



SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC WELFARE AND INITIATIVES

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Dr. D. Suresh



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EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION IN INDIA: FROM ANCIENT WISDOM TO MODERN CHALLENGES



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Abstract: *The paper systematically presents a chronological account of the historical progression of the Indian education system, dividing it into distinct eras: Ancient Vedic times, the Medieval Buddhist period, the Islamic period, and the modern pre and postcolonial era. In antiquity, the Indian education system held a prestigious position, with renowned centres of learning like Nalanda, Takshashila, Ujjain, and Vikramshila Universities attaining widespread recognition and prestige. During the Medieval Buddhist period, educational pursuits continued to thrive at institutions such as Nalanda and Takshashila, contributing significantly to India's intellectual and cultural heritage. The onset of the Mughal reign ushered in changes in traditional educational methods, leading to the establishment of Madrasas and Makhtabs. However, these developments also signalled a departure from previous educational systems. The paper underscores that the present Indian education system is fundamentally rooted in the British education system introduced by Macaulay in the 20th century. The British colonial rule, particularly in the 19th century, emphasized arts and humanities over science and technology in higher education. Despite challenges in implementation, the paper recognizes substantial progress in the contemporary education system, with an emphasis on ongoing improvements in the future. This comprehensive study delves into the historical evolution of the Indian education system, tracing its transformation from ancient times to the post-independence era. The narrative explores the interconnected nature of education, religion, and societal values, shedding light on the diverse influences that have shaped the educational landscape. From the ancient Gurukul system to the impact of Islamic rule in medieval India and the legacy of British colonialism, the text traces the trajectory of education while addressing economic perspectives, social changes, and policy interventions. The post-independence period witnessed a paradigm shift, characterized by constitutional provisions, committees, and policies*

aimed at addressing disparities and promoting inclusivity. The abstract encapsulates the nuanced journey of education in India, offering valuable insights into its multifaceted historical, cultural, and policy dimensions.

Introduction

The largest single enterprise globally is comprised of educational institutions providing primary education to a maximum number of children. With a diverse array of teachers, a substantial student body, and a significant presence of supervisors and administrators, these institutions possess the capacity to influence the social values of individuals. Through education, they contribute to changing the social fabric, considering factors such as magnitude, psychological preparedness, sociological influences, economic necessities, philosophical background, and scientific enlightenment.

From an economic perspective, investing in education is deemed valuable not only by economists but also by educationists. The economic condition of a country is heavily dependent on the educational standards of its people, with primary education serving as the foundational acquisition for the majority. Education plays a pivotal role in modernization and human development, representing a lifelong process of learning that fosters mobilization and encourages participation in developmental activities. It equips individuals with skills for employment, fostering productive efficiency.

The contemporary education system in India has evolved significantly, with efforts from the government aimed at achieving inclusive growth. Notable achievements include a substantial increase in the literacy rate from 18.3% in 1950-51 to 74.04% in 2010-11. The government's focus on education aims to enhance the standard of living, overcome challenges like poverty and unemployment, ensure social equality, and promote equal income distribution.

Education is instrumental in enhancing efficiency, widening democratic participation, and elevating the overall quality of individual and societal life. Despite advancements in elementary education, there has been limited fundamental change in the structure of secondary and higher education in India. Growth in these sectors has been driven by the demand resulting from the expansion of elementary education. Government initiatives, such as the abolition of compulsory CBSE board exams for children and the Free and Compulsory Education Bill, underscore the attention given to primary and higher education in the country.

Education System in Ancient India

The education system in ancient India was deeply intertwined with religion, permeating every aspect of life. Education in this period was designed to foster the multifaceted development of an individual's personality, always with a religious orientation. The overarching concept aims, and ideals of education were intricately linked to the broader ideals of life, with religion playing a pivotal role in shaping the societal structure and educational system.

In ancient India, the educational landscape operated within a specific institutional framework known as the “Gurukul System of Education.” Teachers, often serving as priests, imparted a curriculum that encompassed liberal, spiritual, and religious education. The primary source of instruction was the Vedic literature, a cornerstone of life for the people of India during that era.

The educational atmosphere in ancient India was charged with feelings of love and devotion, reflecting the religious context. One of the essential objectives of the ancient educational system was the preservation and transmission of Indian culture. Renowned teachers dedicated themselves to this task, continuously engaging in their work. The educational approach aimed at fostering independence in students, cultivating habits that contributed to the upliftment of their lives.

While the ancient education system lacked a written curriculum, the Gurus (teachers) judiciously selected activities that facilitated the development of various dimensions of a student’s personality. Gupta highlighted some chief aims and ideals of ancient Indian education, including:

1. Infusing a spirit of piety and righteousness.
2. Forming high character.
3. Developing personality.
4. Inculcating civic and social values.
5. Promoting social efficiency.
6. Preserving and spreading national culture.

These objectives underscored the holistic nature of ancient Indian education, focusing not only on intellectual growth but also on the moral, social, and cultural dimensions of the individual.

Education System in Medieval India

Following the Islamic invasion of India from Persia and Asia Minor, coupled with the establishment of Islamic theocratic monarchies under Mahmud of Ghazni in A.D. 1001 and Muhammad Ghauri in A.D. 1175, the educational institutions associated with Hinduism and Buddhism were systematically dismantled. This paved the way for the emergence and development of Muslim education in India, particularly under the aegis of the Islamic rulers. Muslim educational institutions became closely affiliated with mosques, and these institutions selectively trained individuals for professions such as priests, judges, doctors, and more.

Islamic culture places significant importance on education as a process of teaching, acquiring knowledge, and fulfilling the purpose of human creation. During the medieval period, Islamic education supplanted the existing Vedic and Buddhist systems to meet the growing demands of Islamic administration. Notably, under the rule of Akbar,

there was substantial progress in education compared to the preceding Tughlaq dynasty. Akbar showed deep interest in spreading education, leading to the establishment of various branches of learning, including mathematics, geometry, astronomy, physics, philosophy, history, grammar, literature, and more across different parts of India.

However, the decline of the Mughal Empire after the death of Aurangzeb marked the end of the religiously oriented education system. Many Madrasas and Maktab (schools attached to mosques) and Pathshalas (schools attached to temples) were closed. This period saw a twofold social reaction, with the loss of values resulting in social anarchy and increased socio-personal immorality. In response, Pundits and Mullahs advocated for social conservatism to preserve the crumbling social structure and order, but the cultural front suffered significant damage.

The fall of the Mughal Empire after Aurangzeb's death created an educational and cultural vacuum in Indian society, marking the end of the medieval period. The remnants of the indigenous Hindu and Islamic education systems were mere shadows of their former selves. Consequently, most of the oppressed population sought a New Haven of rescue during this uncertain and chaotic life.

Education System in Pre-Independent India

The history of modern education in India unfolds with the advent of the East India Company, which, under the renewed act granting the Company's privileges for an additional twenty years in July 1813, was compelled to assume responsibility for the education of Indians. This act authorized the Board of Control to issue licenses to missionaries to establish schools in India. Notably, Clause 43 of the Charter Act 1813 introduced in Parliament, and passed after modification, played a pivotal role in shaping educational policies.

With British India divided into five provinces—Bengal, Bombay, Madras, United Provinces, and the Punjab—the Presidency of Bengal took the lead in educational reorganization. The Central Committee of Public Instruction, formed in 1823, focused on various developments in the educational sector, including the reorganization of institutions like Calcutta Madrassa and Banaras Sanskrit Colleges. The Committee introduced English classes in oriental colleges, emphasizing subjects such as mathematics, geometry, astronomy, physics, philosophy, history, grammar, and literature.

In 1835, Governor General Lord Bentinck's resolution emphasized the British government's objective to promote European literature and sciences among the natives of India. This marked a shift towards English education, while also preserving existing Oriental institutions. However, the outbreak of the Sepoy Revolt in 1857 led to a reevaluation of education policies, with Lord Ellenborough's dispatch withdrawing certain provisions related to mass education, female education, and financial support to mission schools.

Subsequently, the dispatch of 1854, highlighting the importance of universities, led to the establishment of the Universities of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay in 1857. The modern education system is aimed at providing secular education, impacting indigenous institutions. By 1871, there were 137 middle and high schools for girls in India.

The Hunter Commission of 1882, also known as the India Education Commission, marked an important step in educational development. During Lord Curzon's tenure, significant reforms were introduced, including the Simla Conference in 1901, the Indian Universities Commission in 1902, and the Indian Universities Act in 1904. Gokhale's efforts in 1910-1913 aimed at implementing the principle of compulsory education, while the slow growth of higher education led to the Calcutta University Commission in 1917.

The National Education Movement (1920-1922) emphasized Indian control and traditional methods of education. Post-World War II, the Sargent Report (Sargent Commission) recommended universal, compulsory, and free primary education for those aged six to fourteen.

In pre-independence India, education systems evolved from ancient religious-based learning centres (Tols and Viharas) to medieval Muslim education through Maqtabas and Madrassas. The modern period introduced institutionalized centres called schools due to British influence.

Education System After Independence of India

The day of independence in India marked a momentous occasion in history, symbolizing joy and freedom for the people. However, the reality in the field of education presented a stark contrast. Educational disparities and imbalances were prevalent, evident in urban-rural divides, gender inequalities, and economic disparities between the rich and poor. Pre-school education was virtually non-existent, with only a few pre-primary centres in metropolitan cities run by Christian missionaries and philanthropists.

As of the eve of independence, the state of education was disheartening. S.K. Kochhar highlighted the inadequacies, stating that the total enrollment in the age group of 6-11 was only 35% in primary schools. Secondary education was limited, with 4% enrollment of children in the 14-17 age group. Universities and colleges had a combined enrollment of 250,000, and the total expenditure on education was a mere 0.5% of the government's total revenue.

The need for immediate reforms in the education system became apparent in India, a country striving for economic development, social change, and democracy. Post-independence, committees and commissions were established to review educational problems and recommend adjustments to meet changing needs.

The Indian Constitution, effective from January 26, 1950, played a crucial role in shaping the educational landscape. Articles such as Article 45 emphasized free and

compulsory primary education for all children until the age of fourteen. Other articles safeguarded secular education, promoted equality of opportunity in educational institutions, and protected the educational interests of socially and educationally backward classes.

In 1986, the National Policy on Education aimed to remove disparities and equalize educational opportunities for various groups, including women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, the handicapped, and minority groups. The policy covered diverse aspects, ranging from school education to adult and continuing education, vocationalization, higher education, and cultural perspectives.

Efforts to universalize primary education gained momentum with initiatives like Operation Blackboard, the Mid-Day Meal program, and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Poverty alleviation programs also played a role in encouraging parents to send their children to school. Over the past two decades, infrastructure has improved, gross enrollment has become nearly universal, and dropout rates, especially for girls at the primary level, have declined.

While the government formulates policies and schemes to enhance the education system and promote inclusivity, it remains the responsibility of every individual to utilize these opportunities for personal and societal development, fostering a society without discrimination based on gender, caste, religion, urban-rural divides, or economic status.

Conclusion

The examination of flaws within the education system is undertaken through a critical lens, considering the five principles of the Capability Approach. Recognizing the imperative to invest urgently in the education of the demographic dividend, it becomes pivotal to harness the potential of the burgeoning young population within a limited timeframe. Neglecting this necessity may result in the transformation of these potential economic assets into liabilities, thereby instigating disillusionment and frustration among the youth. This susceptibility to manipulation, exemplified in Naxalite-affected areas, poses a threat to political stability, societal order, and substantial economic setbacks.

In tackling these challenges, meticulous analysis and scrutiny of education policies by both the central government and national regulatory authorities become imperative. The formulation of a pragmatic National Education Policy is crucial to overseeing the qualitative and quantitative growth of educational institutions. The overarching objective should be to ensure that education not only aligns with industrial needs but also addresses the individual requirements of learners.

Critical to success is the implementation of these policies, transcending mere theoretical frameworks and reaching the broader population. Often, policies become

entangled in bureaucratic red tape, corruption, and indifference from regulatory and monitoring authorities. Addressing these issues necessitates a stringent and systematic approach to prevent the Indian higher education system from descending into irreparable chaos. By confronting these systemic challenges, India stands to better harness the potential of its youth, fostering a more resilient and inclusive education system.

In conclusion, the historical trajectory of the education system in India mirrors a dynamic interplay of cultural, religious, and socio-political forces. The spiritual ethos of the Gurukul system, the transformative influence of Islamic rule, and the imprint of British colonialism collectively shape the educational narrative. Post-independence, the constitutional commitment to free and compulsory education, coupled with subsequent policy initiatives, signifies a concerted effort to address disparities and promote inclusivity. While substantial progress has been achieved in infrastructure, enrollment, and inclusivity, persistent challenges necessitate ongoing attention. As India continues to evolve, the responsibility for advancing educational opportunities for personal and societal development lies not solely with policymakers but also with individuals, fostering a harmonious and equitable society.

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