

Education as Resistance: Madan Mohan Malaviya and the Intellectual Foundations of Indian Nationalism

Rajeev

Research Scholar

Department of History,

Kurukshetra University.

Abstract: This research paper explores the educational philosophy of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and his pivotal role in shaping the intellectual foundations of Indian nationalism during the colonial period. It argues that Malaviya envisioned education as a form of resistance—both cultural and political—against British imperialism. Through a synthesis of traditional Hindu values and modern scientific knowledge, he sought to decolonize Indian minds and foster a morally awakened citizenry. The establishment of Banaras Hindu University stands as a living embodiment of this vision, aiming not only to produce skilled professionals but to build character and national pride. The study also highlights how Malaviya's educational efforts contributed to internal social reform by promoting inclusion, civic responsibility, and national integration. His vision remains profoundly relevant in contemporary discussions on education, identity, and decolonization.

Keywords: Madan Mohan Malaviya, education and nationalism, Banaras Hindu University, colonial resistance, Indian intellectual history, cultural identity, educational reform, character-building, Hindu values, moral education

Introduction

The relationship between education and political resistance has long been a subject of historical and philosophical inquiry. In colonial India, education was not merely a system of formal learning but a deeply contested terrain—one that shaped the consciousness of a nation under foreign domination. The British colonial state sought to use education as a tool to cultivate loyal subjects and create a class of intermediaries trained in Western knowledge systems. However, Indian leaders and intellectuals reappropriated the idea of education as a site of cultural assertion, moral regeneration, and nationalist mobilization.

Among the key figures who transformed education into a powerful vehicle of resistance was **Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya** (1861–1946). A lawyer, educationist, social reformer, and freedom fighter, Malaviya emerged as a towering figure who envisioned an India awakened through the twin ideals of *vidya* (knowledge) and *dharma* (moral duty). His efforts culminated in the establishment of the **Banaras Hindu University (BHU)** in 1916—an institution that symbolized the aspiration of Indians to reclaim intellectual self-determination while embracing modern science and technology.

This research explores how Malaviya's educational vision contributed to the **intellectual foundations of Indian nationalism**. Unlike mere political resistance, Malaviya's nationalism was rooted in an ethical and civilizational framework. For him, education was not just about literacy or vocational training but about instilling patriotism, moral integrity, and pride in Indian heritage. Through education, Malaviya sought to counter colonial narratives of Indian inferiority and foster a new generation of self-respecting and self-reliant citizens.

The study is guided by the following key questions:

- How did Madan Mohan Malaviya conceptualize education as a means of national awakening?
- In what ways did his educational philosophy resist colonial hegemony and reinforce nationalist ideals?
- What intellectual and institutional legacies did Malaviya leave behind for postcolonial India?

This paper draws on a range of primary sources including Malaviya's speeches, writings, and official records related to BHU, along with secondary analyses by historians and educationists. It situates Malaviya within the broader landscape of Indian educational reform and nationalist thought, offering insights into the cultural and ideological strategies through which education became an instrument of resistance and transformation.

In tracing this trajectory, the paper asserts that Malaviya's model of education was both a response to colonial oppression and a forward-looking blueprint for Indian self-rule—*Swaraj*—anchored not only in political freedom but in intellectual sovereignty.

II. Colonial Education and the Indian Response

The introduction of British education in India was not a neutral process of knowledge dissemination; rather, it was a deliberate strategy of imperial governance. Education under colonial rule was designed to produce a class of Indians who would act as cultural intermediaries—Indian in blood but English in taste, as famously envisioned in **Thomas Babington Macaulay's** *Minute on Indian Education* (1835). This policy replaced traditional Indian systems of learning with a curriculum grounded in Western liberal arts, sciences, and English as the medium of instruction. The goal was not to empower Indians intellectually or morally, but to serve the administrative and ideological needs of the Empire.

British educational policies marginalized vernacular languages, devalued indigenous knowledge systems, and created a rupture between the educated elite and the masses. The Orientalist-Anglicist debate of the early 19th century, although framed as a clash of educational ideologies, ultimately gave way to a system that privileged Western knowledge as superior and civilizing. Institutions like the **Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras Universities**, established in 1857, were modelled after British frameworks and remained largely disconnected from Indian social and cultural realities.

However, colonial education had unintended consequences. While it alienated many from their roots, it also awakened a new political and cultural consciousness among segments of the educated Indian elite. Exposure to European political thought—liberty, nationalism, rights, and democracy—invited critical comparisons with colonial domination. Many Indian thinkers began to reinterpret ancient Indian traditions in light of modern values, thereby crafting an intellectual resistance to the colonial narrative of cultural inferiority.

This resistance took two broad forms. First, **a critique of colonial pedagogy**, as voiced by thinkers like **Swami Vivekananda**, **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, and **Aurobindo Ghose**, who emphasized the need to revive India's spiritual and civilizational ethos through education. Second, **the construction of indigenous educational institutions** that aimed to instill nationalist values while blending tradition and modernity. These efforts culminated in the creation of institutions like the **Deccan Education Society** (1884), **Aligarh Muslim University**, **Visva-Bharati** (1921), and significantly, the **Banaras Hindu University (BHU)** under the leadership of Malaviya.

Malaviya's intervention was situated precisely within this cultural and intellectual backlash against colonial education. He did not reject modern education outright but sought to *nationalize* it—both ideologically and institutionally. For him, education was not only a medium of social upliftment and personal virtue, but also a tool of *swaraj*, or national self-rule. In this regard, his work exemplified the larger nationalist aspiration: to reclaim control over the minds of the people, and thereby, the destiny of the nation.

III. Malaviya's Educational Philosophy

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's vision of education was deeply rooted in the belief that learning should serve both the **spiritual uplift** and **national regeneration** of India. Drawing inspiration from ancient Indian traditions, modern Western thought, and the nationalist zeitgeist of his time, Malaviya articulated an educational philosophy that aimed to create not just educated individuals but **morally awakened, culturally rooted, and politically conscious citizens**. His outlook marked a unique synthesis of **Sanatan Hindu values, modern science, and patriotic responsibility**, making education both an instrument of resistance to colonial rule and a pathway to self-realisation.

1. Spiritual and Cultural Foundations of Education

At the core of Malaviya's educational thought was the conviction that **education must be grounded in dharma**—a term he understood not in a sectarian sense, but as a universal principle of righteousness, self-discipline, and service. He believed that India's true greatness lay in its **spiritual traditions**, and that colonial rule had undermined this moral base. In his speeches and writings, Malaviya repeatedly emphasized that Western education, while materially beneficial, had eroded Indian self-confidence and cultural identity.

In response, he advocated for a curriculum that would **reaffirm India's intellectual traditions**—particularly those found in Vedic literature, Sanskrit philosophy, and classical

Indian history—while simultaneously engaging with contemporary global knowledge. For Malaviya, reclaiming India's past was essential not for romantic nostalgia, but for **rebuilding a national identity capable of resisting colonial domination**.

2. Synthesis of Traditional and Modern Knowledge

Malaviya was not a reactionary or obscurantist. He did not call for a return to pre-modern educational forms, but for their **reorientation in light of modern needs**. He insisted that students must be trained in **modern sciences, mathematics, law, economics, and engineering**—but without surrendering their cultural roots. His approach was integrative: he sought to combine the **rationalism of the West with the spirituality of the East**.

This intellectual balance found expression in his educational institutions, particularly Banaras Hindu University, where Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy were taught alongside physics, chemistry, medicine, and engineering. Malaviya's belief was that **only such a balanced education could produce leaders capable of guiding India toward swaraj with both competence and character**.

3. Education for Character-Building and Patriotism

Central to Malaviya's philosophy was the idea that education must instill **moral character and national pride**. He saw India's political subjugation as closely tied to its **moral decay**, and therefore argued that education must go beyond the intellect to shape the heart and soul. He envisioned students not as future bureaucrats, but as **"servants of the nation"** imbued with honesty, sacrifice, and public spirit.

For Malaviya, patriotism was not a political slogan but a **moral duty**. He believed that **true freedom** would come only when Indians developed **self-respect, a sense of unity, and a commitment to public good**. His speeches at convocation ceremonies often invoked ancient Indian ideals—*seva* (service), *tapasya* (discipline), and *tyag* (renunciation)—as essential attributes of the ideal student.

4. Social Responsibility and Reformist Impulse

Although he was deeply rooted in Hindu traditions, Malaviya was also aware of the **need for social reform**, particularly in the domains of **caste, gender, and access to education**. While his positions were often moderate and cautious, he supported **educational initiatives for Dalits (then called "untouchables")** and advocated for their inclusion within mainstream Hindu society. He also supported **women's education**, though within a conservative framework that emphasized their roles as mothers and cultural bearers.

Malaviya's concept of education thus extended beyond personal development—it was a **moral enterprise with social consequences**, intended to uplift not just the individual but the nation.

Madan Mohan Malaviya's educational philosophy was a **visionary blend of ethical idealism and pragmatic nationalism**. It responded to the colonial project not by rejecting

modernity but by **redefining it through the lens of Indian values**. For Malaviya, education was a sacred duty, a national obligation, and a strategic weapon in the anti-colonial struggle. It laid the intellectual and moral foundations for a nationalist consciousness that would go on to shape India's freedom movement and its post-independence educational aspirations.

IV. Banaras Hindu University: A Nationalist Vision Realized

The founding of the **Banaras Hindu University (BHU)** in 1916 stands as the most enduring institutional embodiment of Madan Mohan Malaviya's educational ideals and nationalist vision. Conceived as a **national university by Indians and for Indians**, BHU was intended to serve as a crucible for moral, intellectual, and political awakening. It was not merely an academic project but a conscious act of **cultural and political resistance**—a response to the alienation and fragmentation fostered by colonial education. Through BHU, Malaviya sought to reclaim India's right to define its own epistemologies, cultural values, and national priorities.

1. Genesis and Founding Ideals

The idea for a Hindu university in Banaras emerged in the early 20th century amid rising concerns about the growing dominance of colonial education and the need for a spiritually rooted, yet modern, learning environment. Malaviya, drawing support from the Hindu elite, religious leaders, and nationalist thinkers, envisioned BHU as a **"capital of Indian learning"**, combining the best of ancient Indian wisdom with the advances of modern science and technology.

Malaviya's ability to **unite diverse constituencies**—from conservative orthodox Hindus to progressive reformers and even Theosophists like Annie Besant—was critical to the realization of this vision. He articulated the university's mission in explicitly nationalist terms, stating: *"The object of the university shall be to promote the study of the Hindu Shastras and of Sanskrit literature... and also to advance and diffuse scientific, technical, and professional knowledge."*

This dual objective—**cultural revival and scientific advancement**—became the guiding principle of BHU.

2. Curriculum and Institutional Structure

BHU's academic structure reflected Malaviya's commitment to **educational synthesis**. The university offered courses in **Sanskrit, Indian philosophy, law, history, and religious studies**, while simultaneously building strong faculties in **science, engineering, medicine, and agriculture**. This was a radical departure from the British university model, which had largely ignored Indian intellectual traditions.

The **Medium of Instruction**, though initially English in higher studies, was complemented by efforts to promote **Hindi and Sanskrit**, aligning with Malaviya's broader linguistic nationalism. His insistence on the use of Indian languages in education was both an act of cultural affirmation and a means to widen access to knowledge for the Indian masses.

Furthermore, BHU was envisioned as a **residential university** with a focus on **character-building, discipline, and community life**—qualities Malaviya deemed essential for creating future national leaders.

3. BHU as a Site of National Awakening

BHU quickly became a symbol of **intellectual resistance and cultural resurgence**. It drew students from across India and even abroad, becoming a vibrant hub of **nationalist activity and ideological exchange**. The institution fostered a spirit of **self-confidence, Swadeshi pride, and collective purpose**, contributing to the making of a new Indian intelligentsia.

Malaviya's role extended beyond administrative leadership; he personally mentored students, delivered addresses on patriotism and moral values, and worked to instill in them a deep sense of **national duty**. The university's festivals, convocations, and debates were infused with nationalist sentiment, often celebrating India's civilizational legacy while advocating for political freedom.

Importantly, BHU also sought to **bridge religious and regional divides**. While rooted in Hindu ethos, the university welcomed students of all backgrounds and collaborated with Muslim, Sikh, and Christian educators. Malaviya's nationalist vision, though culturally Hindu, maintained an **inclusive tone**, advocating unity in diversity as a foundational principle.

BHU stands as a **testament to Malaviya's belief that education could serve as the soul of a nation in bondage**. It was not just a university but a **movement**, committed to shaping minds, reviving traditions, and preparing the youth for leadership in a free India. Through BHU, Malaviya demonstrated how an educational institution could embody resistance, renewal, and national aspiration in the truest sense. His success in institutionalizing his vision gave concrete form to the idea that **education is not just a means of personal advancement but a sacred national duty**.

V. Education as Resistance and Reform

Madan Mohan Malaviya's approach to education extended far beyond the classroom. For him, education was a powerful instrument of **resistance against colonial domination** and an equally potent tool for **internal social reform**. In a context where British rule had disempowered Indians culturally, morally, and politically, Malaviya viewed education as a means to **reclaim agency**, both at the level of the nation and the individual. His educational initiatives, most notably the founding of BHU, functioned not only as counter-narratives to colonial institutions but also as platforms for **social transformation** rooted in Indian civilizational ideals.

1. Education as Intellectual and Cultural Resistance

Colonial education had succeeded in creating a class of Indians who, in Macaulay's words, were "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." Malaviya saw this alienation from indigenous traditions as a **form of intellectual subjugation**. His response was to **decolonize the Indian mind** through an education that reasserted Indian values, philosophies, and cultural history while remaining open to useful elements of modernity.

In this sense, Malaviya's educational movement became a **cultural counter-hegemonic project**. It challenged the imperialist assumption of Western superiority and encouraged Indians to take pride in their civilizational legacy. By integrating Sanskrit, Hindu scriptures, and Indian philosophy into the university curriculum, Malaviya offered students a **cognitive framework to resist colonial narratives** of inferiority and to envision an India capable of self-governance.

2. Resistance through Moral and Civic Education

For Malaviya, resistance was not only about political independence but about **moral regeneration**. He believed that colonial rule had corrupted the moral fibre of Indian society and that **education should restore the lost ideals of truth (satya), self-restraint (sanyam), and selfless service (seva)**.

Through BHU and other forums, he promoted an education that fostered **national character**, personal discipline, and civic responsibility. He urged students to serve the nation, not for personal gain but for a higher moral cause. His emphasis on **patriotism as a spiritual virtue** made education not only a path to employment but a **sacred national mission**.

3. Social Reform through Education

Malaviya's nationalism was **not blind to the social ills** within Indian society. While he upheld Hindu traditions, he also recognized the need to address **caste discrimination, untouchability, and the subjugation of women**—issues that hindered national unity and progress. He saw education as the most effective tool to **bridge social divisions and empower the marginalized**.

- **Dalit Education:** Though cautious in his approach, Malaviya supported the idea that Dalits should have access to education and temple entry. He emphasized that **no section of society could be left behind** in the task of nation-building. BHU, over time, became one of the first major Indian universities to admit students from oppressed castes and communities.
- **Women's Education:** Malaviya advocated for **women's upliftment through education**, seeing them as the nurturers of future generations. While he remained conservative in prescribing traditional roles for women, his promotion of female literacy and women's colleges was a significant step for the early 20th century.

4. Institutional Reform and National Sovereignty

Malaviya's educational vision also involved a call for **institutional sovereignty**. He insisted that Indians must establish and manage their own educational institutions rather than remain dependent on colonial universities. In this respect, BHU and similar institutions became sites of **institutional resistance**—where curriculum, pedagogy, and governance reflected **Indian priorities**, not imperial interests.

This move anticipated the larger goal of **Swaraj (self-rule)** by building parallel institutions that fostered national consciousness. Education thus became a **prefigurative space** where the values of a free India were rehearsed, refined, and internalized.

Malaviya's understanding of education as resistance was **holistic and multidimensional**. It involved challenging colonial knowledge systems, cultivating patriotic and moral character, and addressing deep-seated social inequalities. His educational reforms were acts of **constructive nationalism**—seeking not only political freedom from British rule but also the moral and cultural rejuvenation of Indian society. In viewing the school and university as battlegrounds for national dignity, Malaviya turned education into one of the **most effective weapons of the freedom struggle**.

VI. Conclusion: Legacy and Contemporary Relevance

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's educational legacy stands as a towering contribution to India's struggle for intellectual and political emancipation. At a time when colonial rule sought to suppress indigenous thought and shape a subservient elite, Malaviya offered an alternative rooted in cultural pride, moral integrity, and national purpose. He transformed education into a form of **constructive resistance**, one that addressed both the **colonial challenge and India's internal social contradictions**.

His vision of harmonizing **traditional Indian values** with **modern scientific knowledge** challenged the dichotomy imposed by colonial binaries. In building institutions like Banaras Hindu University, he proved that India could chart its own intellectual course—neither rejecting modernity nor surrendering its spiritual inheritance. Malaviya's emphasis on **character-building, civic duty, and cultural rootedness** created a generation of leaders, thinkers, and reformers who would go on to shape independent India.

In today's context, his ideas continue to resonate. As India navigates the complexities of **globalization, cultural identity, and educational reform**, Malaviya's insistence on a **value-based, inclusive, and nationally anchored education system** offers enduring relevance. His work invites contemporary educators and policymakers to ask fundamental questions:

- Can education nurture both **technological competence** and **ethical consciousness**?
- Can it empower without alienating?
- Can it bridge the past and the future, the spiritual and the scientific?

Malaviya's answer to these questions was a confident **yes**, rooted in a deep belief that **education is not merely a tool of livelihood, but a path to liberation**—for the individual and the nation alike.

Works Cited (APA 6th Edition Style)

1. Basu, A. (1974). *The growth of education and political development in India, 1898–1920*. Oxford University Press.
2. Brown, D. M. (1994). *The nationalism of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya*. In D. A. Low (Ed.), *The Indian National Congress: Centenary Hindsight* (pp. 119–134). Oxford University Press.
3. Chandra, B. (1988). *India's struggle for independence, 1857–1947*. Penguin Books.
4. Ghosh, S. C. (2007). *History of education in India*. Rawat Publications.
5. Jain, P. (2010). *Malaviya and the Indian renaissance: A cultural study*. New Bharatiya Book Corporation.
6. Kaur, R. (2007). *Performative politics and the cultures of Hinduism: Public uses of religion in Western India*. Permanent Black.
7. Lelyveld, D. (1996). *Aligarh's first generation: Muslim solidarity in British India*. Oxford University Press.
8. Malaviya, M. M. (1916). *The aims and ideals of the Hindu University*. BHU Press.
9. Mukherjee, M. (2012). *The idea of India*. Penguin Books.
10. Nanda, B. R. (2000). *Gokhale: The Indian moderates and the British Raj*. Oxford University Press.
11. Pande, B. N. (1976). *The life and times of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya*. Vikas Publishing.
12. Radhakrishnan, S. (1939). *Eastern religions and Western thought*. Oxford University Press.
13. Sharma, A. (2005). *Hinduism and secularism: After Ayodhya*. Palgrave Macmillan.
14. Thapar, R. (2002). *The past before us: Historical traditions of early North India*. Harvard University Press.