

Journal of Kolkata Society for Asian Studies: Vol 10. Special Issue II, December 2024

Comparative Study of Moral Education in India and Japan

Tanaka Kenichi¹ Aneesah Nishaat² & Minei Yusaku³

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Abstract

This study compares the state of moral education in India and Japan. India started considering moral education as a national issue after gaining independence from British colonial rule. In case of Japan, moral education was introduced in schools in 1958 as “time for ethics.”

Approach toward the moral education has traversed different trajectory in two countries. Though moral education is deemed important, the diversity of Indian society and the discretion of state administrations regarding education make it challenging to establish uniform moral education at the national level. Therefore, there is not a dedicated textbook for moral education in India yet. However, moral education-related content is included in different textbooks such as English textbooks. On the other hand, establishing uniform moral education was not complicated for Japan due to its homogeneity and has a dedicated textbook for moral education. In both countries, continuous reform can be seen in educational policies for moral education.

However, from the comparison of textbooks in both countries, similar topics related to morality were found, but with a different approach to teaching them. Additionally, continuous reform can be seen in policies regarding moral education in both countries.

Keywords: *Moral Education, Comparative Study, India, Japan*

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative study of the history and current status of moral education in India and Japan, with the aim of exploring if there are elements that can contribute to each other's moral education. Both countries face various issues related to children, such as bullying, violence, and anti-social behavior in school education and the importance of morality has been increasingly recognized. However, in India, establishing a unified moral education at the national level is challenging due to the diversity of Indian society and the substantial discretion of state authorities in educational matters. On the other hand, Japan has established a moral education based on uniform policies and it is an integral part of all educational activities. However, there are challenges related to adapting moral education to changes in times and society. Therefore, in this research, we will review

the current status and content of moral education in both countries, focusing on commonalities and differences, and explore elements that can facilitate mutual learning.

It should be noted that in the context of research and educational policies in India, the terms related to morality, such as "moral values," "spiritual values," and "values," are used without clear differentiation. Therefore, in this research, we have also used multiple expressions based on relevant literature and sources.

2. History of moral education in India and Japan

2.1 India

In India, the serious consideration of moral education as a national issue began after gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1947. Prior to that, moral education was not a formal subject in the curriculum. The first attempt to incorporate moral education into the education system can be traced back to the recommendations made by the Committee for Religious and Moral Instruction (CRMI), which was established in 1959 and issued its recommendations in 1960 (Seshadri 1978). Based on the mandate from the Ministry of Education, the CRMI concluded that teaching moral and spiritual values in educational institutions is desirable and the curriculum should include studies on the lives and teachings of religious leaders, ethical systems, and philosophies with emphasis on good conduct, social service, and patriotism at all stages.

Furthermore, it is emphasized that it should respect the spirit of the Constitution, including provisions such as "No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds" ("Article 28," The Constitution of India). The sensitivity of religious groups should also not be ignored. However, the committee suggested that there should be no harm in students learning ethical codes from various religions, while acknowledging the need for a balanced approach. Additionally, the committee made various recommendations for the content of moral education at different educational levels. For example, in primary schools, it was suggested that moral education should be conducted twice a week, and teachers should narrate stories based on the great religions of the world excluding religious doctrines and rituals. These recommendations aimed to strike a balance between moral education and the diverse religious and cultural landscape of India.

However, this does not imply that people in India did not have opportunities to learn moral values in the past. In ancient India, education was deeply rooted in values (Mondal and Majumder 2019), with the tradition of "Gurukul" where students lived with their teachers learning a wide array of knowledge and values. This included Vedic studies, cleanliness, and the mentor-disciple relationship (Patil and Patil 2021). Throughout history of India, from the Vedic period to the present, various traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islamic rule, and Christian influence have explored and taught aspects of human life including truth, morals, and ethics (Mefodeva, Fakhrutdinova, Ukhimenko and Valeeva 1997). Moral lessons and stories have been passed down through generations.

Due to India's rich religious and philosophical historical background, it is considered impossible to separate morality from religion and spirituality in the country. The prevailing belief is that moral education should be a fusion of both. Indian thought has traditionally seen a pure humanistic or moral approach to life as incomplete and insufficient unless it is coupled with religious considerations (Radhakrishnan 1959: 52-55,). The CRMI recommendations, which include teaching about the life and teachings of great religious leaders and stories based on the great religions of the world, can also be seen in the context of this historical background. They underscore the importance of integrating religious and moral values in moral education.

2.2 Japan

In Japan, historically, religious concepts such as compassion, mercy, and harmony have been emphasized through Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism, and they are believed to have shaped the common moral values of the Japanese people. However, it was in 1872, during the Meiji Era, that "Shushin" (moral education) was first introduced as a subject in schools. In post-World War II (WWII) Japan, various policies were proposed for moral education, with four significant turning points. The first was the discontinuation of "Shushin." After WWII in 1945, under the General Headquarters for the Allied Powers (GHQ)'s leadership, Japan introduced new educational policies, including the "Policy on the Japanese Educational System" and the "Policy on the Suspension of Shushin, Japanese History, and Geography."

The second was the introduction of a dedicated "Time for Ethics" in the curriculum by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 1958. A "Time for Ethics" was introduced in the elementary and junior high school curriculum, marking the beginning of moral education classes. The purpose of the "Time for Ethics" was to complement, deepen, and integrate moral education with other educational activities while fostering desirable moral habits, attitudes, and judgment in students (Toyoizumi 2016). In the same year, the MoE established "The National Curriculum Standard," which set legally binding standards for the curriculum. "The National Curriculum Standard" has undergone revisions approximately every ten years. The goal of the 1989 revision of the elementary school curriculum was to cultivate individuals who can respond to the changes in society, leading rich and resilient lives. The content was organized into four new categories: "1. Primarily regarding oneself," "2. Primarily regarding interactions with others," "3. Primarily regarding interactions with nature and the sublime," and "4. Primarily regarding interactions with groups and society".

The third was the distribution of "Kokoro no Noto (Notebook for Mind)" (renamed as "Watashitachi no Dōtoku (Our Morality)" in the 2013 revision by the MoE in April 2002. It was initially considered as supplementary material. A 2012 survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) revealed that it was being used as a teaching resource in most elementary and junior high schools. In practice, it was treated as equivalent to textbooks (Sakai, Tanaka and Nakamura

2017).

The fourth was the formalization of moral education as a subject in the curriculum. In the 2008 revision of the elementary school curriculum, the changes were made in accordance with the amended Fundamental Law of Education. The shared ideal was to cultivate the "zest for life," that connects to their future. They emphasized the importance of children being able to find their own challenges, learn, think, make judgments, and take action independently; even in a society that is unpredictable and undergoing significant changes.

In the 2015 revision of the elementary school curriculum, moral education was positioned as the core of education. This change was driven by the need to address issues such as bullying and other problematic behaviors, and to prepare students for living in a rapidly changing society with a focus on nurturing their ability to live rich and self-determined lives. Furthermore, the curriculum needed to address the challenges posed by the thinking patterns required in a society focused on scientific and technological innovation (Oshitani 2017). In this context, MEXT(2018) introduced "Special Subject: Moral Education" to emphasize the importance of harmonizing scientific and moral thinking. MEXT called for the improvement and evaluation of the use of moral education textbooks and teaching methods in elementary and junior high schools. This curriculum revision marked the most significant change in 78 years since the end of WWII. These educational policies were institutionalized by the state and were also closely related to societal changes (Sakai, Tanaka and Nakamura 2017).

3. India's diversity and Japan's homogeneity

3.1. Diversity in India

India is characterized by a rich diversity in terms of language, religion, ethnicity, and social hierarchy. This diversity is reflected in the education system as well. As previously mentioned, there is a strong connection between religion, spirituality, and morality. For example, language serves as a means of communication for the people, shaping their social and cultural activities. Individuals, through the acquisition of their language, undergo personality development and social learning. Therefore, when teaching morality and values to children, it is natural to use myths, stories, and ethical narratives written in the native language of the society they are born into and can understand. Differences in language are also reflected in the variations of people's moral and value systems.

Furthermore, in India, education has been the responsibility of state governments since independence. Although it was declared as a subject, jointly governed by the central and state governments, in 1976, the discretion of state governments continues to have a significant influence. This is rooted in the country's diversity.

Despite the widely recognized importance of moral education, the majority of state-run schools in India are generally hesitant to teach morality as a separate subject. Instead, moral and value education

is incorporated into various subjects. In other words, there is still no national consensus on the concept of morality and the implementation of moral education as a subject. This lack of consensus makes it challenging to introduce uniform moral education. As a result, only a few states, such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, have introduced moral education as a subject (Seshadri 1981).

3.2. Homogeneity in Japan

Unlike India, Japanese society is homogeneous. Japanese is taught and used as the sole standard language throughout all regions. Regarding religion, many Japanese identify with multiple religions simultaneously. Additionally, as noted by Shimada (2009), there are people in Japan who do not adhere to any specific religion. It is common practice among Japanese people to visit shrines and temples to pray on New Year's Day and to hold funeral rites at temples when they die.

In Japan, the new Meiji Constitution abolished the social hierarchy of samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants. Therefore, Japanese government can teach morality uniformly throughout the country in elementary and junior high schools based on the moral education policy made by MEXT (2018).

4. Debate over moral education

4.1 Discussions regarding moral education as a subject in India

The question of whether planned and organized moral education is necessary has been a long-standing theme of debate in the Indian education system. While there are opinions advocating for the inclusion of morality as a subject within the educational system, notable figures in India such as Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Sri Aurobindo held a negative view towards direct moral education. They believed that morality should not be taught as a separate subject but should be integrated into the overall education system.

Tagore advocated for innate moral insight in humans, emphasizing suggestive education over teaching (Mani1961: 245). Sri Aurobindo proposed imparting moral education through emotional development and forming good habits, criticizing the inefficacy of teaching morality as a subject (Bhyrappa 1968: 94, 99). Gandhi believed that schools should focus on nurturing individuals' character, and he saw education through manual labor as contributing to the harmonious and holistic development of the body, intellect, and spirit (Yonezu 2012). While Gandhi differed in educational methods from Tagore and Aurobindo, the common theme in their educational philosophies was that the true purpose of education was not just the transmission of knowledge but the understanding and practice of moral principles. These great thinkers shared the belief that humans inherently possess moral values, and the goal of education should be to help children bring out their moral values in the context of social life. Therefore, if moral education is to be considered, it should be integrated throughout the entire educational system, rather than confined to a single subject.

4.2 Discussions regarding Japanese moral education as a subject

Similar to India, after the end of WW II, the question of whether moral education should be a subject in education has been a long-standing theme of debate in Japan. After the end of WWII, moral education was prescribed as something to be learned throughout the entire educational system. The formalization of moral education as a subject had active support from both government and researchers and practitioners. On the other hand, questions were raised about whether moral education could be taught at all. The critique primarily centered on the fundamental question of whether it made sense to teach moral education, and if it was even possible (Murai 1990).

The introduction of moral education as a special subject in schools also faced criticism and concerns about state control and potential imposition of moral values on children. At the time, the Special Committee on Educational Policy of the Japan Educational Research Association primarily raised four points of concern (Nihon Kyoiku Gakkai Kyōiku Seisaku Tokubetsu Inkai 1957). The first was whether the establishment of special moral education would wrongly involve the state in matters of individual conscience. The second was whether special moral education would go against the essence of moral education. The third was whether there was a risk of undemocratic content being taught under the framework of special moral education. The fourth was whether the approach of special moral education might also pose issues in terms of teaching methods (Sakai, Tanaka and Nakamura 2017). These discussions also encompass fundamental questions about what morality is.

5. The education policies related to moral education in India and Japan.

When comparing moral education in India and Japan, it is essential to consider the relationship between their respective education policies and moral education. This is because the policies and institutional design of each country have a significant impact on moral education.

5.1 Basic education policy regarding moral education in India

The first National Education Policy (NEP) in India was promulgated in 1986, and it has undergone revisions since then. NEP (1986) primarily focused on access to education and equity, leading to the development of the "Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act" in 2009. Regarding value education, the policy emphasized that in a culturally plural Indian society, education should aim to nurture universal and eternal values that seek unity and integration among people.

The NEP (1986) outlines several key principles, such as inclusive education, flexibility, incorporating cultural heritage and values, and secular education. For India, one of the most significant challenges has been how to integrate its diverse population into a unified nation without risking division or conflicts. The NEP (1986) explicitly underscores the importance of addressing diversity in education. The fact that state governments have significant discretion in education also reflects the background of this diversity. The NEP (2020) highlights education's goal as develop good human beings. Such

individuals exhibit rational thinking, compassion, courage, resilience, a scientific temperament, and creative imagination. They should also have a strong ethical foundation and values. The policy focuses on producing productive, contributing citizens who can adapt to a rapidly changing world by acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Given these objectives, there is a growing use of the broader term "value education," which encompasses not only moral education but also the cultivation of values, ethics, and attitudes necessary for the development of well-rounded individuals. The concept of "value education" can also be seen in documents such as the "Value Education Handbook for Teachers" created by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in 2012. In contemporary Indian education, it can be observed that the terms "morality" and "values" are used interchangeably without clear differentiation.

5.2 Basic educational policy regarding moral education in Japan

In Japan, the Education Basic Law was enacted in 1947, stating the purpose of education as "the fostering of citizens who are competent individuals, capable of leading an upright and prosperous life, and are conscious of their obligations as members of a peaceful state and society, and who love truth and justice, value individual dignity, respect labor and responsibility, have a spirit of independence, and are filled with a deep sense of morality."

In 1958, "Time for Moral Education" was allotted in schools with the goal of supplementing and integrating moral education within various subjects, special educational activities, and school events. The aim was to nurture desirable moral habits, sentiments, and judgment in students, as well as to deepen their self-awareness about their roles in society and enhance their moral practical skills (Aoki, Kanai, Sato and Murakami 1980: 279).

Even with many revisions in the curriculum guidelines, the importance of moral education has not changed. In the curriculum guidelines announced in 2017, the previous "Time for Moral Education" has been made into a "Special Subject: Moral Education." In addition, the content has been improved to better deal with the issue of bullying and to provide a more systematic approach that takes into account children's developmental stages, and instruction that incorporates problem-solving and experiential learning.

6. Implementation status of moral education in India and Japan

6.1 National Approaches to Moral Education in India and Japan

As mentioned above, it is difficult to establish a uniform moral education at the national level due to the diversity of Indian society and the large degree of discretion that state administrations have regarding education. Therefore, there is still no national consensus regarding the meaning, content, and methods of moral education, and only a limited number of states have adopted moral education as a subject.

On the other hand, the implementation of moral education in Japan is nearly universal, with almost all the schools offering moral education. Each school submits the following information to their local educational committees in mid-February: 1) the overall plan for moral education, 2) the annual teaching plan for the moral education subject, and 3) a separate sheet containing details such as the teaching topics, materials, questions, and related items for the moral education subject. Subsequently, the local educational committees submit this information to the prefectural authorities, and it is then reported to the MEXT. Typically, the MEXT announces the implementation status of moral education in the following year around July to August.

6.2 Comparison of contents of moral education in Indian and Japanese textbooks

In order to understand the differences in content of moral education between India and Japan, it is appropriate to compare the content of textbooks for grades 3,4,5 and 6 of primary school in both countries on the same basis (Table 1). In the table 1, content of moral education is classified into 4 factors: A: Mainly about oneself, B: Primarily, matters related to interactions with others, C: Mainly related to interactions with groups or society, D: Mainly concerning the relationship with life, nature, and the sublime, and explained each moral factors in brief words. It is based on the 1958 Notification on The National Curriculum Standards and the 2017 Notification "Special Subject: Moral Education" of Japan.

For this comparison, moral education textbooks from Japan and English language text books from India were utilized. Due to India's linguistic diversity and limited availability of information on moral education implementation, a unified English textbook from the National Council of Educational Research and Training was chosen. Given India's multilingualism and the widespread teaching of English, it serves as a common language. Since content related to moral education is observed in textbooks for third graders and above, a comparison was made with the content of textbooks for grades 3 to 6 in both India and Japan.

Table1 : Topics related to morality in the textbooks of primary school in India and Japan

	Topic
A: Mainly about oneself	➤ Judgment of good and evil, autonomy, freedom, and responsibility ➤ Honesty, sincerity ➤ Moderation, self-control ➤ Personal growth ➤ Hope and courage, effort and strong will ➤ Pursuit of truth
B: Primarily, matters related to interactions with others	➤ Kindness, compassion ➤ Gratitude ➤ Etiquette ➤ Friendship, trust ➤ Mutual understanding, tolerance
C: Mainly related to interactions with groups or society	➤ Respect for rules ➤ Justice, fairness, social justice ➤ Diligence, public spirit ➤ Family love, fulfillment of family life ➤ Better school life, fulfillment of group life ➤ Respect for tradition and culture, an attitude of loving the country and hometown
D: Mainly concerning the relationship with life, nature, and the sublime	➤ The preciousness of life ➤ Love for nature ➤ A sense of wonder and reverence ➤ The joy of living better

Result of Comparison

(1) Both countries' textbooks include elements categorized into four groups (mentioned above) and their respective moral components, with no essential differences observed. Japanese moral education textbooks are richer in topics and have a greater volume of text compared to Indian textbooks. Additionally, all elements of the A to D categories are incorporated into textbooks for each grade in Japan. On the other hand, Indian students commonly learn three languages: the language of their region, Hindi, and English. Since English is considered a foreign language for students, incorporating numerous moral topics into elementary school textbooks is challenging. However, the essence of moral topics learned over the four years of elementary education (grades 3 to 6) in India is similar to that in Japan. Moreover, Indians also learn about morality through various textbooks written in their regional languages. Therefore, while it may be difficult to assess quantitatively, there seems to be no significant qualitative difference in moral education between the two countries.

(2) Japanese moral education textbooks cover numerous topics and keywords related to morality, encouraging students to read, think, and write their thoughts. It includes sections for students to write their thought. However, questions arise regarding time allocation for these activities. Indian textbooks, on the other hand, include sections like "Reading is fun" and "Talk Time" for each topic, helping students to engage through various tasks. The emphasis on student-initiated discussions in Indian textbooks may stem from a perception of Indian fondness for debates. Despite fewer topics, Indian textbooks may offer more time for students to share opinions and engage in discussions, potentially enriching the learning experience.

(3) Recent Japanese moral education textbooks often have content with unknown authors, many sourced from "Elementary School Reading Materials and Their Use" by the MEXT. They frequently rely on systematically created topics for moral education. It includes the textbook for third graders which has a noticeable amount of content and topics created by the Moral Research Editorial Committee. This could be attributed to the fact that Japanese textbooks are approved by the MEXT. In contrast, Indian textbooks select topics from both domestic and international stories and poems with clearly identified authors, distinguishing them from Japanese textbooks.

(4) Despite having fewer topics compared to Japanese textbooks, Indian textbooks always incorporate poetry and poetic expressions. India has a rich tradition of oral transmission of myths and folktales from ancient times, and Indians are known for their proficiency in recitation. Growing up, they become familiar with songs and poetry through regional traditional and religious events. This background suggests that the emphasis on tradition is reflected, and despite the limited number of topics, poetry remains an integral part of Indian education. Additionally, for Indians, learning through poetic expression may be more enjoyable and memorable, adding a practical dimension to the educational approach.

7. Conclusion

We discussed about moral education in India and Japan. Based on that, we found several similarities and differences between India and Japan. In case of India, there is no national consensus on moral education. There are various discussions regarding the values and roles of morality, and there is still no unified and clear concept of morality. Second, India's diverse society and the significant discretion of educational matters under state governments make it challenging to establish nationwide moral education. While recommendations for implementing moral education at multiple levels have been made, achieving consensus on making it a separate subject in various states has not been successful. Thirdly, moral education practices in some states vary in terms of the targeted grade levels, instructional hours, content, and the allocation of time for moral education.

Japan's moral education also faces challenges, such as challenges relate to the improvement, and evaluation of teachers' and students' efforts within the existing unified subject of "Special Subject: Moral Education."

Both in India and Japan, moral education places a strong emphasis on children "thinking, discussing" and problem-solving or experiential learning. For example, engaging children in hypothetical problem-solving situations and experiencing and learning about better behaviors concerning contemporary issues. In addition, both countries also emphasize on "teaching values" and "acquiring life skills."

About differences, curriculum of moral education in Japan includes content related to all the four factors (see table 1) in each grade's text book. However, in Indian curriculum, though all these factors are included, each grade concentrates on certain topic such as, grade three text book focuses on love for nature. This gives students ample time to learn various aspects of one broad topic and opportunity to engage in various activities related to that topic throughout the year. In addition, Indian textbooks include stories with religious teaching to teach morality and value, whereas, Japanese moral education textbooks do not include any content related to religion.

Overall, both India and Japan emphasize moral education as important part of education system.

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Bio Profile of the Authors:

¹. Seisa International High School, Tachikawa

E-mail: tskk.tanaka@kki.biglobe.ne.jp

². Lecturer, Higashi Nihon International University

E-mail: aneesah.nishaat@gmail.com

³. Tokyo Metropolitan Tama Education Office, Tachikawa

E-mail: yuyalps@gmail.com

