

EVOLVING HORIZONS

An Interdisciplinary International Journal of Education,
Humanities, Social And Behavioral Sciences
(An International Peer Reviewed Journal)
Volume 13 • November 2024 • ISSN : 2319 - 6521

DR. TAHA HUSSAIN'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY 'THE DAYS' (AL-AYYAM).

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Abstract

Dr. Taha Hussain was one of Egypt's most prominent intellectuals, reformers, and Education Minister. This paper aims to find out how Hussain's educational philosophy is reflected in his seminal autobiography 'The Days' (Al-Ayyam). Dr. Taha Hussain used his life story to critique traditional religious education and advocate for modern, secular, and inclusive learning. The present study was based on analysis of review of various primary and secondary sources and after re-examination the thought content was reflected. This paper analysed Hussain's critique of the existing educational framework, his advocacy for reform, and the enduring relevance of his ideas in addressing contemporary challenges in education of Egypt as well as India through 'The Days.' It was found that the personal experiences of Dr Hussain towards blindness, rural poverty, and institutional challenges shaped his views on education as a transformative tool for individual liberation and societal progress. Hussain challenges the rote memorization and intellectual stagnation prevalent in traditional systems, emphasizing the need for critical thinking, rational inquiry, and the integration of modern disciplines such as science, literature, and history. Furthermore, his call for accessible education reflects his vision of bridging socio-economic divides and empowering marginalized communities, including rural populations and women. By linking education to national development, Hussain positions it as a cornerstone for Egypt's advancement.

Keywords: Educational reform, modern education, Egypt, Egyptian educational system, institutional challenges

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1. Introduction

Dr. Taha Hussain (1889–1973) remains one of the most influential figures in modern Arab thought and education. As a literary critic, historian, and reformer, his work was driven by a deep belief in education as the foundation of human progress and societal transformation. His autobiography 'The Days' (Al-Ayyam), published in three volumes between 1929 and 1972, provides a profound exploration of his personal journey through education and the broader challenges of the Egyptian educational system of his time.

This research paper examines Dr. Hussain's educational philosophy through a critical analysis of 'The Days'. It discusses his critique of traditional education, his advocacy for modern and secular learning, and his emphasis on educational accessibility to uplift individuals and society as a whole.

2. Background of the Study

Dr. Taha Hussain's life was marked by immense personal and societal challenges. Born in a rural Egyptian village, he was blinded by illness at a young age. Despite his disability and the societal limitations placed on him, Hussain pursued knowledge relentlessly, becoming one of Egypt's greatest intellectuals.

'The Days' serves as both a memoir and a critique of the prevailing educational systems in Egypt. During Hussain's time, traditional education dominated by religious instruction and rote learning limited intellectual inquiry and failed to address the needs of a changing society. Hussain's experiences at Al-Azhar University and later in secular institutions in Cairo and France shaped his educational philosophy, which called for reform, inclusivity, and modernity.

3. Objectives

The objectives of this research paper are:

1. Analyse Hussain's Educational Philosophy: Critically examine Dr. Taha Hussain's educational ideas in *The Days*, focusing on his critique of traditional education and advocacy for reform.
2. Education and Personal Empowerment: Explore how education contributed to Hussain's journey from poverty and blindness to intellectual success.
3. Critique of Religious Education: Examine Hussain's critique of traditional religious education, highlighting the limits of rote memorization and lack of critical thinking at institutions like Al-Azhar.
4. Advocacy for Secular Education: Emphasize Hussain's promotion of modern, secular education that fosters rational inquiry and intellectual freedom.
5. Accessibility and Social Justice: Investigate Hussain's vision of education as a tool for bridging socio-economic divides and empowering marginalized groups.
6. Education and National Development: Connect Hussain's educational philosophy to national development, analysing its role in Egypt's modernization.
7. Relevance of Hussain's Ideas: Assess how Hussain's educational philosophy can inform current debates on educational reform in Egypt, India, and beyond.

4. Significance

This study holds significance in the context of educational reform, social justice, and national development:

1. It highlights the enduring relevance of Dr. Taha Hussain's educational philosophy in addressing critical issues in education. It underscores the need for reforms that prioritize critical thinking, inclusivity, and modern disciplines over rote learning.
2. Hussain's advocacy for accessible education for marginalized communities, including women and the rural poor, remains vital in tackling persistent inequalities.

3. By linking education to national development, his ideas emphasize individual empowerment as a driver of societal progress.

4. Situating his vision within early 20th-century Egypt, the study offers valuable insights for balancing tradition and modernity, providing a framework to address contemporary educational challenges globally.

5. Review of literature

The review of literature focuses on the scholarly examination of Dr. Taha Hussain's educational philosophy, his autobiography *The Days* (Al-Ayyam), and the broader context of educational reform in Egypt. This section explores key themes, critiques, and perspectives that inform the understanding of Hussain's work and its impact on education.

Dr. Taha Hussain and His Contributions to Education

Taha Hussain is a pivotal figure in Arab intellectual history, renowned for advocating modern and secular education in Egypt. His autobiography *The Days* reflects his critique of traditional educational systems and his belief in the transformative power of education. Scholars like Hourani (1991) commend Hussain's critique of rigid, religious education, particularly at Al-Azhar University, where rote learning prevailed over critical inquiry. Reid (1990) contextualizes Hussain's work within early 20th-century Egypt, highlighting colonial influences and internal struggles between tradition and modernity.

Educational Critique in 'The Days'

Hussain's *The Days* combines personal narrative with a scathing critique of traditional education. Scholars such as Al-Musawi (2006) highlight his disdain for intellectual stagnation and rote memorization at Al-Azhar. El-Enany (1993) links Hussain's advocacy for rational inquiry and questioning

authority to Enlightenment ideals, underscoring his critique of Al-Azhar's resistance to integrating modern sciences and philosophy. His experiences provide a lens to analyse Egypt's evolving educational landscape.

Secular and Modern Education

Hussain championed secular education, urging the inclusion of modern disciplines to prepare citizens for a changing world. Shukrallah (2002) emphasizes the influence of Hussain's studies at the Sorbonne in shaping his secular, progressive views. While critics argue his ideas were Eurocentric, Hussain's emphasis on rationality and intellectual freedom remains a cornerstone of Egypt's educational reform.

Education and Social Justice

Hussain's philosophy also addressed socio-economic disparities in education. Sabry (2007) highlights his efforts to make education accessible to marginalized groups, including women and rural communities. His belief in education as a tool for social mobility and national progress continues to inform discussions on inclusivity and equity in education.

Educational Reform in Egypt

Hussain's work must be seen within the larger framework of early 20th-century Egyptian educational reform. Under British colonial rule, disparities and inadequate infrastructure plagued the system. Cook (2012) identifies Hussain's contributions as part of the Arab Renaissance (Nahda), advocating a balance between cultural heritage and modernity.

Contemporary Relevance

Hussain's ideas on secularism, critical thinking, and inclusivity resonate with current educational reform debates. Abu-Lughod (2000) highlights the relevance of his philosophy in addressing challenges like technology integration and multiculturalism.

His vision for education aligns with global efforts to create equitable and progressive systems.

Gaps in Existing Literature

While there is extensive scholarship on Taha Hussain's contributions to literature and education, certain gaps remain. For instance, limited attention has been given to the practical implementation of his educational philosophy in contemporary Egypt. Additionally, further research is needed to explore the intersection of Hussain's ideas with global educational trends, such as digital learning and multiculturalism.

The literature on Dr. Taha Hussain underscores his significant contributions to educational reform and intellectual thought in Egypt. His autobiography *The Days* provides a critical lens through which to examine the limitations of traditional education and the potential of modern, inclusive systems. By bridging the gap between tradition and modernity, Hussain's philosophy offers valuable insights for addressing educational challenges in both historical and contemporary contexts. This study builds on existing scholarship while addressing gaps to provide a comprehensive understanding of Hussain's legacy.

6. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology, relying on textual analysis to critically examine Dr. Taha Hussain's educational philosophy as articulated in his autobiography *'The Days'* (Al-Ayyam). The methodology focuses on extracting themes and insights from primary and secondary sources to understand and evaluate the historical, cultural, and intellectual context of Hussain's ideas.

Research Design

The study adopts an interpretive approach to explore the underlying meanings and implications of Taha Hussain's reflections

on education. It involves:

Textual Analysis: A close reading of *The Days* to identify key themes related to education, personal empowerment, social justice, and reform.

Contextual Analysis: Examining the socio-political and historical backdrop of early 20th-century Egypt to situate Hussain's philosophy within the broader debates of his time.

Data Sources

Primary Source: *The Days* serves as the central text for this research. Hussain's firsthand account of his experiences and critiques of traditional and modern education systems provides the foundation for analysis.

Secondary Sources: Scholarly articles, books, and critical essays on Hussain's life, works, and contributions to educational reform. These include works by Hourani, Reid, and Al-Musawi, among others.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Data collection involved reviewing and annotating relevant sections of *The Days* to extract recurring themes and philosophical insights. Additionally, secondary sources were reviewed to understand how Hussain's ideas have been interpreted and critiqued by scholars.

Cross-Referencing: Hussain's ideas were compared with contemporary educational theories and practices to highlight their relevance.

Analytical Framework

The study uses thematic analysis to structure the findings. The framework includes:

1. **Critique of Traditional Education:** Analysing Hussain's criticism of religious education systems, particularly Al-Azhar.
2. **Advocacy for Secular and Modern Education:** Evaluating his support for rational inquiry, intellectual freedom, and the inclusion of modern disciplines.

3. Education as a Tool for Social Justice: Exploring his emphasis on educational accessibility and its role in empowering marginalized communities.

4. Contemporary Relevance: Assessing how Hussain's ideas align with current educational challenges and reforms.

Limitations of the Study

The study relies heavily on textual analysis, which may not fully capture the practical implications of Hussain's philosophy in contemporary educational systems.

Limited access to unpublished or less-studied works of Hussain may restrict the scope of interpretation.

The research is focused on Hussain's educational philosophy as presented in *The Days* and may not encompass his broader intellectual contributions.

7. Analysis & Interpretation

Education as a Tool for Liberation and Empowerment

One of the central themes in *The Days* is the transformative power of education in overcoming personal and societal constraints. Hussain's own struggles highlight education as a path to liberation:

Personal Liberation: As a blind child in a conservative village, Hussain faced significant prejudice and marginalization. In *The Days*, blindness becomes a metaphor for ignorance and societal backwardness. Education, in contrast, is depicted as a source of light and empowerment. His resilience in pursuing learning despite his disability underscores the importance of perseverance and self-determination.

Social Empowerment: Hussain saw education as essential for societal progress. His experiences demonstrate that knowledge can empower individuals to challenge social hierarchies and transform communities. He believed that education could bridge gaps between the elite and margin-

alized groups, including rural populations, women, and the poor.

Critique of Traditional Religious Education

Taha Hussain's experiences at Al-Azhar University, recounted in *The Days*, reveal his critique of the traditional religious education system. This critique forms a cornerstone of his educational philosophy:

Rote Learning and Intellectual Stagnation: Hussain criticizes the methods employed at Al-Azhar, which focused on rote memorization of texts without encouraging critical thinking or intellectual exploration. He argues that such an approach limits creativity and inhibits progress.

Dogma and Modernity: While acknowledging the value of Egypt's Islamic heritage, Hussain calls for a reformation of religious education to include modern subjects such as science, philosophy, and literature. He advocates for a balanced approach that integrates tradition with modernity.

By critiquing the rigidity of the traditional system, Hussain aligns himself with the broader reformist movements of the early 20th century that sought to modernize education in the Arab world.

Advocacy for Modern and Secular Education

In *The Days*, Hussain champions a modern, secular approach to education, drawing on his exposure to Western learning during his studies in France. His philosophy emphasizes:

Rational Inquiry and Critical Thinking: Hussain argues that education must prioritize reason, evidence-based learning, and intellectual freedom. Unlike traditional systems that suppress questioning, modern education fosters curiosity and innovation.

Secularism in Education: Hussain calls for a separation between religious instruction and state education. While he respects

Egypt's religious values, he believes that secular education is necessary to prepare individuals for participation in a modern, pluralistic society.

Inclusion of Modern Disciplines: Hussain advocates for the incorporation of subjects such as history, literature, mathematics, and the sciences into educational curricula, ensuring that students are equipped with knowledge relevant to contemporary challenges.

Educational Accessibility and Social Justice

A key tenet of Hussain's philosophy, as reflected in *The Days*, is the idea that education should be accessible to all. His personal struggles underscore the inequities within the Egyptian educational system, where opportunities were often limited to the elite.

Equality in Education: Hussain argues that education must be a right, not a privilege. He envisions a system that serves rural communities, women, and marginalized populations, breaking down socio-economic barriers.

Education as a National Imperative: Hussain connects education to national progress, arguing that Egypt's development depends on cultivating an educated citizenry. He believes that literacy and critical knowledge are essential for building a strong, independent nation.

The Individual and the Pursuit of Knowledge

Throughout *The Days*, Hussain emphasizes the importance of individual effort and intellectual curiosity in achieving knowledge. His personal journey serves as a testament to the transformative impact of education on individual lives.

Self-Discipline and Perseverance: Hussain's struggles—traveling long distances, enduring discrimination, and overcoming blindness—demonstrate the value of determi-

nation in the pursuit of learning.

Lifelong Learning: Hussain's passion for literature, philosophy, and history reflects his belief in lifelong education as a means of intellectual and personal growth.

8. Findings

The analysis of Dr. Taha Hussain's educational philosophy, based on his autobiography *The Days (Al-Ayyam)*, reveals several key insights into his views on education and its broader implications. The findings reflect his critical engagement with the traditional educational systems of his time and his forward-thinking vision for reform.

1. Critique of Traditional Education

Hussain identified significant limitations in traditional religious education, particularly the systems practiced at institutions like Al-Azhar University. These included:

- a. Overemphasis on rote memorization of religious texts without fostering understanding or critical thinking.
- b. A lack of intellectual freedom, which discouraged questioning and exploration of new ideas.
- c. Resistance to integrating modern disciplines such as science, history, and philosophy into the curriculum.

Key Finding: Traditional education systems, as critiqued by Hussain, perpetuated intellectual stagnation, and failed to prepare students for modern challenges.

2. Advocacy for Secular and Modern Education

Hussain championed the integration of secular and modern disciplines into educational curricula. His experiences in Europe, particularly at the Sorbonne, shaped his belief in:

- a. Rational inquiry as the foundation of learning.

- b. The importance of exposing students to diverse fields, including literature, arts, and sciences.
- c. Education as a means of fostering intellectual freedom and progress.

Key Finding: Hussain viewed secular and modern education as essential for individual and societal advancement, emphasizing its role in overcoming traditional constraints.

3. Education as a Tool for Social Justice

Hussain's personal experiences with poverty, blindness, and social marginalization informed his belief in education as a transformative force. He strongly advocated for:

- a. Universal access to education, irrespective of socio-economic status, gender, or geography.
- b. The inclusion of marginalized groups, such as rural populations and women, in educational opportunities.

Key Finding: Hussain saw education as a tool for achieving social equity and bridging societal divides, making it a fundamental right for all.

4. Link Between Education and National Development

Hussain emphasized the role of education in national progress, arguing that a reformed system could address Egypt's developmental challenges. He believed in:

- a. Aligning education with the needs of a modern economy and society.
- b. Cultivating a knowledgeable and skilled citizenry to drive socio-economic growth.

Key Finding: Hussain positioned education as the cornerstone of Egypt's modernization and its ability to compete globally.

5. Relevance of Hussain's Educational Philosophy

Hussain's ideas remain pertinent to contemporary debates on education, particularly in addressing issues such as:

- a. The persistence of rote learning and resistance to reforms in traditional systems.
- b. The importance of inclusivity and accessibility in education for marginalized communities.
- c. The need for balancing tradition with modernity to create equitable and progressive educational frameworks.

Key Finding: Hussain's educational philosophy offers timeless lessons for creating systems that are inclusive, modern, and relevant to societal needs.

Summary of Findings

Dr. Taha Hussain's reflections in *The Days* highlight:

1. The shortcomings of traditional religious education systems in fostering intellectual growth.
2. The transformative potential of secular and modern education in promoting critical thinking and progress.
3. The role of education in achieving social justice and bridging socio-economic divides.
4. The significance of education in national development and modernization.
5. The enduring relevance of Hussain's ideas in addressing contemporary educational challenges.

These findings underscore Hussain's belief in education as a powerful force for individual empowerment and societal transformation. His vision remains a guiding framework for educational reform and equity in modern contexts.

9. Relevance of Taha Hussain's Educational Philosophy for the Indian Context

Dr. Taha Hussain's educational philosophy offers significant lessons for the Indian

context, particularly when examined in comparison with the ideas of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. His advocacy for universal, secular, and accessible education aligns with the needs of modern India, where disparities in educational access, caste-based inequalities, and gender imbalances persist. Below are key ways Taha Hussain's philosophy is relevant and applicable to India today:

1. Education as a Tool for Liberation

Like Phule and Ambedkar, Taha Hussain believed education is essential for the liberation of marginalized communities. In India, millions still face systemic exclusion based on caste, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Taha Hussain's emphasis on making education accessible to women, the rural poor, and underprivileged groups mirrors the continuing struggles in India to eliminate barriers to education. For example, programs like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao resonate with Hussain's call for education to be "like water and air—free and available to all."

2. Promoting Gender Equality in Education

Taha Hussain was a strong advocate for women's education, recognizing it as a foundation for societal progress. In India, thinkers like Phule and Savitribai Phule championed similar causes by establishing schools for girls and breaking patriarchal barriers.

Even today, gender disparities in education persist, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. Taha Hussain's philosophy highlights the urgency of eliminating gender bias in education, empowering women to participate fully in social, economic, and political life.

3. Modern and Secular Education

Taha Hussain critiqued rigid, outdated religious education systems and advocated

for a modern, secular curriculum that integrates sciences, philosophy, and critical thinking. Similarly, Ambedkar promoted rationality and modern knowledge as tools to challenge caste-based orthodoxy.

In India, secular and scientific education remains vital to counter regressive ideologies, superstitions, and communal divides. Taha Hussain's philosophy reinforces the need to strengthen India's secular education system, ensuring it fosters rational inquiry, critical thinking, and inclusivity.

4. Education for Marginalized Communities

Taha Hussain's work resonates deeply with India's efforts to provide education to marginalized groups, including Dalits, tribal communities, and rural populations. Ambedkar's call for equal educational opportunities for Dalits aligns with Hussain's belief that education is key to societal progress.

In India, policies such as reservation systems, scholarships, and mid-day meal programs aim to improve educational access for historically disadvantaged communities. Taha Hussain's ideas encourage further reform to address gaps in literacy rates and dropout rates among marginalized groups.

5. Addressing Rural Educational Challenges

Taha Hussain emphasized the importance of rural education, critiquing systems that neglected villages and underdeveloped areas. This challenge remains highly relevant in India, where rural schools often face issues of infrastructure, teacher shortages, and lack of resources.

Hussain's advocacy for improving rural education systems aligns with India's need to strengthen educational infrastructure in villages, ensuring quality education reaches all corners of the country.

6. Challenging Social and Cultural Dogma

Taha Hussain's critique of blind adherence to tradition echoes Ambedkar's call to reject caste-based orthodoxy and social stagnation. Both reformers emphasized that education must promote rationality, progress, and equality, enabling individuals to question and reform outdated systems.

In India, Hussain's ideas underscore the need for education to combat caste discrimination, religious extremism, and cultural dogma that hinder societal growth. Schools and universities must serve as spaces of critical inquiry and inclusive dialogue.

10. Conclusion

Dr. Taha Hussain's *The Days* offers a profound reflection on education as both a personal journey and a societal imperative. His critique of traditional religious education, his advocacy for secular and modern learning, and his emphasis on educational accessibility underscore his vision for a reformed educational system in Egypt.

Hussain's philosophy highlights education as a tool for liberation, empowerment, and progress, transcending his personal struggles to offer a universal message. By challenging intellectual stagnation and promoting rational inquiry, Hussain's work remains a cornerstone for educational reform in Egypt and the broader Arab world. His vision for education—rooted in equality, modernity, and critical thinking—continues to inspire efforts toward creating just and inclusive societies.

Taha Hussain's educational philosophy mirrors the ideals of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in India. All three believed that education was key to liberation, social justice, and national progress. They critiqued outdated traditions, advocated for modern and inclusive education, and emphasized the role of education in uplifting marginalized communities. Their ideas remain vital in contemporary educational reform discussions in both Egypt and India.

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