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Editorial

Esteemed Readers,

Happy Gandhi Jayanti. This issue of Quest in Education brings to you the most desirable content to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's Birth Anniversary.

Primary data collection-based article, "Annie Margaret Barr (1899-1973): Pioneer Educationist and a Social Reformer in The Khasi Hills" by Dr. Prabha Ravi Shankar critically analyses Margaret Barr's pioneering work for education in the remote region of Kharang Valle, in proper historical perspective.

The article by Dr. Joya Vrushal Chaudhari and Prof. Dr. Sunayana J. Kadle is based on study of "Teacher's Attitude towards Gender Equality in the Light of Mahatma Gandhi's thought on Women" and discusses these findings through Gandhi's emphasis on women's dignity, education, independence, non-violence and their role in social transformation.

Shri. Pramit Goel envisages a future marked by partnership of human knowledge with education technology in his article titled, "Re-engineering Education: Creating Agile Learners for the Digital Age".

Dr. Anita Brandon has provided valuable insights in her book review of a thought-provoking volume, titled, Higher Education and Community Engagement: The Cultivation of Humanity edited by Maistry, S.M., McCann, C., and Hornby, D. Dr. Yogita Mandole's Review Article of The Direct Path: A Collection of Review of Susheel Kumar Sharma's Unwinding Self, edited by Danielle Hanson provides an eagle's eye view of the mind-blowing literary criticism.

Prof. Dr. Vibhuti Patel has paid rich tributes to a dynamic educator Prof. Pradip Prabhu who passed on 25th August, 2026.

The scholars and experts are requested to send their original research-based articles, case studies and book reviews on contemporary challenges faced by the education sector.

Prof. Dr. Vibhuti Patel
Chief Editor

ANNIE MARGARET BARR (1899-1973): PIONEER EDUCATIONIST AND A SOCIAL REFORMER IN THE KHASI HILLS

BY

Dr Prabha Ravi Shankar,

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Annie Margaret Barr (1899-1973), was a pioneer educationist, social reformer and an admiring disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. An outstanding English Unitarian Minister, an honorary member of the General Assembly and her students included many girl children and some boys who were poor and had no proper living, let alone education. She arrived in India in 1933, met Mahatma Gandhi at Wardha and was determined to follow the path of constructive work set up by him, especially his philosophy of education for the poor. Her sister Mary Barr was already doing Gandhi's work in the Indian villages. Unlike many other missionaries, Annie was a firm believer in respect for all religions and brotherhood and kept away from people who denigrated the indigenous religion. To understand the local culture, she learnt the Khasi language. By 1933, she set up her own small home Khasi Hills and became deeply involved in providing education, the impact of which was probably immeasurable. In 1949 when the government of India took over the schools in Shillong, Margaret shifted to the Kharang village further up the hills where she started a rural centre called Kharang School for poor children concentrating on education and health care. It was something similar to Gandhi's basic education system along with self-reliance and dignity of labour.

'In the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth, truth persists, in the midst of the darkness, light persists. Even a single lamp dispels the deepest darkness'— Mahatma Gandhi.

Introduction:

Reverend Annie Margaret Barr (1899-1973), better known as 'Kong Barr' in the Khasi language was an outstanding, intrepid Unitarian Minister and pioneer educationist who followed the direction of Mahatma Gandhi and greatly contributed to the education and wellbeing of the poor in the Khasi Hills of Assam, now in Shillong in the State of Meghalaya. She was a courageous, hardworking and enterprising woman who dedicated her whole life to the noble work of providing education to the children of a distant land of India then under colonial rule of the British. Her life of trials and tribulations, sacrifices and sufferings deserve to be studied in proper historical perspective as she entered all alone into the villages of Khasi hills-- the beautiful and culturally-diverse region of the North East India and how she overcame these challenges through sheer grit and determination. Her contribution assumes great significance especially today, with India's National Educational Policy (NEP) that has great potential for Meghalaya, in the key areas such as multidisciplinary education, vocational education, preservation of language and culture, integration of technology, teacher training development, human resources, equal access and opportunities for all including women and marginalized communities.

Early Life and Career

Margarat Barr was born on 19 March 1899 in Yorkshire in a Methodist family of six children. She obtained a degree in Comparative religion at the Girton College, Cambridge and became a trained teacher. Though a Methodist, her visits during adulthood to Unitarian churches grounded on justice and equality and respect for all religious and fellow brothers, appealed to her intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. She began her career at Rotherham as a Unitarian Minister and later became an honorary member of the General Assembly of the Unitarian churches in the UK. In her late twenties, she attended the Annual meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian Churches and was stirred by an address delivered by Reverend Griffith who spoke of an indigenous Unitarian movement in the remote Khasi and Jaintia hills of Assam and the courage, vision and simple faith shown by Hajjom (Hajjam) Singh who had founded the Unitarian movement in the hills of Assam. Hajjom Singh (1865-1928), was a quiet and prudent reformer who sincerely believed in education and literature to bring development in the region. The Welsh missionaries led by Reverend Thomas Jones and his wife had just begun the work of education in Chirapunjee only a few decades before. Hajjom learnt Khasi language and became the first to develop written form using the Roman script. He founded a Primary School in Jowar in 1893. His achievements were remarkable because he quietly worked hard for social changes at a time when the Khasi language and nationalism had just begun.

Reverend Griffith had suggested in his discourse that someone need to go to the remote hills from the United Kingdom to help the nascent movement to grow. Margaret got interested but being a woman, she could not get the support needed to go to a remote place in a strange land all alone. However, she drew inspiration from her elder sister Mary Barr, who was teaching as a Wesleyan Methodist Missionary in India and had recently joined Mahatma Gandhi as one of his full-time village workers. In 1931 Mahatma Gandhi was in London to attend the Round Table Conference regarding Indian administration. He and Mary returned to India aboard the same ship and had become lifelong friends. Mary moved to Gandhi's ashram at Ahmedabad and became a dedicated teacher doing her work in remote villages that needed such constructive activities.

Trip to India:

Margaret Barr believed that one has to visit India personally to know the land and the people. She soon began to study the Indian National Movement with all seriousness, especially Gandhi's life and work and began to educate English public opinion to the cause of Indian freedom. She was highly critical of British colonialism that had ruined India. She had joined a society in England called the 'Friends of India' and remained active there. As a trained teacher and a Unitarian Minister, she developed an intense desire to make the Khasi Hills a useful sphere of her service activities. She soon heard about the Gokhale Memorial Girls School in Calcutta (Kolkata) founded by the Brahmos and that the lady Principal of that school wanted someone to join the staff for teaching and discussion of world religions. Margaret boldly applied for the job and soon received an invitation to join the staff as a resident housemother and also to take classes in English and mathematics for intermediate students. Luckily for her, this time the General Assembly offered to sponsor her trip for three years and Margaret was delighted to

get the opportunity.

Meeting with Gandhi:

Margaret landed in India in October 1933. She stayed in Bombay (Mumbai) for some time with an activist. Soon after landing in Bombay, she travelled towards Wardha, where she met Gandhi sitting on the floor and was amazed at his simplicity and generosity. She asked him ‘What do you want your English friends to do, Bapu?’ Pat came the reply: ‘Keep away from gaol or prison now. Don’t get mixed up in politics. Find some constructive work to do in villages, serving those who need you the most’. By now she had penetrated into the culture, customs and life of Indians, met many eminent Indians including nationalists such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore, C.F. Andrews, and others.

In June 1934, she began her journey from Calcutta to the Khasi hills, a twelve-hour journey on a rough terrain along the steamy Brahmaputra River to Guwahati, then move to the South for a most difficult journey of six hours with hairpin bends and valleys to the cool Khasi hill where she soon found constructive as well as pioneering work in the villages of the Khasi Hills of Assam. The hills then had few Hindus; indigenous tribal people roughly constituted ninety percent of the population and some of whom had been converted to Christianity. While teaching at the Gokhale Girls School in Calcutta, Margaret used the vacation period in the first three years to visit the Khasi hills. Margaret was moved by the sight of terrible poverty and illiteracy and ill-health in the villages of the Khasi hills around her. She wrote that though the villagers have loyalty, enthusiasm and faith, there is no education and without education there is no progress...The experiences of an unpredictable weather—heavy rains, earthquakes, insanitary conditions and far removed from civilization hardened her for the coming days. She was in no way like an ordinary missionary with an interest in conversion. She believed in tolerance and respect for all religions. She wrote a letter to her parents that ‘Hinduism is as fertile as any religion in the world—in the present age probably more so than any other’. She had no interest to take up the leadership role of the Unitarian movement. Instead, she devoted to improve the educational opportunities to enable them to produce strong and self-reliant leaders such as Hajjom Kissor Singh.

According to Gandhi basic education was meant to transform village children into model villagers. She never forgot what Gandhi had taught her --to provide not only education but also health care to those who have no access to them. She followed Gandhi’s pattern of education, that is providing basic education for rural, underdeveloped people-to build a cooperative and self-sufficient community-that will provide food, shelter and clothing, creating its own art, music literature and drama, respect for man without any distinction of caste, class and religion. She soon founded an infant school and a teacher training program. Margaret first learnt the Khasi language for better communication with the children of the hills. She even wrote a primer in Unitarian history. A British inspector who visited the school said, ‘I could never have believed that Khasi children could be so alert and happy’. Like Gandhi, Margaret believed in vocational education--cooking, carpentry, tending domestic animals, swimming, developing organically-grown vegetables and fruits, storage shed and crop cultivation, building of bunds and so on. Students who came to her, lived and worked with her. They cooked, ate, studied and

slept together. Early to bed and early to rise was the lesson she not only taught to the students but also practised—and that senior students must teach the younger ones. She insisted on character and discipline as the foundation for education. She took classes for both poor and orphans, taught them that all religions are road to one God and one must respect all, read all religion and learn. Her education was free; importance of physical fitness and manual labour was stressed. She began teaching the students English, arithmetic, geography, basic science, hygiene, sanitation and nature cure. She prepared senior students for a career. Slowly she helped them prepare for Government examination. At night a reading from the scriptures of world religion became a practice. With faith in an educational process for a balanced life, she made the children rely on self-help. She sent some of her teachers-in-training to Wardha, to get a feel of the place, to study Hindi and pick up the Gandhian spirit.

Interestingly in 1945 Gandhi had kept before the nation a comprehensive scheme of basic education, a full-fledged training centre at Wardha ashram. According to Nai-Talim, craft, literary instruction, hygiene and art must be blend together to form the education of an individual, all-round development and attain equality and integrated as a scheme as did the NEP in 1986. Having found that the need for education was the greatest in the villages, Margaret established an educational centre some distance away from towns such as Shillong and Jawai. She along with Ekiman Singh, son of Hajjom Kishore Singh, selected the village of Kharang in the middle of Shillong and Jowai. She had already trained a number of teachers not only by herself but also by sending them to attend Gandhi's Seva gram for basic education. Land was purchased and the house at the Kharang centre was built first for Ekiman Singh and his family who decided to settle there and look after the centre and the farm. She also toured UK and Australia to obtain support for funds from them. Her residential school attended by many children. She played the role of teacher, nurse, midwife, counsellor, adviser and so on. The Kharang Centre became famous under her care. People from the United her centre and were impressed.

Margaret and Gandhi were in touch until the latter's his death in early 1948. On 12 January 1946 Gandhi regretted that he had to leave Assam without meeting her. He wrote: '... for the folly of my forgetfulness—or shall I say your folly in not descending to Gauhati, I shall have to go away without seeing you even though you are within a short distance of me'. He appreciated her hard work in the villages and instructed his close associates as well his sons to provide all support to her whenever she happens to travel. He inquired about her father's illness and advised her to read the Upanishad, the ancient Indian sacred text . On the 26 May 1946, Gandhi wrote to her: 'Yours of 9.4.1946, I have kept long for use. I have read and reread it. So long as you give rewards you will be giving prizes. The line of distinction is thin. The examination has to go before prizes do. The ancient system of saying which teacher taught you and how much was the only right thing. But in this age of competition, this reversion won't answer till people are tired of the thing. Let us silently pray, work and wait. ...'

Margaret also got the support that she needed from the Unitarian Churches as well as from the Women's League. The Women's League in particular, continued their support year to year until 1964 and many branches and individuals still make donations to continue the work there. In 2000 the Women's League raised a remarkable sum of 8,500 pounds. Even today they

contribute by way of sponsoring children. She got the support of local teachers who were grateful to her and many schools were named in her memory. Graduates of her school became teachers, head teachers and one of them even joined the present hill University. Margaret remained at Kharang for thirty-seven long years with a brief visit to Britain and America in the middle.

Margaret became ill in her early Seventies. She told her close comrades that she had just two years. She died of cancer in Delhi on 11 August 1973. A burst of her can be seen near the hospital in Kharang. Her birth anniversaries are celebrated even today in Shillong. She revered Gandhi and his ideals, had a real heart-felt desire to render service to the distant and remote parts of India, that part of India where the poor lived. Even the Governor of Assam and Lady Reid supported her efforts. Her autobiography reveals her strong desire for service through difficulties and challenges, a proof of how and why the Unitarian community felt a binding desire to support her with time, money and labour. She loved the village, the hills, its silence, the flora and the fauna. Her greatest love were children and she wrote: 'Children have been my salvation, each an individuality to be respected, developed and loved, each with his or her own special gifts, defects, needs and potentialities...' When someone asked her whether she felt lonely in the remote hills, she replied that she feels 'lonely in the streets of London but not with children in her village schools'.

An appraisal of her life and work:

Margaret Barr remains such a splendid figure in our history. Considering the remoteness of Assam at that time, far away from modern development and progress, where she dedicated her whole life work for Khasi Hills for education, it was a huge landmark in the history of education and social changes in India. Over a period of time, many Unitarians not only from England but also from other parts of Europe and United States and Canada visited Margaret and her school. Even after her death in 1973 they kept visiting and continue to support. It is said that a teacher's greatest tribute comes through the students. In an interview the students of Kong Barr noted that she spoke Khasi very fluently and even wrote a primer in Khasi on the history and people in Unitarian history. She lived, ate and sang and swam with her children and dressed in a simple manner. She was strict about punctuality and discipline which were the key to her whole educational experience. For example, if a student wasted food, they would get that much less in the next round of eating. One of her students said in a recent interview during her 50th birth anniversary recently in 2023: 'Thank God, I got Kong Barr as my teacher. I learnt many new things. Otherwise, I would be working in the fields or have been relegated to the kitchen in my home'. Her books *The Great Unity* (a comparative religious educational book) and *A Dream Come True* actually reveals the saga of not only herself but also of Indian women— their trials and tribulations, sacrifices and sacrifices with a single-minded devotion and determination for the cause of education and health care.

Margaret basically followed Gandhian basic education. And this brings us to the fact that there are some similarities between Gandhi's scheme of basic education and the NEP of 2020. For e.g., Gandhi put emphasis on job-oriented education. NEP also talks about 'Re-imagining Vocation Education' so that students can earn their livelihood and suggested integration of

vocational with main stream education. Education should be activity- centred. Gandhi favoured imparting education through mother tongue in primary classes. NEP also talks about power of language. Gandhi believed in value-based education: in village as a self-sufficient unit and vocational education within the students will pave the way for self-sufficient unit. His emphasis was on cooperation and on total development of the human personality through education. Emphasis on the three H's-- that is Head, Heart and Hand. Gandhi believed the end of education is character. NEP also talks about 'Holistic Development of Learner'. Gandhi talked about man-making education, physical, mental and moral development of the learner. NEP also talks about holistic development of the learner at each stage. Gandhi wanted the students to become self-reliant, responsible citizen of the country. The NEP also speaks about a democratic, just and socially-conscious citizens for the country. Gandhi planned to provide education to all. He considered education as the birth right of children and both parents and the state must provide education for all. NEP also talks about universal literacy.

It is not at all easy for a foreigner and a woman to show charity and philanthropic activities in a strange land amidst strange people. But she he gave hundreds of children a start in life, a push for a better life, a life from dust to dignity. Her life is a saga of a single-minded devotion to serve the people of India despite insurmountable odds and especially, in that region of the North East, where the people were not only poor but also far removed from the development of modern western civilization and conditions extremely primitive. She had dedicated her whole life towards educating, healing and providing health care to the villages and later, established a Rural Centre in the Kharang Valley where her legacy still endures. Today the challenges of education in the Khasi Hills are hard pressing indeed. These North Eastern Region States with its peculiar geography and close proximity to international borders present new and serious challenges-- On the one hand there is this threat of religious disturbances and on the other there are the ethnic fights. Government schemes aim at elementary education for all but it has to be made a mass movement-- only then it would be a success. Economic development of the region helps to promote political, social well-being of the people. Human Resources, Capital formation, other developments would enrich economy. However, it is up to the govt. private organization and dedicated individuals to provide vocational education.

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN THE LIGHT OF MAHATMA GANDHI'S THOUGHT ON WOMEN

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Abstract

Gender equality is an important educational and social concern and has significant implications for the preparation of future teachers. Teachers are expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to challenge gender stereotypes, discriminatory practices and unequal expectations within educational settings. Mahatma Gandhi's ideas on women provide an important Indian philosophical and social perspective for understanding gender equality. Gandhi advocated women's dignity, freedom, participation in public life and equality of rights, while emphasizing their potential as agents of social transformation. The present empirical study examined the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards gender equality in the light of Gandhian perspectives on women. A descriptive survey method was employed. The sample consisted of 653 pre-service teachers studying in aided and unaided B.Ed. colleges affiliated with the University of Mumbai. The findings suggest that gender equality attitudes among future teachers are broadly similar across gender groups, while maternal educational background is associated with differences in attitudes. The study discusses these findings through Gandhi's emphasis on women's dignity, education, independence, non-violence and their role in social transformation.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Pre-Service Teachers, Attitude, Mahatma Gandhi, Women, Teacher Education

Introduction

Gender equality is an important educational and social concern that involves equal rights, dignity, opportunities, participation and freedom for all individuals, irrespective of gender. Gender-related attitudes and beliefs are developed through family, society, media and, importantly, educational institutions. Teachers play a significant role in shaping learners' perceptions of gender through their classroom practices, expectations, interactions and teaching materials. Therefore, pre-service teachers, as future educators, need to develop positive attitudes towards gender equality and learn to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices.

In the Indian context, the understanding of gender equality can be enriched by examining the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi strongly opposed the treatment of women as inferior and emphasized their dignity, equality and independence. He advocated equal treatment of sons and

daughters and supported women's participation in social and public life. He also regarded women as powerful agents of social transformation and encouraged their active participation in India's freedom movement. Although some of Gandhi's views on gender were shaped by the social and historical context of his time and therefore require critical interpretation from a contemporary perspective, his emphasis on equality, dignity, moral agency, freedom and resistance to injustice continues to have relevance for teacher education.

Thus, connecting Gandhi's thoughts on women with contemporary gender equality provides an important framework for understanding the attitudes of future teachers. Developing such attitudes can help pre-service teachers create classrooms that promote equality, respect, participation and inclusion. Against this background, the present study examines pre-service teachers' attitudes towards gender equality and investigates whether these attitudes differ according to gender, mother's education and father's education.

Rationale of the Study

Although gender equality has received increasing attention in education, gender stereotypes continue to influence educational experiences and social expectations. Teacher education therefore needs to prepare teachers who can identify and challenge gender-based assumptions.

The present study is significant for three reasons. First, it focuses on **pre-service teachers**, who will become important agents in shaping the attitudes of future generations. Second, it examines gender equality through an **Indian philosophical perspective**, thereby connecting contemporary gender discourse with Gandhian thought. Third, it examines whether attitudes vary according to demographic characteristics such as gender and parental education.

The study is particularly relevant to the Gandhian idea that social transformation begins with changes in attitudes and everyday relationships. Gandhi's vision of social justice included equal respect for women and men.

Aim of the Study

To study pre-service teachers' attitudes towards gender equality in the light of Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts on women.

Objectives

1. To study the attitude of pre-service teachers towards gender equality.
2. To examine whether there is a significant difference in pre-service teachers' attitudes towards gender equality based on gender.
3. To examine whether there is a significant difference in pre-service teachers' attitudes towards gender equality based on mother's education.
4. To examine whether there is a significant difference in pre-service teachers' attitudes towards gender equality based on father's education.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference in pre-service teachers' attitudes towards gender equality based on Gender and Parent Education.

H₁: There is a significant difference in pre-service teachers' attitudes towards gender equality based on Gender and Parent Education.

Methodology

The present study employed the descriptive survey method to examine the existing attitudes of pre-service teachers towards gender equality and to determine whether these attitudes differed across selected demographic groups. The sample comprised 653 pre-service teachers enrolled in B.Ed. programmes in aided and unaided colleges affiliated with the University of Mumbai, selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed Gender Equality Attitude Scale, consisting of 25 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale. The collected data were analysed using Jamovi software. Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis were computed. The Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to examine the normality of the data, yielding $W = 0.992$, $p = .001$. Since $p < .05$, the assumption of normality was rejected, and therefore non-parametric tests were employed for inferential analysis.

Results and Findings

OVERALL ATTITUDE TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

Attitude							
Test	Sample size	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gender Equality	653	96.6	100	102	14	-0.749	0.365

The overall attitude score for the 653 pre-service teachers had a mean of **96.6**, median of **100**, mode of **102**, and standard deviation of **14**. The skewness was -0.749 and kurtosis was 0.365. The negative skewness indicates that responses were concentrated towards the higher end of the scale. Overall, the findings indicate a generally positive attitude towards gender equality among the pre-service teachers.

This finding can be viewed in relation to Gandhi's emphasis on women's dignity and equal status. His insistence that women should not experience disabilities that men did not experience provides a philosophical basis for viewing positive attitudes towards gender equality as an important component of teacher preparation.

Hypothesis Testing

H₀: There is no significant difference in pre-service teachers' attitudes towards gender equality based on Gender and Parent Education.

**ONE WAY ANOVA OF PRE SERVICE TEACHER'S ATTITUDE ACROSS
GENDER, MOTHER'S EDUCATION AND FATHER'S EDUCATION
PERFORMANCE.**

One way ANOVA (Kruskal-Wallis)					
	χ^2	df	p	ϵ^2	Inference
Gender	3.78	2	0.151	0.0058	Not Significant
Mother's Education	13.8	4	0.008	0.0211	Significant
Father's Education	4.97	4	0.29	0.00763	Not Significant

1. Gender

Since $p > .05$, the difference was **not statistically significant**. Thus, the null hypothesis concerning gender was retained. The finding suggests that male and female pre-service teachers in the present sample did not differ significantly in their attitudes towards gender equality.

From a Gandhian perspective, this finding is encouraging because Gandhi argued against treating women as inherently inferior and stated that he made no distinction between men and women with regard to independence and courage.

However, the absence of a statistically significant difference should not be interpreted as proof that gender has no relationship with gender attitudes in all populations. It only indicates that no significant difference was detected in this particular sample.

2. Mother's education.

Since $p < .05$, the difference was **statistically significant**. Therefore, the null hypothesis concerning mother's education was rejected.

The effect size, however, was small ($\epsilon^2 = .0211$). Therefore, although mother's education was statistically associated with differences in attitude, it should not be interpreted as having a large influence by itself.

The finding can be discussed through Gandhi's emphasis on education, awareness and women's dignity. A mother's educational experience may contribute to the social and intellectual environment in which children develop their understandings of equality. However, the present study is correlational/descriptive in this respect and cannot establish that mother's education directly causes more positive attitudes.

3. Father's Education

Since $p > .05$, the difference was **not statistically significant**. Therefore, the null hypothesis concerning father's education was retained.

Although participants whose fathers were graduates had a relatively high mean score (97.6),

the differences among groups were not statistically significant. The group whose fathers had education above postgraduate level had a lower mean score (88.3), but the group contained only nine participants, making interpretation of this result particularly cautious.

Discussion from a Gandhian Perspective

The findings present an interesting relationship between contemporary gender attitudes and Gandhian thought. First, the overall positive attitude of pre-service teachers towards gender equality is consistent with Gandhi's emphasis on women's dignity and equal rights. Gandhi argued that women should not be subjected to legal disabilities that men did not experience and supported equality between sons and daughters.

Second, the absence of a significant gender difference suggests that positive attitudes towards gender equality are not confined to female pre-service teachers. Male pre-service teachers also demonstrated substantial levels of positive attitudes. This is important because gender equality cannot be achieved only through the participation of women. Men must also become active participants in challenging discriminatory attitudes and practices.

Third, the significant association with mother's education provides an important educational insight. The gradual increase in mean scores across the mother's educational categories suggests that the home environment and educational background of parents may contribute to the development of attitudes concerning gender. Gandhi's thought emphasized the importance of education and awakening women to their dignity and capacity. His involvement with women was based partly on the belief that women could contribute actively to the transformation of society.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted without assuming that mothers alone are responsible for children's gender attitudes. Gender socialization occurs through multiple institutions, including family, school, peer groups, media, community and culture. Mother's education is one associated factor among many.

The Gandhian perspective also provides a useful foundation for understanding teachers as agents of social change. Gandhi did not view women merely as beneficiaries of reform; he encouraged their active participation in public and social life. Similarly, teachers should not merely teach the definition of gender equality. They should create classroom environments in which equality is practised through participation, language, responsibilities, decision-making and respect.

Educational Implications

The findings have several implications for teacher education:

1. **Gender-sensitive teacher education:** B.Ed. programmes should provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to critically examine gender stereotypes, discrimination and unequal social expectations.

2. **Gandhian perspectives in teacher education:** Indian thinkers such as Gandhi can be incorporated into discussions of gender equality to connect contemporary educational concerns with Indian social thought.
3. **Role of the teacher as change agent:** Teachers should model equality through classroom participation, distribution of responsibilities, language and interactions with learners.
4. **Family and social context:** Teacher education should recognize that attitudes towards gender are shaped by family and social environments. The significant association with mother's education indicates the need to understand gender socialization as a multidimensional process.
5. **Critical engagement with Gandhi:** Gandhian perspectives should not be presented uncritically. Pre-service teachers should compare Gandhi's historical ideas with contemporary constitutional values and gender-equity frameworks.

Conclusion

The present study examined pre-service teachers' attitudes towards gender equality in the light of Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts on women. The analysis revealed that gender did not produce a statistically significant difference in attitudes towards gender equality. Similarly, father's education did not produce a statistically significant difference. However, mother's education was significantly associated with differences in attitude, although the effect size was small.

From a Gandhian perspective, the findings reinforce the importance of dignity, equality, education and women's participation in social transformation. Gandhi's belief that women could actively contribute to social change remains relevant to contemporary teacher education. Future teachers need to understand gender equality not simply as a theoretical concept but as a value that must be reflected in everyday educational practice.

The study therefore highlights the importance of preparing pre-service teachers as reflective and gender-sensitive professionals capable of challenging stereotypes and promoting equality in schools. A Gandhian approach, critically interpreted in the context of contemporary gender discourse, can contribute to developing teachers who see education as an instrument of social transformation.

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REENGINEERING EDUCATION: CREATING AGILE LEARNERS FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

**By
Shri. Pramit Goel (Researcher)**

This essay highlights the urgent need to transform education systems to prepare students for a rapidly evolving, technology-driven economy. Traditional industrial-era models are inadequate in addressing the demands of AI-driven workplaces. The paper advocates for integrating technical expertise with soft skills – such as adaptability, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving – to create agile learners capable of thriving in dynamic environments.

Introduction

It critiques standardized, subject-focused curricula and testing methods for stifling creativity and failing to address interdisciplinary challenges. Instead, it calls for experiential learning frameworks, project-based assessments, and holistic progress cards, aligning with India's National Education Policy 2020. The essay emphasizes the importance of balancing STEM proficiency with human-centric skills to foster adaptability and occupational mobility. Recognizing the necessity of lifelong learning, it proposes mechanisms such as micro-credentials, employer-sponsored training, and government incentives to support continuous skill development. Educators play a pivotal role in this transformation by reskilling and upskilling themselves to teach interdisciplinary concepts effectively.

The essay envisions a reengineered education system that integrates STEM, soft skills, experiential learning, and adaptability. This holistic approach aims to equip future workers to collaborate with machines while leveraging uniquely human capabilities to drive innovation in the digital age.

Introduction

Goldman Sachs predicts that 300 million jobs could be impacted globally by 2025 because of advancements in AI and automation.¹ As industries get reshaped and impacted due to rapid developments in technology, the education system must be reimagined to prepare students for a future where technical expertise is increasingly commoditized, and job requirements are changing at a faster pace than ever. This calls for integrating soft skills in curriculum design while reviewing outdated assessments, pedagogy, and accreditation. The education system must reorient from rigid subjects and standardized testing to more interdisciplinary, experiential learning frameworks of lifelong learning.

Historical Context of Education Systems

Modern education originated in the late 19th century during the shift from an agrarian to an industrial society. The Committee of Ten, a group of American educators, designed a standardized high school curriculum with separate subjects like mathematics, history, and

¹ AIPRM. "50+ AI Replacing Jobs Statistics 2024 · AIPRM." AIPRM: Your Cheat Code for AI Like ChatGPT, Claude & Midjourney · AIPRM. Last modified July 11, 2024. <https://www.aiprm.com/ai-replacing-jobs-statistics/>.

languages to meet industrial needs.² A factory model of education was established, and the approach was standardized and efficient, akin to an assembly line production system to prepare students for repetitive, task-oriented jobs.³ Although this model was effective in equipping the student with the basic literacy and numeracy, it is becoming outdated as automation and AI transform the nature of work. This inflexible and linear nature of the education system neglects the interdisciplinary and dynamic environment that students will soon find themselves in.

Needs of the New-Age Economy

The modern economy, driven by rapid technological advances, demands a new blend of skills. According to McKinsey, success now hinges on a combination of technical and soft skills. While technical skills, especially in STEM, are vital for productivity, soft skills are equally important in creating an adaptable workforce.

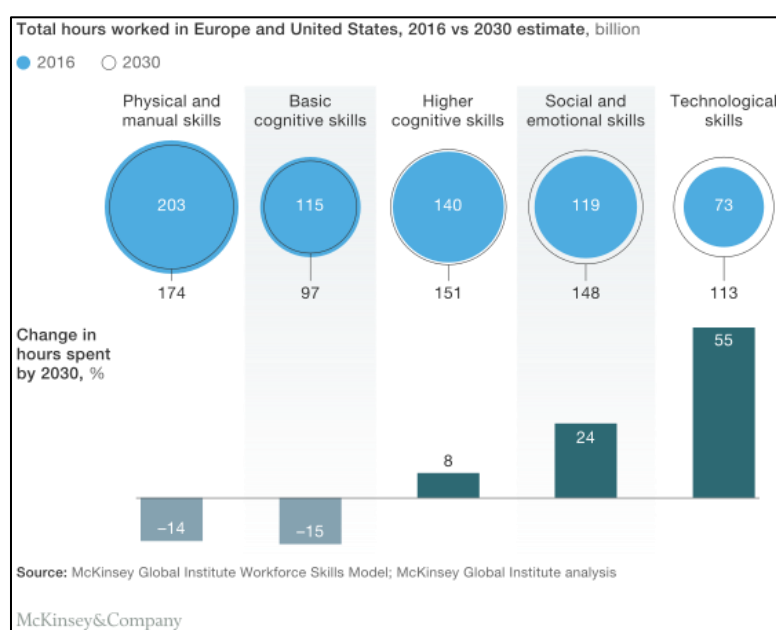


Figure 1⁴

Orienting the education system around STEM increases the marginal product of labor, which, according to the Marginal Productivity Theory of Wages, leads to higher wages and consequently higher economic output.⁵ It also addresses the projected 3.5 million skilled labor gap in STEM sectors in the US by 2025, helping reduce structural unemployment caused by a mismatch between workers' skills and job requirements.⁶ By equipping future employees with

² National Education Association of the United States. Committee on Secondary School Studies, *Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies [appointed at the Meeting of the National Educational Association July 9, 1892: With the Reports of the Conferences Arranged by this Committee and Held December 28-30, 1892]* (1893), 43.

³ H. P. Baptiste and C. Sleeter, *Multicultural Education: A Renewed Paradigm of Transformation and Call to Action* (San Francisco: Caddo Gap Press, 2015), 115-136.

⁴ Jacques Bughin et al., *Skill Shift Automation and the Future of the Workforce*, (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018), <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/skill-shift-automation-and-the-future-of-the-workforce>.

⁵ Daniel Hamermesh, "The Demand for Labor in the Long Run," 1984, 1, doi:10.3386/w1297.

⁶ Deloitte AI Institute, *Inspiring STEM learning and careers with AI*, (Deloitte, 2021), <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/consulting/articles/stem-diversity-inclusion.html>.

the technical skills to effectively leverage AI, economies can operate closer to their full capacity.

However, reliance on technological specialization also exposes workers to the risk of creative destruction, a concept developed by economist Joseph Schumpeter. It refers to the process through which innovation leads to the demise of older technologies and the skills associated with them. In an economy increasingly driven by technological advancements, workers who specialize in specific technologies may find their skills rendered obsolete, leading to structural unemployment. This is where soft skills become important, as workers will need to be adaptable in moving between industries and jobs with the advancement of technology.

Orienting the educational system toward the development of soft skills is critical in workers' ability to adjust to a rapidly evolving, technology-driven economy. A study conducted on Hungarian white-collar workers and managers revealed that complex problem-solving, creativity, and adaptability —essential soft skills— are strong indicators of employees' preparedness to embrace digital technologies.⁷ This adaptability, also known as occupational labor mobility, is crucial as workers transition between jobs and industries in response to changes in technology. Greater flexibility improves labor market fluidity, which flattens the Phillips Curve, allowing the economy to sustain higher output and lower unemployment without prompting significant inflation.

As AI and automation achieve levels that mirror or surpass human capabilities in most technical tasks, the significance of human-centric abilities, especially soft skills, has become increasingly apparent. Human beings have a comparative advantage over machines in activities that require emotional intelligence, adaptability, and effective problem-solving. The development of soft skills equips employees to work synergistically with AI rather than competing with it. This can be evidenced in trends for wages in Figure 2, where workers possessing higher social skills have achieved dramatic growth in wages compared to those with weak social skills. In fact, Deloitte estimates that, by 2030, two-thirds of all jobs will be soft skill-intensive occupations.⁸

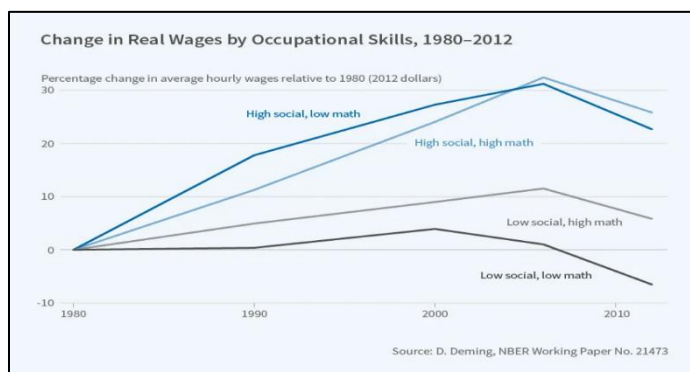


Figure 2⁹

⁷ Nóra Obermayer et al., "Importance of digital and soft skills in the digital age," *European Conference on Knowledge Management* 24, no. 2 (2023): doi:10.34190/eckm.24.2.1550.

⁸ Deloitte Access Economics, *Soft skills for business success*, (2017), <https://www.deloitte.com/au/en/services/economics/perspectives/soft-skills-business-success.html>.

⁹ D. Deming, "The Growing Importance of Social Skills, NBER Working Paper 21473," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132, no. 4 (June 2017): 1637.

Beyond Traditional Academic Disciplines

Academic disciplines have long served as the core structure for school curricula. However, as students gear up for a future shaped by automation and technological advancements, a more effective approach may be to organize education around soft skills and ways of thinking rather than conventional subject boundaries. Such a model would foster skills like systems thinking, design thinking, communication, leadership among others. Within each of those courses, students would look at interrelated ideas related to a wide range of disciplines.

As innovation cycles shorten and knowledge quickly becomes outdated due to the accelerating pace of discovery, the essence of education should shift from simply acquiring information to developing soft skills. These skills, which enable workers to adapt to change and navigate complex challenges, remain relevant regardless of technological shifts. While a solid understanding of STEM subjects is necessary for knowing the tools of technology, it is the development of soft skills that shows workers how to apply these tools in innovative, impactful ways.

Increasingly, workplaces require employees to solve problems that are multifaceted and span various industries. For instance, tackling climate change requires knowledge from STEM subjects like chemistry, biology, and physics, but also social sciences like economics and politics. Teaching subjects in silos, as is common in today's education system, fails to reflect the interconnected nature of these real-world challenges. Ambrose's pedagogical theory of cognitivism highlights the importance of building mental maps that establish meaningful connections between concepts.¹⁰ Integrating diverse subjects into skill-based courses can foster connected understanding, better equipping students to solve complex, real-world problems.

Measuring What Matters

Policymakers need to fundamentally rethink how to assess student learning. Current systems heavily rely on standardized testing, which, while measurable, often succumbs to Goodhart's Law – the idea that when a metric becomes a target, it stops being a reliable measure.¹¹ In the context of standardized testing, this means that when educational institutions prioritize test scores as a measure of student success, they may inadvertently encourage behaviors that prioritize test preparation over genuine learning. Students may resort to rote memorization and test-taking strategies rather than developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This focus on quantifiable metrics can lead to a narrow educational experience that does not adequately prepare students for real-world challenges.

Policymakers and institutions should adopt a system of paired metrics, an approach championed by former Intel CEO Andy Grove, where the second metric is introduced to address the negative consequences of the first one.¹² Complementing standardized testing with project-based

¹⁰ Susan A. Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 44.

¹¹ C. A. Goodhart, "Problems of Monetary Management: The UK Experience," *Monetary Theory and Practice*, 1984, 91, doi:10.1007/978-1-349-17295-5_4.

¹² Andrew S. Grove, *High Output Management* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 17.

learning would lead to a better evaluation of student capabilities. Project-based learning not only evaluates essential soft skills like teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, but also encourages deeper learning. The application of knowledge promotes the “transfer” of learning and fosters “mastery,” aligning with Ambrose’s theory of effective learning.¹³ India’s National Education Policy 2020 reflects this shift by advocating for a “holistic progress card” that measures both soft and hard skills through a mix of project-based and test-based assessments. Additionally, the NEP promotes flexibility in curriculum design, allowing students to choose subjects based on their interests and career aspirations. It also emphasizes the integration of technology in teaching and learning to enhance educational delivery.¹⁴ To prepare students for the fast-evolving job market, institutions should prioritize experiential learning that aligns with Blikstein’s constructionist model, which emphasizes learning through real-world experiences¹⁵ This approach will help graduates become more adaptable and better equipped to thrive in industries influenced by automation. In today’s builder economy, where creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation are highly valued, this kind of learning is especially crucial.

Central to this transformation in learning process are the educators, who will play a pivotal role in equipping students not only with technical proficiency but also with the essential soft skills needed to thrive in the digital era. Since most educators might have been trained in traditional systems where soft skills were often overlooked, the process must begin with reskilling and upskilling the educators themselves.

Micro-Learning for a Dynamic Workforce

In a world where technology is advancing at an unprecedented pace, the traditional notion of a student – someone who spends a finite number of years in school before entering the workforce – is outdated. Today’s workers must be lifelong learners. Current methods involve employer-sponsored training programs, designated professional development days, and access to online courses. However, these initiatives seem insufficiently integrated into the everyday work life, often treated as optional extras rather than essential components of a sustainable career.

One way to support lifelong learning is by providing paid time off for workers to pursue educational opportunities. This could be incentivized through government policies that encourage businesses to invest in their employees’ ongoing education. Governments could also promote micro-accreditation, allowing workers to earn smaller, more targeted qualifications throughout their careers, rather than requiring them to commit to long-term degree programs. In 2022, the EU passed the “Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability” to enable institutions and businesses to develop, implement, and recognize micro-credentials.¹⁶ These programs should not only focus on technical skills but also prioritize the development of soft skills – such as communication,

¹³ Susan A. Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 91-121.

¹⁴ Government of India, *National Education Policy*, (2020).

¹⁵ Paulo Blikstein, "Travels in Troy with Freire," *Social Justice Education for Teachers*, 2008, 206, doi:10.1163/9789460911446_015.

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adaptability, and emotional intelligence – which are increasingly critical in the modern workplaces.

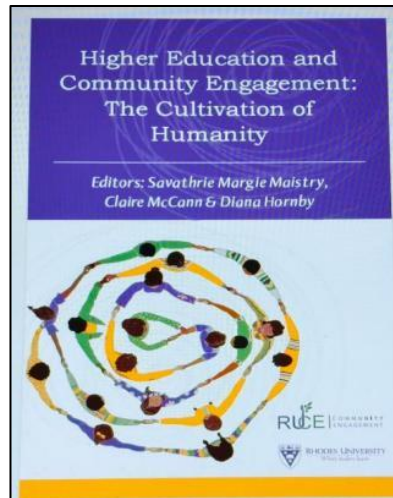
Conclusion

The workforce of the future will be more fluid, with careers spanning multiple industries and roles. As AI and automation continue to transform the job market, the cultivation of soft skills will become increasingly critical for professionals looking to future-proof their careers. A holistic education model is required that integrates STEM with soft skills, interdisciplinary thinking, real-world application, and life-long learning. Ultimately, the future workforce will need to collaborate with machines, however it is our unique human skills that will define the direction of that partnership.

BOOK REVIEW

By

Dr. Anita Brandon



Publisher : Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCES)/Rhodes University Press, South Africa, 2026

ISBN : 978-1-0492-9725-5 (Hardcover/Open Access PDF)

Introduction

The present edited Volume titled–*Higher Education and Community Engagement: The Cultivation of Humanity* (294 pages) edited by Maistry, S.M., McCann, C., and Hornby, D. is a timely nudge to rethink and reform the role of universities from pursuing market-driven purposes of higher education confined to narrow priorities of employability, competitive institutional rankings and knowledge productivity—as being steered at present; to rise up to unleash their broader ethical humanising potential to foster community engagement.

It carves out the contours of relevant higher education as a space to nurture students, academics and communities around them to support human interlinkages in the spirit of ‘*Ubuntu*’—the South African Philosophy of “I am because We are” with its 5 Core Values of survival, solidarity, compassion, respect and dignity; Nussbaum’s Conception of Cultivating Humanity and the adapted Four Worlds Integral Development Model. The book espouses cultivation of humanity through promoting universal human values in pedagogy, research, institutional culture and living community partnerships, emphasizing our shared inter-connectedness, anchored in mutual respect, empathy and compassion, to shape our well-being and growth, depending on the well-being and growth of our community.

The present book edited by distinguished South African Scholars – S.M. Maistry, C. McCann and D. Hornby and published by Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCES), South Africa, 2026; offers thought-provoking re-orientation of the Role of Higher Education and Universities in 21st Century.

This book is pertinent for being reviewed in the Journal – *Quest in Education*, a long- standing quarterly journal rooted in the Gandhian philosophy of holistic, value-oriented and socially responsible education promoted through Gandhi Shikshan Bhavan, Mumbai.

Theoretical Perspective and Philosophical Thrust

The book is anchored in the adapted *Four Worlds Integral Development Model*. This theoretical framework integrates four vital dimensions of knowledge and human existence: **the rational-** (academic/theoretical), **the pragmatic-** (functional/ operational), **the holistic-** (systemic/ ecological) and **the humanistic-**(relational/ cultural).

The contributing authors to this book draw inspiration from the South African philosophical ideas of *Ubuntu*—premised on cultivating humanity through conscious community engagement and Martha Nussbaum’s insights on fostering liberal education to build the capacities of students for global citizenship, through nurturing critical self-examination, narrative imagination and inter-cultural empathy. True engagement with communities believes in their indigenous propensity to be active co-creators of enriching lived knowledge and addresses questions of power and inequality to promote social justice.

The ideas explored in this Book are to clearly envision the social responsibility of Universities for the Cultivation of Humanity; liberating them from remaining confined to knowledge production, career building, degree granting and research outputs. It defines the higher purpose of Universities to be transforming students and society to create a more just, humane and inclusive future; wherein, students are educated not merely for becoming employable, but to unleash their potential for creating a life of meaning and social responsibility, grounded in the cultivation of humanity.

Structural Overview of Content

The Book is organized into two main components, with first half of the volume focusing on theoretical and ideological reflections about current concerns and ideals dominating higher education. The chapters in the first half of the Book seek to redefine the purpose of higher education in the 21st Century by integrating the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, community engagement imbued with universal human values for the cultivation of humanity for sustaining freedom, justice, peace and well-being of all, through the pursuit of the common good of humankind. Community Engagement is advocated as the core functional process to enact and live this transformation for cultivation of humanity in Higher Education, guided by *Ubuntu* Philosophy and universal human values to be inculcated.

The second part of the Book captures empirical and philosophical realities across diverse settings of higher education. The chapters in the second half of the Volume document case studies of university-interface with community in action. These case studies present community engagement as a space for genuine co-learning and co-liberation to foster responsible citizenship among students.

Strengths of the Present Book

This book volume models the inclusivity that it advocates. It blends high level philosophical and ideological analysis with empirical case-studies based on participatory action research interfacing with the community partners. Thus, the book becomes a living testimony of creating collaborative spaces for co-learning with community engagement.

The Volume's critique of institutional structures that constrain real community engagement, provides an insightful framework for Indian educators to move beyond tokenistic rural field visits towards living, long-term sustained and reciprocal partnerships. While India's National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) reiterates community engagement, value-based learning and social responsibility; Indian Academia often struggles with its actual practice. Thus, for scholars in the Indian Academia and for readers of *Quest in Education*, this Book offers inspiring cross-cultural insights.

Limitations of the Book

While the theoretical framework of this Book has adapted the *Four Worlds Integral Development Model* ; a few of the empirical chapters in its second half, do not fully integrate this framework.

This volume could have been further strengthened by incorporating indigenous, decolonial philosophies from other regions of the global South, other than South Africa—such as the Gandhian concept of Basic Education linked with community work. Including more country/regional perspectives would have further enriched the book's living examples.

Conclusion and Academic Value

The present book on Higher Education and Community Engagement : The Cultivation of Humanity is an insightful addition to the Sociology of Education and Higher Education Studies. The Editors Maistry, McCann and Hornby deserve appreciation for bringing forth this Volume that challenges Universities to reconnect knowledge with living reality, learning with social responsibility and higher education with community engagement for cultivation of humanity.

This Book is thought-provoking for revisiting and redefining the Vision and Goals of Higher Education to rebuild Universities as ethical, empathetic and socially just harbingers of social transformation for equality, justice, peace and progress of all people. It is recommended as an inspiring reading for scholars, educational administrators and policy- planners worldwide to transform higher education to contribute responsibly to foster the ideals of peace, progress and prosperity for all people, for cultivating a shared humanity for a meaningful human life and sustained human development.

REVIEW ARTICLE

***The Direct Path: A Collection of Reviews of Susheel Kumar Sharma's Unwinding Self*, Edited by Danielle Hanson. New Delhi: Paragon International Publishers, 2026, pp. xiv + 402, ISBN: 978-93-94964-28-0.**

By

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Introduction: Metacritical Architecture and Polyphonic Reception in Contemporary Poetry

Literary criticism in contemporary poetics rarely witnesses an event where an entire scholarly volume is dedicated to the multi-layered critical reception of a single collection of verse. In Indian English Poetry (IEP), which has historically grappled with the dual pressures of regional rootedness and global canonization, the publication of *The Direct Path: A Collection of Reviews of Susheel Kumar Sharma's Unwinding Self* (2026), edited by the acclaimed American poet and Editor Danielle Hanson, and constitutes an extraordinary intellectual and pedagogical milestone. The volume represents an ambitious metacritical endeavor: it gathers fifty-one published reviews and critical review essays alongside an exhaustive, fifteen-part concluding dialogue between the editor and the poet, mapping the profound domestic and international resonance of Susheel Kumar Sharma's third poetry collection, *Unwinding Self* (originally published by the Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute in 2020).

As Matthew Arnold famously posited in his classical essays on criticism, great literature requires both the creative power and the critical power; poetry flourishes when sustained by an active, discriminating, and vibrant intellectual atmosphere. In the Indian aesthetic paradigm, this corresponds directly to the symbiotic relationship between the Kavi (poet-seer) and the Sahrdaya (the responsive, empathetic reader-critic). The *Direct Path* materializes this exact classical aesthetic nexus within a contemporary, transnational framework. Danielle Hanson—herself an accomplished American lyricist and editor who previously compiled *Sightlines: View Points on Susheel Kumar Sharma's The Door is Half Open* (2024)—has brought together a remarkably diverse assembly of scholars, critics, senior professors, early-career researchers, and creative writers from eighteen Indian states and eight foreign countries across five continents.

Sharma, a senior Professor of English at the University of Allahabad (one of India's oldest and most prestigious seats of higher learning), presents in *Unwinding Self* a corpus of forty-two tightly crafted poems that interrogate the fractures of modern existence, the socio-economic vulnerabilities of subaltern communities, the quiet trauma of gendered oppression, the looming shadows of ecological degradation, and the eternal spiritual quest for self-realization (*Ātma-Darśana*). By consolidating fifty-one distinct critical perspectives, *The Direct Path* demonstrates how Sharma's poetic oeuvre transcends isolated regionalism to become an expansive canvas of universal human concern. This review provides a comprehensive appraisal of the edited volume, delineating its structural design, thematic clusters, dialogic depth, pedagogical utility, and lasting scholarly significance.

Structural Architecture and Demographic Matrix of the Volume

The volume is meticulously organized into three overarching segments: the editorial front matter (Prelude and Introduction by Danielle Hanson), the main body comprising fifty-one distinct critical reviews (Chapters 1 through 51, pp. 1–351), and a substantial concluding conversational monograph titled 'To Preserve Human Dignity Amidst Silence & Erasure: A Conversation with Susheel Sharma' (Chapter 52, pp. 352–402). The volume concludes with biographical profiles of the international contributors and indices.

What makes the volume structurally distinct is its democratic range of critical voices. Unlike conventional academic festschrifts or anthologies restricted to senior professorial cliques, Hanson's compilation reflects an expansive egalitarian spectrum. The contributors include eminent scholars, former university Vice-Chancellors, former Heads of University Departments, established bilingual poets, senior literary journal editors, mid-career professors, doctoral research fellows, early-childhood educators, literary bloggers, and emerging postgraduate researchers. The critical pieces gathered in this volume originally appeared in prestigious peer-reviewed journals such as *Research Trends in Modern Linguistics and Literature*, *VOICES*, *Journal of Literature, Culture & Media Studies*, *Literary Voice*, *Current English Review*, *The Critical Endeavour*, and *Creative Flight*.

The following structured table encapsulates the salient features, quantitative metrics, and demographic breadth of *The Direct Path*, offering a comparative overview of the volume's editorial scope:

Structural / Analytical Dimension	Quantitative & Qualitative Profile in The Direct Path
Volume Title & Editor	The Direct Path: A Collection of Reviews of Susheel Kumar Sharma's <i>Unwinding Self</i> Edited by Danielle Hanson
Primary Text Analyzed	<i>Unwinding Self</i> (Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute, 2020) by Prof. Susheel Kumar Sharma (42 Poems)
Total Reviews & Essays	51 Comprehensive Critical Reviews and Analytical Essays (Chapters 1 to 51, pp. 1–351)
Culminating Dialogue	Chapter 52: 'To Preserve Human Dignity Amidst Silence & Erasure: A Conversation with Susheel Sharma' (pp. 352–402)
Geographical Diversity	8 Countries across 5 Continents: India, United States, Russia, Ukraine, Spain, South Africa, Tanzania, New Zealand, Australia
Indian Regional Coverage	18 Indian States and Union Territories (representing North, South, East, West, and North-Eastern regions)
Contributor Profile	Emeriti Professors, Former Vice-Chancellors, Department Chairs, Journal Editors, PhD Scholars, Translators, Early Educators
Original Publishing Venues	High-impact peer-reviewed journals (e.g., <i>Literary Voice</i> , <i>The Critical Endeavour</i> , <i>Creative Flight</i> , <i>VOICES</i> , <i>JCMS</i>)

Critical Frameworks Used	Vedantic Hermeneutics, Subaltern Studies, Postcolonialism, Ecocriticism, Reader-Response Theory, Rasa Theory, Semiotics
Total Pagination & Format	xiv + 402 pages (Paragon International Publishers, New Delhi, 2026, ISBN: 978-93-94964-28-0)

Thematic Trajectories and Critical Currents across the 51 Reviews

A rigorous synthesis of the fifty-one reviews reveals that Susheel Kumar Sharma's *Unwinding Self* does not lend itself to a single, monolithic interpretive paradigm. Rather, the reviewers approach the collection through six major thematic vectors, demonstrating the multi-layered richness of Sharma's poetic universe.

Vedantic Metaphysics, Cosmic Consciousness, and the Ontological 'Self'

A prominent cluster of reviews—including foundational essays by Abhishek Tiwari (Ch. 1), Ashok Kumar Mohanty (Ch. 4), Dhurjjati Sarma (Ch. 14), Maxim Borisovich Demchenko (Ch. 28), Surya P. Nair (Ch. 48), and Vadapalli V. B. Rama Rao (Ch. 51)—engages with the metaphysical core of the collection. Sharma's title, *Unwinding Self*, is interpreted not as self-indulgent autobiography, but as a deliberate deconstruction of the ego (*ahaṅkāra*) to uncover the underlying cosmic self (*Ātman*). Tiwari describes Sharma as a modern 'Hṛṣi-Kavi' (ascetic-seer poet) whose verse bridges the corporeal and the transcendental, observing human spectacles through the lens of the Infinite.

In his incisive reading of 'Kabir's Chadar', Tiwari highlights how Sharma critically dialogues with the great medieval saint-poet Kabir. Whereas Kabir celebrates the unsullied preservation of the spiritual shawl ('Jyon ki tyon dhar dini chadariya'), Sharma recognizes that for contemporary human beings navigating a ruthless, transactional society, existential and moral stains are an unavoidable reality of lived experience:

Even the blood stains of abortion / The burn marks of jealousy
The blotches of over-ambition / The pigments of infamy
The splatter of calumny / The spatter of canards
The invectives of distrust / Go unnoticed on mine.

Demchenko, writing from a Russian comparative perspective, links Sharma's spiritual resonance with Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, noting that both poets utilize English not as an alien colonial medium, but as an expansive vessel to transmit the timeless metaphysical consciousness of Indian *darśana*. Similarly, Surya P. Nair examines the elemental schema of the *Pañcabhūta* (earth, water, fire, air, and space), illustrating how Sharma's poetry grounds human suffering and spiritual longing within the cosmic fabric of universal elements.

Subaltern Resistance, Ethical Witnessing, and Socio-Economic Precarity

Contrasting with the metaphysical readings is a powerful body of sociological and subaltern criticism contributed by Donovan Roebert (Ch. 15), Joyjit Ghosh (Ch. 21), Mithilesh Kumar Pandey and Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay (Ch. 29), and Tanzanian scholar Jeno Francis Kidasi (Ch. 20). These critics highlight Sharma's unwavering ethical commitment to giving voice to the marginalized, the exploited, and the dispossessed.

A central text for this critique is 'On Reading Langston Hughes' "Theme for English B"', in which Sharma transposes Hughes' Harlem Renaissance racial critique into the Indian context

of caste and institutional hierarchy. Re-invoking the mythical master-disciple confrontation between Guru Droṇācārya and the tribal youth Eklavya, Sharma issues a biting postcolonial and subaltern interrogation:

Will you be another / Stumbling block on my way?
I am told, you justify Dronacharya's every act—
Will you repeat him? Will you replicate him?

As Pandey and Chattopadhyay argue, Sharma exposes the epistemic violence inherent in institutional gatekeeping, asserting the subaltern subject's right to knowledge without the ritualistic sacrifice of their agency or thumb. In 'Me, A Black Doxy', Sharma provides an extraordinarily empathetic interior monologue of a sex worker. As Roebert and Tiwari observe, the poet refuses moralizing judgment; instead, he reveals the persona's profound human compassion when she laments that her client 'could have spent that amount / on his wife, on his children'. Furthermore, poems like 'A Voice' and 'A Family by the Road' confront the brutal economic precarity of daily-wage laborers, migrant workers, and traffic-signal destitute families living in metropolitan centers, making Sharma a vital chronicler of subaltern survival.

Gender Politics, Institutional Hegemony, and the 'Bubli' Poetic Sequence

The eleven-part poetic cycle dedicated to 'Bubli' receives extensive, nuanced analysis across numerous essays, notably by B. Kathiresan and collaborators (Ch. 7, 8, 9), Sulakshna Sharma (Ch. 45), Richa Biswal (Ch. 42), and Chumdemo Tungoe (Ch. 12). The Bubli sequence functions as a microcosm of patriarchal oppression, chronicling the journey of an aspiring, lower-middle-class girl whose athletic and career dreams are systematically crushed by institutional misogyny and sexual exploitation:

The coach said she could not be recommended / To represent the state if she did not meet
the Secretary of the Association privately.

Sulakshna Sharma and Biswal observe that Sharma avoids sensationalism or melodrama. Instead, he clinically maps the multi-tiered compromises forced upon women in patriarchal spaces—ranging from athletic federations to family structures. Bubli's subsequent disillusionment and gradual spiritual introspection ('not yet ready for salvation') echo classical literary antecedents while firmly rooting the narrative in contemporary Indian gender realities. The reviews unanimously commend Sharma for adopting a sensitive, feminist-aligned gaze that dissects institutional predation while honoring female resilience.

Ecological Vulnerability, Anthropocene Crisis, and Sacred Topographies

Ecocritical interpretations constitute another major strand in the volume, spearheaded by Patricia Prime (Ch. 34), Patrycja Austin (Ch. 35), Pradip Kumar Patra (Ch. 37), and Siddhartha Sharma (Ch. 44). In analyzing poems such as 'The Kerala Flood 2018' and 'Chasing a Dream on the Ganges', these critics underscore Sharma's acute awareness of the Anthropocene and ecological devastation.

In 'The Kerala Flood 2018', Sharma captures both the catastrophic fury of nature unleashed by unbridled developmental greed and the petty ideological squabbles that infect disaster management. As Siddhartha Sharma notes, the poet lays bare the irony of human politicization amidst catastrophe:

Some say help only from / Good is welcome.
Some say it is vile and be stopped. / Does a victim have a choice?

Similarly, 'Chasing a Dream on the Ganges' deconstructs romanticized notions of sacred geography, presenting the river as simultaneously a venerable spiritual mother and an ecological casualty of urban pollution, industrial effluents, and commercial hypocrisy. Sharma's ecopoetics insists on ecological accountability as an inseparable component of spiritual integrity.

Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics, Postcolonial Poetics & Global Reception

The international contributions in *The Direct Path* provide invaluable comparative frameworks. Spanish semiotician Asun López-Varela (Ch. 5) investigates how Sharma synthesizes Hindu philosophical traditions with Western literary theories, establishing a cross-cultural semiotic bridge between East and West. South African scholar Donovan Roebert reflects on the unique cultural vitality of poetry in India compared to its institutional marginalization in the contemporary West.

Ukrainian scholar Svitlana Buchatska (Ch. 49) emphasizes the collection's profound 'love of values'—a moral and ethical compass that transcends geopolitical boundaries. In Chapter 21, Joyjit Ghosh examines Sharma's resistance to colonial mimicry, demonstrating how the poet utilizes the English language with sovereign autonomy, embedding Sanskrit concepts, vernacular idioms, and indigenous mythic archetypes without defensive apologetics or exoticization. The volume as a whole affirms that Indian English Poetry has evolved from being an imitator of colonial models into a mature, self-confident global discourse.

Stylistic Innovation, Micro-Poetics, and Lyrical Craft

Several reviewers focus specifically on Sharma's formal craft, poetic technique, and stylistic innovation. Rabindra Kumar Verma (Ch. 41) explores Sharma's mastery of 'micro-poetry', illustrating how extreme brevity and compressed lyrical syntax generate expansive philosophical epiphanies. Krishna Gopal Srivastava (Ch. 27) provides a masterly analysis of the 'silences that speak' in *Unwinding Self*, investigating how Sharma employs caesuras, ellipses, and unsaid pauses to invite the reader into active co-creation of poetic meaning.

K. Balachandran (Ch. 23) praises the crystalline simplicity of Sharma's diction, recalling Wordsworth's ideal of poetry written in the real language of human beings, yet imbued with high intellectual seriousness. Sarat Chandra Satapathy (Ch. 43) and E. Ram Bhaskar Raju (Ch. 16) examine the rich tapestry of literary allusions across Sharma's verse—weaving effortlessly between Alexander Pope, Thomas Gray, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, and classical Sanskrit poetics (Valmiki, Vyasa, Kalidasa, Bhartṛhari).

The Culminating Hermeneutic Dialogue: The Hanson-Sharma Interview (Chapter 52)

The crowning jewel of *The Direct Path* is undoubtedly Chapter 52, titled 'To Preserve Human Dignity Amidst Silence & Erasure: A Conversation with Susheel Sharma' (pp. 352–402). Conducted via correspondence over nine months (September 2024 to June 2025) between Editor Danielle Hanson and Prof. Susheel Kumar Sharma, this 51-page interview represents a monumental primary-source document in contemporary literary scholarship.

Structured around fifteen substantial, probing questions, the dialogue delves into the core philosophical, technical, and pedagogical commitments that have guided Sharma's three-decade career as a poet-academic. Hanson pushes Sharma beyond conventional platitudes, asking hard questions about the tension between individual introspection and political commitment, the ethics of aestheticizing trauma, the politics of English as a medium of Indian creative expression, and the practical challenges of teaching creative writing in modern university classrooms.

Among the critical insights emerging from this dialogue, three concepts stand out for their theoretical significance:

1. The Concept of the 'Ideal Reader' (The Sahṛdaya Pāṭhaka Synthesis): Sharma articulates a sophisticated reader-response framework that bridges Roland Barthes's Western concept of the 'writerly reader' (*texte scriptible*) with the classical Indian concept of the Sahṛdaya Pāṭhaka (the empathetic, culturally attuned reader). Sharma explains that poetry does not deliver closed, dogmatic moral verdicts; rather, it creates an open, meditative field wherein writer, reader, and critic co-create meaning through active, shared contemplation.

2. Polyphony and the Seven Afterwords: Hanson questions Sharma on his unorthodox practice of appending seven international 'Afterwords' and detailed glossaries to *Unwinding Self*. Sharma explains that this was a deliberate act of decentering authorial monopoly. Drawing parallels to the Bhakti traditions of Kabir and Tukaram—whose verses were historically preserved and disseminated through layers of critical commentary, glosses, and community interpretation—Sharma asserts that once a poem is published, it belongs to the public domain, and international commentary deepens rather than dilutes the poetic voice.

3. Poetry as Ethical Resistance and Preservation of Dignity: Sharma reflects movingly on the responsibility of the poet in an age dominated by authoritarian erasures, communal strife, and digital alienation. He defines poetry not as ornamental entertainment, but as an essential ethical space dedicated to preserving human dignity, amplifying marginalized silences, and refusing to let human suffering be reduced to statistical insignificance.

Critical Evaluation: Scholarly Merits, Metacritical Pedagogy, and Methodological Considerations

In evaluating *The Direct Path* as an academic volume, several exceptional scholarly strengths must be highlighted alongside minor editorial considerations:

A. Democratization of the Critical Sphere: Danielle Hanson deserves profound credit for creating an inclusive, polyphonic critical space. By placing early-career researchers and international scholar's side-by-side with senior academic luminaries, the volume democratizes academic criticism and provides an invaluable model for how literary reception ought to be curated.

B. Pedagogical and Methodological Utility: For postgraduate students, research scholars, and teachers of literature, *The Direct Path* serves as a practical masterclass in the art of the book review and literary hermeneutics. Readers can witness firsthand how fifty-one distinct critics analyze the exact same poems ('Snapshots', 'Bubli', 'Kabir's Chadar', 'Me, A Black Doxy') using entirely different theoretical lenses—ranging from Formalism and Stylistics to Ecocriticism, Subaltern Studies, Feminism, and Comparative Semiotics.

C. Elevation of Indian English Poetry on the Global Stage: The volume decisively counters the historical Euro-American neglect of contemporary Indian poetry in English. The rigorous engagement by scholars from five continents proves that Indian English poets like Susheel Kumar Sharma are producing work of undeniable global resonance and philosophical weight.

D. Methodological Considerations: As with any collection of fifty-one reviews centered on a single 42-poem volume, certain structural redundancies are unavoidable. Key biographical details, citations of opening poem lines ('Tsunami hits Japan / God is resting in Heaven'), and

summaries of the Bubli cycle inevitably recur across multiple essays. However, far from diminishing the collection's value, these recurring citations demonstrate which poems serve as the primary cognitive anchors of the collection, revealing how different critical minds extract divergent interpretive epiphanies from the same foundational texts.

Conclusion and Scholarly Recommendations

In conclusion, *The Direct Path: A Collection of Reviews of Susheel Kumar Sharma's Unwinding Self*, edited with meticulous care and intellectual vision by Danielle Hanson, is a landmark contribution to contemporary literary scholarship. It is at once a testament to Susheel Kumar Sharma's stature as one of India's most profound and philosophically grounded poets, and a vibrant celebration of the critical community that gives life to literature.

Following the analytical traditions exemplified in peer-reviewed journals like *Quest in Education*, this volume demonstrates that poetry remains a powerful vehicle for social critique, ethical awakening, and spiritual introspection. The volume makes a compelling case for the revitalization of poetry review as a rigorous academic genre capable of bridging creative artistry and theoretical inquiry.

The volume is unreservedly recommended for:

- University and departmental libraries catering to English Literature, Comparative Literature, Indian Writing in English, and Cultural Studies.
- Research scholars and postgraduate students seeking practical, high-level models for literary criticism, review writing, and textual hermeneutics.
- Faculty members designing curricula around Postcolonial Poetics, South Asian Literature, and Contemporary Global Verse.
- Creative writers and general readers seeking to understand the deep, transformative nexus between the poet's vision, social reality, and the reader's empathetic response.

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The Direct Path

A Collection of Reviews of
Susheel Kumar Sharma's *Unwinding Self*



Editor
Danielle Hanson

PROF. PRADIP PRABHU (1-10-1947 TO 25-8-2026)



**By Prof. Dr. Vibhuti Patel, Trustee,
Indian Council of Basic Education, Mumbai**

The Former Dean, TISS Tuljapur, Prof. Pradip Prabhu, founder of Kashtakari Sangathana and Co-founder, Barefoot Academy of Governance, popularly known as Pradip Bhau passed on 25-8-2026 in Pune after a prolonged illness. He stood out as a brilliant, deeply principled, intellectually rigorous lifelong learner, non-hierarchical teacher and coworker and inclusive leader.

All those who were his fellow travelers in his academic journey as well as different social movements of the intersectionally vulnerable people facing multiple marginalities have so many inspiring memories of Pradipbhau's mentorship and rapport with the community, single minded-dedicated efforts for social justice, democratic style in conversation, studied presentations and culturally responsive mass communication, electrifying oratory and analytical proficiency marked by deep knowledge of ethnography, anthropology, cultural studies, liberation theology and grounded understanding due to extensive travelling and working with the grass roots activists in the Global South. His training sessions on forest dwellers 'rights, dignity and entitlements' left an unforgettable mark on the participants. We had opportunity to discuss with Prof. Pradip along with members of Women's Centre, FAOW and RCWS during 1980s and 1990s, when we regularly visited Kashtakari Sangathana (KS). Pradip bhau, Shiraz, Supriya Akerkar, Adv. Brianbhau patiently explained the political economy of the area and the intervention of KS, we learnt so many warli songs!!! The women members of KS were always encouraged to participate in the National Conferences of Women's Liberation Movement (1980, 1985, 1990), Kriti Cultural Workshop in Delhi (1982) and Daughters Rally of Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Presentation on 14-11-1986. Collective wisdom of KS on "Of Witches and the Witchcraft" published in Special Issues of Socialist Health Review in 1984 (archives.sochara.org) brought in valuable insights to understand power dynamics of the phenomenon of disproportionately single women, deserted women, widows, or elderly women who are branded as witches (*chetakin* or *dakin*) by local

shamans or witch-doctors (*bhagats / ojhas*).

Prof. Pradip Prabhu's tireless work for social justice, environmental sustainability, and unwavering commitment to democratic values and gender equality inspired countless people over the last 5 decades. His mentorship and fervour for transformative change towards equity will be deeply missed.

There were multiple Memorial Meetings for Pradip Bahu in Pune, Dahnu, Palghar and many more. The online meeting was very moving and overwhelming as there were so many people from diverse walks of life, and different parts of India and the world, whose lives were touched by Pradip bhau in so many ways-teacher, trainer, mentor, guiding light.....

Quest in Education offers respectful homage to Pradip bhau and conveys heartfelt condolences to his life-partner, Shiraz Bulsara Prabhu and his colleagues Advocate Suresh, Advocate Brianbhau, Madhu and Kashtakari Sangathana team.