

Investigating Mahatma Gandhi's Thoughts as Lessons in Primary Classrooms

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi viewed education as a means to nurture individual potential. His principles have influenced many across the world. This study seeks to explore how Gandhi's ideas are represented in the primary school textbooks of two different educational boards in India—the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board (GSHSEB). In addition to the textbook analyses, the study also examines teachers' perceptions of Gandhi and how they approach teaching his life and values in the classroom. The findings suggest that Gandhi's representation in the primary-level textbooks contributes to aspects of students' moral and character development. Teachers from both boards generally hold a favourable view of Gandhi's contributions and regard the inductive method as particularly effective for teaching related topics. The study also identifies specific Gandhian values discussed in the texts and reflects on their contemporary relevance.

INTRODUCTION

Education not only imparts knowledge but also helps cultivate skills, values and moral habits. For it to have a lasting impact, it must be designed to nurture self-confidence and critical thinking, moving beyond rote memorisation. A holistic approach to education includes understanding real-life examples of individuals, who

have contributed meaningfully to the society.

Among such figures, Mahatma Gandhi remains a prominent personality in Indian history. His principles of truth, non-violence, compassion and simplicity offer lessons that can still resonate with young learners today. However, it is important to present Gandhi not as an idealised figure but as a person

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who evolved through reflection, struggle and self-awareness. This approach allows students to relate to him as a human being rather than a distant symbol.

This study explores how Gandhi is presented in the primary-level curricula of the CBSE and the Gujarat State Board, and how teachers perceive and interpret his life and values in classroom teaching.

WHY GANDHI'S VALUES MATTER IN TODAY'S EDUCATION

Incorporating Gandhian philosophy in school curricula can help students understand broader human values. Gandhi's commitment to truth, non-violence and social justice can be linked to the real-life situations that children face. For example, he believed in practising truth in thought, speech and action—a lesson that young minds can grasp through stories and reflection rather than moralistic preaching.

Textbook content, if curated thoughtfully, can encourage children to reflect on questions such as, 'What does it mean to be truthful?' or 'How do my actions affect others?'. Gandhi's own childhood experiences, such as the well-known story of Raja Harishchandra influencing his views on truth, offer relatable narratives for the children.

The National Education Policy (1986) also emphasises the need for children to understand their country's past. However, historical figures like

Gandhi should be portrayed not as flawless heroes, but as individuals with doubts, failures and growth. As Pathak (2009) notes, understanding the humanity in these figures can make their stories more meaningful.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is as follows:

1. To examine how Gandhi is represented in the Primary-level textbooks of two Boards (CBSE and Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board)
2. To understand the perspective of Primary School teachers on teaching about Gandhi

METHODOLOGY

This study employed both content analysis and interviews. Primary data came from online interviews with 10 Primary School teachers from CBSE and Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board schools. Secondary data included textbook stories and materials on Gandhi. A structured interview schedule was used to collect responses, with pseudonyms used to maintain the respondents' anonymity.

REPRESENTATION OF GANDHI IN SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

NCERT Textbooks: Example from *Rimjhim* (Class IV Hindi)

The chapter titled 'स्वतंत्रता की ओर' from *Rimjhim* (Class IV Hindi) tells the story of a boy named Dhani, who lives in

Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram. Through Dhani's curiosity and interaction with Gandhi, the story introduces the Salt March and the idea of a peaceful protest. The narrative illustrates how even young children can be part of larger movements by contributing in their own small ways.

While the chapter effectively captures Gandhi's humility and leadership, it avoids excessive glorification and presents him as someone accessible to the common people, including children.

Gujarat State Board: *The Great Hero* (Class IV English)

This book is structured around stories and activities meant to engage students with Gandhi's early life and values. In one story, a young Mohan refuses to cheat during a school test, reinforcing honesty. Another anecdote includes a conversation between Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel in jail, using metaphors to convey moral lessons.

These stories emphasise values, like honesty, empathy and non-violence without overly idealising Gandhi. The activities require students to reflect on traits like simplicity and truthfulness through storytelling and discussion. While the title 'The Great Hero' may suggest reverence, the activities focus more on introspection and moral reasoning rather than idolisation.

TEACHERS' VIEWS ON TEACHING GANDHI

CBSE Teachers' Perceptions

Teachers generally expressed that Gandhi is a relevant subject for the Primary-level learners. They noted that stories from his life are engaging and relatable, especially those involving children. Teachers often begin by discussing Gandhi's personality to create interest before reading the chapters. Some suggested including more content on Gandhian ideas, like non-violence and self-reliance.

They also highlighted the developmental benefits of such stories, suggesting that learning about Gandhi's principles at a young age can shape students' character and ethical understanding.

Gujarat State Board Teachers' Perceptions

Teachers from the Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board noted that Gandhi is often a source of inspiration for both the students and educators. They reported using skits, fancy dress events and visual aids to bring Gandhi's stories to life. They said that these interactive activities help children relate better with abstract ideas.

However, some teachers acknowledged that younger students sometimes struggle to relate with the historical context. They recommended using visual materials and age-appropriate explanations to

make Gandhi's role in history more accessible. A few also suggested including more practical applications of his teachings in the curriculum.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Gandhi's portrayal in the textbooks is generally positive and simplified for the younger audience.
2. The stories focus on values like honesty, empathy and peaceful resistance.
3. Both boards include meaningful anecdotes, though with some variance in tone.
4. Teachers recognise the value of teaching Gandhi, but suggest improvements in the delivery of context.

CONCLUSION

Gandhi's life and philosophy offer valuable lessons to the students. Stories of his honesty, humility and resolve can be effective educational

tools when taught through activities and discussions.

Educational content should aim to inspire, while remaining relevant and relatable. This can be achieved by highlighting Gandhi's values through stories that promote reflection and ethical thinking, rather than elevating him beyond reach. Practical, discussion-based teaching methods, supported by visual media and real-life examples, can make Gandhi's philosophy meaningful for primary school students.

As children progress through school, a deeper and more critical engagement with historical figures, including Gandhi, can foster moral development, empathy and civic awareness. Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping this understanding and should be supported with resources and training to handle these topics with sensitivity and balance.

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