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FROM GURUKULA TO GLOBAL CLASSROOM: A HISTORICAL STUDY OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Rutvij Vyas¹ & Ved Vyas²

I. ABSTRACT

This research paper delves into a deep tapestry of understanding the historical development of transmission methods of knowledge. Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and value through various learning methods, wherein the education system is a formal instrument of education application in society. As per Swami Vivekananda, 'Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man'. Human resources and its management play a vital role in the development of the national economy, and thereby, the paper also highlights the significant role education has played in the Indian economy from time immemorial.

This paper explores the historical evolution of India's education system from early human civilization to the new national education policy of 2020. The paper relies on dates of history and its effect on the people, culture, and social order. One of the major aims of the authors is to rationally elucidate the role of the education system in the corresponding development of a complex organic society, emphasizing the development of the education system and its role in creating social cohesion, assimilation, and solidarity.

The paper highlights with time, the curricula of education also change, from teaching astronomy, warfare, language, and philosophy of religions to physics, mathematics, sociology, psychology, and data science. The paper highlights the importance of a national education policy, furthermore, providing Suggestions to improve the current education system following the 5 points program.

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Overall, this paper provides brief introductory research on the development of education in India from pre-historical times to modern-day cutting-edge educational systems, showing the shift of education from gurukul to global citizens. The authors dedicate the research paper to the scholars, philosophers, and teachers who have played their role in the education system and its development since time immemorial.

II. KEYWORDS

Education system, Educational Reforms, New Education Policy, History of Human Resources management;

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The brief objective of this research is to provide a rational analysis of the historical evolution of the Education system in India, with a special focus on several issues:-

- To Examine & analyze the progression of the education system of India from the beginning of the need for education to the National Education Policy of 2020. Highlighting the key aspects of reforms and revolutions in the system;
- To Investigate the role of the education system in the development of class struggle and shaping dynamics of relationships in society, in developing a patriarchal society, and in the creation of caste as a social hierarchy in India;
- To analyze the relationship of the State in the development of the education system and its influence on historical political settings;
- To explore the metaphysical genesis of the education system as a transmission of ideas and its shift to a materialistic system as a medium of wealth & power maximization

IV. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The research hypothesis posits that the current education system of India is a synthesis of the historical thesis and its anti-thesis of ideas, influenced by metaphysical, epistemological, political, sociological, and religious factors.

The research proposes that all major problems of current education systems are not *Sui generis*, and they have a presence in the historical roots of the education system. In conclusion, the author gives a 5-point program on the revival of the education system to secure the stance of India as Vishwaguru – the education hub of the world.

V. INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and value through various learning methods. It involves the process of exchange of knowledge and skill from one person to another. According to Rabindranath Tagore, “*Education enables the mind to find the ultimate truth which gives us the wealth of inner light and love and gives significance to life*”. Through education, there is the transmission of culture, the reinforcement of critical thinking, and the preparation of the person for social engagement.

These all have been greatly embodied in the education system. According to renowned Indian philosopher and great teacher Swami Vivekananda, ‘Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man’. The study of history is essential to know how education has evolved from time to time. Education in the prehistoric community was informal, focusing on survival skills. The education system began to develop in the ancient era when societies became more complicated.

In India, there were gurukul where disciples came to study, and at their, they used to study the different subjects. Education became more organized in the medieval period by establishing monastic schools and madrasas. The modern education system is the product of the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods by this, there was an increasing emphasis on reason, science, and individualism.

Social changes and revolutions have not only influenced the education system but have also changed it for example, the French Revolution in 1789 was greatly influenced by the idea of Enlightenment through the spread of literacy. The school system has suffered the most despite playing a crucial role, such as disparities, outdated curriculum, and insufficient infrastructure. By putting laws into effect that promote equal access, changing curriculum according to current demand, and making investments in educational infrastructure, these issues can be resolved.

VI. BIRTH OF EDUCATION SYSTEM

Around 70,000 years ago, humans witnessed a cognitive revolution³, which developed an ability to think, which opened the gates for all logical-rational ideas & imagination. Twelve thousand years ago, humans observed an ability to produce agriculture⁴, which resulted in the settlement of society from nomadic culture; around 5,000 years ago, humans developed an ability to systematically think and present a formative hypothesis on metaphysical questions. With the change of time, society created a set of rituals, culture, law order, morals, and values to civilize our society.

These changes resulted in the development of a system of transmission of knowledge, which we refer to as the educational system in 3000 BCE.⁵ The education system of pre-history seems to be blurry. However, it appears that the primary focus was to create a culture of continuance in social order.⁶ And to impart the practical knowledge and skills required for daily life. As per Swami Vivekananda, "Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man."⁷, which suggests that the education system is an evolved institution to unlock the true potential of human consciences and rationality.

The prehistorical education system of India was only available to the class of sons of priests, teachers, kings, and aristocrats. As per some sources, the Kheti (who was the treasurer of Mentuhotep) established the first formal school in the Egyptian middle kingdom.⁸, which was limited to the elite kinship of the Egyptian monarch. However, some sources describe the genesis of education in the 2075-1600 B.C., Xia dynasty of China, with the establishment of the first formal schools to enlighten the male children of aristocrats such as Bailudong, Songyang, and Heilu Academy.⁹

³ Miller, George A. 2003. "The Cognitive Revolution: A Historical Perspective." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7 (3): 141-44. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1364-6613\(03\)00029-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1364-6613(03)00029-9).

⁴ Blakemore, Erin. 2019. "What Was the Neolithic Revolution?" *National Geographic*. National Geographic. April 5, 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/neolithic-agricultural-revolution>.

⁵ Britannica. 2019. "Education - Education in the Earliest Civilizations | Britannica." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-the-earliest-civilizations>.

⁶ Russell, Bertrand. 2013. *Education and the Social Order*. Routledge.

⁷ Mondal, Ajit, and Jayanta Mete. 2012. "SWAMI VIVEKANANDA : SOME REFLECTIONS on EDUCATION." *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL of MULTIDISCIPLINARY EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH* 1 (3).

⁸ Zinn, Katharina. 2012. "Education, Pharaonic Egypt." *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, October. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah15122>.

⁹ China Highlights. 2000. "China Ancient Education." *China Highlights*. 2000. <https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/ancient-education.htm>.

Furthermore, as per some sources, the Ancient Indian education system is believed to be the first formal education system. The ancient Indian education was based on the Gurukul system and witnessed a change from a newly civilized society to an urban-agrarian society.

A. Education system in Ancient India

In ancient India, the language used for education was Sanskrit. During that period, the education was of Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, and the Dharmasutras. The goal of our education system traced to Rigveda, was to help the student develop both their inner and exterior selves.

The ancient education system emphasized teaching students concepts such as discipline, self-reliance, and respect for every living being. The process of learning began with the religious ceremony called “upanayana”. It was a sacred thread ceremony. Education was normally imparted orally, also known as the “shruti and smriti” tradition. The entire system in Ancient India was built on the Gurukul System. An important aspect of the ancient education system was to protect ancient Indian culture and social order. During that period, the royal families and the king of the empire used to donate their wealth for the development of the education system.

The syllabus was used to design as per the requirements of that period. There were no examinations, education was continued during that period, and there were no books. There were three steps of instruction in ancient India. Shrvana, Manana and Nithyasana. Shrvana is to hear what gurus have taught, and Manana is that the pupil has to think about the topic, and in Nithyasana, the student has to reflect on the teaching. During this period, self-education was given the utmost importance; we have the example of the Taitteriya punished.

The Bhrgu son of Varuna approaches his father and asks him to educate him regarding the brahmana his father tells him to elevate his knowledge through meditation. In the ancient Indian education system, women also played an important role, like Gargi or Maitreya, who achieved the highest knowledge. As per Buddhist and Jain traditions, languages like Prakrit-Pali & apabhramsha were education's common language (*lingua franca*).

Several Buddhist and Jain institutions were widely known for their par excellence in education, such as:- Vikramshila, Nalanda, Somapura, Jagaddala, and Odantapuri Universities

for Buddhist education.¹⁰, while Vallabhi, Manyakheta, and Kanchipuram Universities for Jain studies.

B. Education system in Medieval India

The Medieval era spans approximately from the 7th century to the 18th century C.E. The medieval education system was deeply influenced by its socio-political order and can be characterized as a synthetic blend of Vedic (gurukul) and Islamic (madrasas) systems of knowledge.¹¹.

Vedas, Upanishads, logic, grammar, astrology, and Vedanta (By Adi Shankar and Ramanujacharya) were the key subjects of Gurukula. At the same time, Arabic, Persian, sharia (divine law), Sufism & theology were key subjects of madrasas. Both were supported by the kings-rulers and wealthy merchants, reflecting education as a method of social achievement. The education system played a significant role in religious-cultural reform movements of "bhakti and Sufi tradition".

Sufi scholars such as Shaikh Muinuddin Sijzi¹², Khwaja Qutubuddin Baktiyaar Kaki, Nizamuddin Auliya, and Lal Ded were key framers of medieval thought¹³. Nammalavar, Ramanujacharya, Basavanna¹⁴, Jnanadeva, Ramanand and Vallabhacharya¹⁵ Were crucial scholars of the medieval Hindu knowledge system. It is important to observe that education was not limited to studies of faith; secular disciplines such as economics, politics, archery, astronomy, and mathematics were also part of the education system.

¹⁰ Ravi, Vajiram . 2024. "Buddhist Centres of Learning and Pilgrimage Sites." Vajiram & Ravi. May 16, 2024. <https://vajiramandravi.com/quest-upsc-notes/buddhist-centres-of-learning-and-pilgrimage-sites/>.

¹¹ Kanjilal Biswas, Adarini. 2016. "DEVELOPMENT of EDUCATION in INDIA during the MEDIEVAL PERIOD: A HISTORICAL APPROACH." IJRAR19D1183 International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews. <https://www.ijrar.org/papers/IJRAR19D1183.pdf>.

¹² Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield, *Telling and Texts: Music, Literature, and Performance in North India* (Open Book Publishers, 2015), p. 463

¹³ Nizami, K.A., "Čiṣṭī", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrich

¹⁴ Work as Worship in Viraśaiva Tradition, R Blake Michael (1982), *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 50, No. 4, pages 605-619

¹⁵ "Chapter -3 Reflection of Vaishnavism on Education and Entertainment 3.1 Women's Education ." n.d. Accessed August 10, 2024. http://inet.vidyasagar.ac.in:8080/jspui/bitstream/123456789/5912/1/11_chapter%203.pdf.

However, the medieval education system lacked accessibility, representation, and rationality due to social stratification based on gender, caste, and religion. Thus, the education system resulted in deep-rooted educational-social and economic disparity between women and marginalized communities. There was minimal focus on women's education due to ancient gender roles¹⁶. However, Lalleshwari, Mukta bai, Gulbadan Begum, Habba khatoon, Mirabai, Avvayyar, and Akka Mahadevi were prominent educated some of such times.

The education system also reflected the rise and fall of the Delhi Sultanate, Maratha, Mughal, and Rajput dynasties. Maratha and Rajput established several vidhyapiths, while Bakhtiyar Khiji is notoriously known for blazing Nalanda University. The education system reflected the benefits of the ruling class- the elites, primarily focusing on Brahmin and Muslim aristocracy as its controllers.

The Gurukuls of the agrarian- Feudal economy of medieval India were left with no option but to focus only on realistic knowledge used in day-to-day utilitarian life, which resulted in the presence of high skills but lacked enlightened idealism and political knowledge.

C. Education system in British India

British came to India in the 17 century as a trader, and to make a profit was their prime motive, so they did not show much interest in the development of education methods in India. They came to India for the promotion of Christianity, and this they have destroyed the religious faith in India. They have declared our source of knowledge as a Myth and declared it as mythology. They have encouraged Western education in India by introducing the English language.

In a round table conference in 1931, Gandhi said, " The beautiful tree of education was cut down by you British". In the book name beautiful tree, which Shri Dharampal Ji published, he mentions all the details of how the British have played and twisted the education system of India. Macaulay's letter dated 12 Oct 1836 to his father, he wrote that he had a firm belief that if successfully the British education policy was applied to India, then in the next 30 years, there would be no people who were idolaters.

¹⁶ Thakur, Renu. "WOMEN IN EARLY MEDIEVAL NORTH INDIA: SOME REFLECTIONS." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 78 (2017): 269-74. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26906094>

They have made compulsory English education for entrance into government services. In 1858, by MR. TC Hope has suggested that the government should take the Tax from the local schools who were running for their profit this was the point from where education has been used for monetary purposes. Another important commission was given to the British, and this was used to be known as the Hunter Commission this came in (1882-83) it was stated that the government should take the entire expense for primary education, but the government rejected this idea.

By this, all we get is information on how the British have changed and twisted the entire education system of India, and due to this, India is still suffering from this problem according to one report, due to this policy, India is far more illiterate than it was 100 years ago. The education system developed by the Britishers was novel to Indian people due to its secular nature. Thereby, Swami Vivekananda writes, "If you attempt to get the secular knowledge without religion, I tell you plainly, vain is your attempt in India"

VII. IMPACT OF SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENTS ON THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Indian education system is an amalgamation of all values, ideas, and theses of all cultures that evolved with due process of time. There are two sets of socio-religious movements in India. I.e. Bhakti tradition and Indian Renaissance of 18th & 19th centuries. The Bhakti movement impacted the education system with scholars and teachers like Raidas, Kabir, Surdas, Shah Alam, Shanakradeva, Tukaram, Sri Chaitanya, and many others.¹⁷

The Indian Renaissance played a crucial role in the development and execution of Macaulay's education policy. Scholars of this era questioned the religious superstitions and dogmas, creating an egalitarian value system based on the European Renaissance model. Many of such thinkers were a product of the Western education system and its values. Furthermore, education was one of the methods of spreading egalitarian ideas.

¹⁷ Study IQ IAS. 2023. "Bhakti Movement, Origin, Rise, Bhakti Saints & Significance." September 6, 2023. <https://www.studyiq.com/articles/bhakti-movement/>.

The young Bengal movement led by Henry Vivian Derozio¹⁸ (professor at Hindu College) supported women's rights in education and improved Raja Ram Mohan Roy's idea of public education. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar¹⁹ (principal of Sanskrit college) believed in high values and morale-based education, based on Sanskrit- the Vedic method of teaching. They were also the torchbearer of women's education. Dayanand Saraswati and Arya Samaj played important roles in establishing Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) schools.

Justice M.G Ranade²⁰ Believed in the Western education system as an important part of the Indian reform movement. Satyashodhak Samaj and Jyotiba Phule²¹ Played a vital role in the education of women and marginalized castes. Thus, the socio-religious reform movements in India played a role as a catalyst of change in the education system. They were based on two major ideas, i.e. rationalism and universalism, which later became the fundamental of the education system of independent India.

A. An Overview of the Post-Independence Education System in India

India, after independence, witnessed a transformative shift in the philosophy of education. Education of future India was one of the major points of discussion of the Constituent Assembly. The Constitution of India enshrined education to be part of the concurrent list under schedule 7, furthermore, education for all is one of the enshrined directive principles of state policy under part 4.

The major aim of the Union government was to focus on inclusivity, accessibility, and affordability of education. Various committees and commissions were established to reform the education system. With the establishment of the University Education Committee of 1948, headed by Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the committee highlighted the importance of higher education and the development of human resources by fostering critical thinking. The Second Education Committee of 1952-1953, under the leadership of Dr A. Lakshma-

¹⁸ Henry Louis Vivian Derozio | Indian Poet and Educator | Britannica." n.d. [Www.britannica.com. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-Louis-Vivian-Derozio.](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-Louis-Vivian-Derozio)

¹⁹“ Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar | Indian Educator.” 2019. In Encyclopædia Britannica. [https://www.britannica.com/biography/Isvar-Chandra-Vidyasagar.](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Isvar-Chandra-Vidyasagar)

²⁰“ Mahadev Govind Ranade | Indian Politician.” n.d. Encyclopedia Britannica. [https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahadev-Govind-Ranade.](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahadev-Govind-Ranade)

²¹ Desh Raj Sirswal. 2013. “Jyotiba Phule : A Modern Indian Philosopher”

naswami Mudaliar, highlighted the multitude of courses at the secondary and higher secondary levels to create a diverse and dynamic education system to cater to the needs of the future.

The government of India, to revolutionize the British model, established the Kothari Commission in the year 1964-66, the commission proposed a novel structure of the system with the changing socio-economic scenario. Furthermore, the Kothari Commission played the foundation of a consolidated national policy on education. In 1986, the government of India formed the first National Policy on Education, focusing more on inclusively and improving the quality of education. The Supreme Court, in the leading judgment of *Unnikrishnan Vs. The state of Andhra Pradesh*²² and *Mohini Jain Vs State of Karnataka* (1989)²³ highlighted the constitutional values on education and held the “Right to education is concomitant to the fundamental rights.

In 1990, the Union government launched the program of ‘Education for All’ and ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan’ in 2000 to achieve elementary education for all. The parliament, in 2002, passed the 86th Constitution Amendment Act to ensure the right to education. The Right to Education Act of 2009 made the right to education a fundamental right for the age of 6 to 14. The importance of education in the medium of the mother tongue has been recognized through all these reforms. Education is a subject under the concurrent list, which empowers the state government to promote education in the mother tongue.

B. Contemporary developments in the Indian education system and the New National Education Policy of 2020

The Indian education system has witnessed significant advancements in recent years, with the introduction of the National Education Policy of 2020. The objective of NEP is to overhaul the established structures and introduce a new-rationalised curriculum for overall child development. The NEP focuses on a multi-disciplinary approach to impart knowledge and signifies skill-based learning for students to adapt to coming technology.

²² 1993 AIR 2178, 1993 SCR (1) 594

²³ 1992 AIR 1858; 1992 SCC (3) 666; 1992 SCR (3) 658

The NEP overhauls the previous 10+2 structure and ensures the 5+3+3+4 structure. Overall, the NEP is aimed to ensure the holistic, dynamic, and comprehensive stages of learning. The NEP also provides for early childhood care & educational facilities. The NEP promotes the impartation of knowledge in regional languages (mother tongue), focusing on vocational training with critical thinking. The NEP keeps a space for learning of science and technology to young minds. The New National Education Policy is created with a vision of making Indian youth a globally competitive citizen.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE THE CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM FOLLOWING THE 5 POINTS PROGRAMME

The paper provides five major suggestions to deal with problems that are faced by the Indian education system historically, such as lack of inclusivity and representation of women, Dalits, and other marginalized sections; Lack of appropriate syllabus and teachers; no focus on skill-based education and failure to adopt with coming technology;

The problem with the Indian education system is its classroom pedagogy of one-sided interaction and teacher-student role of the 18th century (developed in Germany & France), syllabus and subjects of teaching in the 19th century, teachers of the 20th century and the preparation of students for the challenges of the 21st century.

- **Increase Inclusivity:** The government has already implemented policies to give free access to education for all sections of society, but the focused participation of students from marginalized communities remains poor, promotes scholarships for economically underprivileged groups, and introduces flexible learning models to accommodate diverse learning needs. The central executive is to make a sub-classification of other backward classes and schedule tribes in reservation policy to create inclusivity within marginalized communities. To create strong laws- regulating the education institutions with religious functions, including minorities-run education institutions.
- **Selection of Proper Knowledge:** Update curricula as per the needs of the 21st century to include practical and relevant knowledge, focusing on critical thinking,

problem-solving, and interdisciplinary subjects. Currently, we are teaching our children what to think rather than how to think.

- **Selection of Proper Knowledge Givers:** Establish stringent qualification standards for teachers, provide continuous professional development, and incentivize mentorship programs to improve teaching quality by creating strong state-level laws to regulate paper leaks, cash for teaching jobs, and corruption in the education sector. Moreover, there is an active need to put the Indian education system on the verge of All-India services.
- **Emphasize Skill-Based Learning:** Shift from rote learning to experiential and vocational training, preparing students for real-world challenges and employability.
- **Integrate Technology and Innovation:** The educational institutes and school boards shall try to utilize digital tools, AI-driven learning platforms, and remote learning solutions to make education more accessible and adaptive to individual learning paces.

IX. CONCLUSION

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and value through various learning methods. It involves the process of exchange of knowledge and skill from one person to another. According to Rabindranath Tagore, *“Education enables the mind to find the ultimate truth which gives us the wealth of inner light and love and gives significance to life”*. This paper develops a comprehensive historical record of the transformation of the education system in India.

From the Pre-historic societies to the post-modern culture, the education system plays a vital role in the continuance and reform of social order. The Indian education system has witnessed significant advancements in recent years, with the introduction of the National Education Policy of 2020. The objective of NEP is to overhaul the established structures and introduce a new-rationalised curriculum for overall child development. Overall, this paper provides deep insights into the past, present, and future education systems.

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