and nurturance reveal a normative system which threatens to reconfigure gender expectations instead of breaking them.

These intratextualities are essential in a non-romantic approach to the affairs of Gandhian pedagogy. Gandhi did not just critically oppose domination, instrumentalism and hierarchical power in learning but through educational ethics, he was expressing assumptions about social and moral values of his



contemporary. Instead, this involves criticism in engaging Gandhi as educational thinker both acknowledging the depth of ethical significance of his approach to education and also its limited usefulness when considered through the prism of contemporary issues related to gender equality and autonomy.

Feminist Pedagogy: Concepts, Commitments, and Classroom Praxis

The notion of feminist pedagogy should be conceived as a critical approach to education instead of a method, which is based upon the articulate examination of power, authority, and generation of knowledge in the classroom. Developing out of the feminist theory and the critical pedagogy, it criticizes stratified teacher student relationships and reveals how institutions of higher learning tend to distribute gendered, racial, and economic disparities in the form of curriculum, assessment, and organizational cultures (Weiler, 1988; Morley, 2013). Fundamentally, feminist pedagogy claims that teaching is never neutral, rather it is an ethical and politicized practice that is informed by social location as well as power.

Redistribution of power in the learning spaces is one of its key commitments. Feminist educators aim to move out of centre authoritarian practices of pedagogy by focusing on dialogue, responsibility and collective knowledge making, without severing the asymmetries of knowledge which still exist in the higher education (hooks, 1994). Voice and experience is accepted as a valid asset at epistemology, especially to those students whose view often gets relegated to the periphery of mainstream epistemology. Such a focus is not romanticizing experience but making it an element of critical reflection and theorizing.

Another defining characteristic is the reflexivity. Feminist pedagogy asks those in control of classrooms to critically rejoin their positionalities and complicities in the institution of power and to physically acknowledge the circulation of authority, privilege, and vulnerability (Ahmed, 2017). This type of reflexivity is notably relevant in educational settings and in particular, in universities, where much of the purported objectivity that forms the basis of the disciplines of study and examination blurs gendered norms inherent in educational processes and practices.

Intersectionality goes further to enhance feminist pedagogical analysis through foregrounding problems of interlocking which exists between gender and caste, race, class, sexuality and other forms of inequality. Basing the analysis on intersectional feminist ideas, researchers believe that the pedagogical practices that are mindful of the gender aspect are likely to reproduce the exclusion in the field of higher education (Crenshaw, 1991; Morley, 2013). Feminist university is an intervention accordingly rather than



a form of inclusion, but of a structural critique, of connecting classroom practice with epistemic biases and institutional change.

Ethical Convergences: Gandhi and Feminist Pedagogy in Dialogue

When Gandhian educational thought is put into conversation with the feminist pedagogy, there are only convergent ethical situations and not theoretical parallels. Both traditions express a prolonged critique of domination in pedagogical relationships and the critique of instrumental conceptualizations of education imposing on education a primary emphasis on control, efficiency and credentialism to the detriment of moral responsibility. The fact that Gandhi was insistent that education had to develop in the aspects of ethical restraint and responsibility towards others echoes the feminist pedagogical desires of care, accountability, and relational education (Gandhi, 1909/2009; hooks, 1994).

One of the main points results in a convergence over a common focus on non-domination. Gandhi was never in favor of the coercive educational authority that he believed that true learning was created through examples, persuasion, and morality between ends and means (Gandhi, 1958/1994). Feminist pedagogy also attacks authoritarian the classroom and tries to redistribute power by dialogical activities and is still sensitive to the structural asymmetries that are determining higher education (Weiler, 1988; Morley, 2013). Both frameworks find their way into responsibility and transfiguration of authority instead of merely banning it within the context of ethics.

Another point of contact would be the dialogic learning. In education as well, Gandhi is more inclined to dialogue as an ethical pursuit based on seeking the truth (satya) and respect to one another instead of debating to win (Gandhi, 1958/1994). Feminist educators also anticipate dialogue as a pedagogical approach to allow the marginalized voices to join the production of knowledge and imposing on reflexivity and critical interrogation of experience (hooks, 1994; Ahmed, 2017). In both instances, dialogue is moral work and not a technique.

Simultaneously, there are certain significant boundaries that should be taken into consideration. The universalism of ethics of Gandhi and his normative approach to gendered position fall ill with the intersectional criticism of feminist pedagogy of power and identity. Feminist pedagogy theorizes gender, embodiment and institutional exclusion explicitly in a manner that Gandhian thinking is not systematically about. What is interesting about this dialogue then is not harmonization but critical juxtaposition: Gandhi provides a dialectic of moral self-construction and non-dominative power and feminist pedagogy provides the instruments of analysis to question the gendered power in educational



institutions. They all together open a field of morally sound but critically mindful pedagogical practice in the higher education.

Feminist Critiques and the Limits of Gandhian Pedagogy

Gandhi has historically attracted the critical concern of feminist and postcolonial scholarship regarding the weaknesses in his ethical and pedagogical paradigm under scrutiny by the prisms of gender, sexuality and power. Although Gandhi confirmed that women had moral agency and empowered them to engage in the right of life, those who are critical of this view see that the conceptualization of womanhood had been rooted in normative ideals of self-sacrifice, chastity and moral perseverance. It is these ideals, feminist scholars opine, that may remain the ideals to reproduce patriarchal expectations despite them questioning colonial domination (Sarkar, 1986).

One of the main lines of criticism has to do with paternalism of Gandhi. His instructional focus pedagogy on moral direction, discipline, and exemplary power but not in any coercive nature frequently made the teacher, or leader, an ethical parent. According to the feminist theorists, this position has the potential of distorting power inequities and limiting the independence of women because the emphasis of emancipation under moral obligations comes out as opposed to rights-based demands (Chatterjee, 1993). In this sense, Gandhian pedagogy would inadvertently restrict the range of dissent especially in cases where moral obedience is rewarded over numerous manifestations of gendered experience.

Sexual questions are other questions that make Gandhian ethics a complex issue. The feminist scholars have clear readings of bhut Gandhi, who tried celibacy and moral control of desire, as a discomfort of a greater level with females and their sexuality and control of the body (Sarkar, 1986). These perceptions do not augur well with feminist pedagogical devotion to bodily incarnation, sexual agency and sanction forced desire as an element of lived life in educational locations.

These are not criticisms that make Gandhian Pedagogy obsolete, and this does not diminish the ethical findings of Gandhian Pedagogy. Instead, they emphasize the need to be critical. Feminist pedagogy claims that the understanding of ethics should be vigilant of how authority of moral authority can be used to propagate domination. Feminist reading of Gandhi to this extent then not only illuminates but intensifies the need to re-think ethical pedagogy by creating the downside to that prospective visage and also by pinpointing its unavoidable historical and conceptual constraints.



Conclusion

This paper has proposed that a critical conversation between the Gandhian educational ethics and the feminist pedagogy provided a fruitful albeit limited framework on which to discuss the problem of gender injustice in higher education. The discussion has pointed out overlaps in the ideas of non-domination, dialogic learning, the moral responsibilities of teachers, and not ignore the issue of feminist criticism of gendered assumptions and paternalist inclinations in Gandhi, placing Gandhi as an ethical-pedagogical thinker, as opposed to a moral exemplar. The demands of feminist pedagogy such as reflexivity, intersectionality and institutional critique offer the analytical nuances needed to engage the Gandhian concepts without idealizing and homogenizing them.

Of importance in this dialogue is the ability to base the feminist pedagogical practice in an ethical language of responsibility and means end consistency, but at the same time expose the said language to continued feminist examination. This kind of engagement does not eliminate such issues between ethical universalism and gendered power; rather, it produces them as topics of sight and subjects to pedagogical discourse. This way, it places emphasis on the pragmatism of context-specific practices in present day universities instead of the idealistic educational visions.

This question can be further investigated in three ways in the future. To begin with, the empirical research on training programmes in teachers training could investigate the way ethical reflexivity and non-dominant force are developed within practice. Second, research that centre's on curriculum can address the issue of how canons of the disciplines are transformed under Gandhian and feminist viewpoints. Last but not least, the comparative pedagogical research would be able to evaluate the working similarities of the ethical-critical dialogues in the context of various cultural and institutional settings, further affirming the practicality of gender-balanced education in the world.

References:

- Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Duke University Press.
- Apple, M. W. (2013). *Can education change society?* Routledge.
- Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories*. Princeton University Press.



- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum. (Original work published 1970)
- Gandhi, M. K. (2009). *Hind Swaraj or Indian home rule*. Navajivan Publishing House. (Original work published 1909)
- Gandhi, M. K. (1958–1994). *The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Vols. 1–100). Publications Division, Government of India.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Jahanbegloo, R. (2016). *Gandhi: A nonviolent perspective on politics*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Menon, N. (2012). *Seeing like a feminist*. Zubaan.
- Morley, L. (2013). *Women and higher education leadership: Absences and aspirations*. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.
- Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.
- Reay, D. (2012). *Gender, education and neoliberalism: Young women and the politics of choice*. Routledge.
- Sarkar, T. (1986). Gandhi and the feminine. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21(15), WS21–WS28.
- Weiler, K. (1988). *Women teaching for change: Gender, class, and power*. Bergin & Garvey.