Indian Education System- A Historical Journey

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Abstract:

The present paper discusses about the historic journey of Indian education system, which can be chronologically categorized into Ancient Vedic times, Medieval Buddhist period, Islamic period and modern pre and postcolonial era. Indian education system as well as the culture enjoyed its excellent status during ancient time. Education flourished at Nalanda, Takshashila, Ujjain, and Vikramshila Universities during medieval Buddhist period and earned prestige and reputation everywhere forever. With the advent of Mogul reign in India, the traditional methods of education increasingly came under Islamic influence; and Urdu, Farsi and Arabic languages replaced Sanskrit as a medium of instruction. Islamic institutions of education developed traditional Madresas and Maktabs and disapproved previous systems of education prevailed in India. The present educational system of India is nothing but a replica of British education system, introduced and founded by Macaulay in the 20th century. During 19th century in higher education, the British rule did not take adequate measures to help develop science and technology in India and instead focused more on arts and humanities. Though there are problems and disparities between the objectives and their implementation in education, the present education system in India has come a long way and will continue to improve in the future.

Keywords: *Ancient medieval, Ancient Vedic Times, Indian education system, Islamic, Pre and postcolonial modern era*

1. Historical Background

Ancient India had been the land of inventions and innovations. India can boast of the establishment of the world's first university in 700 B.C. More than 10,500 students all over the world studied more than 60 subjects in Takshashila University. Aryabhatta, the Indian scientist, invented the digit zero. Place value system and the decimal system were developed in India in 100 B.C. The value of "pi" was first calculated by the Indian Mathematician Budhayana, who also explained the concept of Pythagoras theorem. Trigonometry, algebra, calculus studies were originated in India; Shridharacharya used quadratic equations in the 11th century.

Bhaskaracharya calculated the time taken by the earth to orbit the sun hundreds of years ago, even before the astronomer Smart.Aayurveda was the earliest school of medicine known to the mankind. The father of the Aayurved medicine Charak, consolidated Aayurveda 2500 years ago Finally, Yoga and Pranayam for the physical fitness and mental peace are the universal gift of India to the entire human civilization.

The education system of ancient India was culturally and spiritually enriched and advanced. The foundation of ancient education system was religion. As religion played predominant part in the education system, the ultimate aim of the same was to seek "moksha" *"Savidhya ya Vimuktaye"* The temples and the community centers formed the role of schools. Sanskrit was considered to be the mother of many languages and sciences was also the language of learned men and the language of teaching.

Later, the Gurukul system of education came into existence. The Gurukuls were the traditional Hindu residential schools of learning, which were usually the teacher's house or a monastery. The formal admission ceremony was known as 'Upanayana'. With the accomplishment of this ceremony, the child had to leave his home for the 'ashrama' or the Gurukul, where he would receive education. At the Gurukuls, the teacher imparted knowledge on various aspects of the religion, the scriptures, the philosophy, the literature, the warfare, the statecraft, the medicine, astrology and the history. Even though the education was free, the students from well-to-do families paid the Gurudakshina, which was a voluntary contribution after the completion of their studies. This system was considered as the oldest and the most effective system of education.

In ancient days, the sages and the scholars imparted education orally, which was passed orally from one generation to another. Students acquired education through listening, which was known as 'shruti', and they were supposed to memorize the same, which was known as 'Smriti'. The second stage was 'Manana', in which they have to make their own inferences and assimilate the lesson taught by their teacher into the life. The third stage 'Nidhyasana' meant complete comprehension of truth and its use in the life. It was mainly the Brahmins followed by Kshatriyas, who received education at the Gurukuls, while the boys from the lower caste learnt their family trade from their fathers.

After the development of letters, it took the form of writing using the palm leaves and the barks of trees. This also helped in spreading the written literature. Ancient Indian civilization contributed very intensively and extensively to different aspects of knowledge and various fields of teaching and enhanced the horizons of human civilization.

In ancient India, women were given equal right to education and teaching. Women seers like 'Gayatri' were prominent participants in educational debates and the proceedings of the 'Parishads'(Assemblies).The Rugveda mentions female poets called brahmavadinis, specifically Lopamudra and Ghosha. By 800 BC women such as Gargi and Maitreyi were mentioned as scholars in the religious Upnishads.

2. Medieval Buddhist Period

In the first millennium and the few preceding centuries, Education flourished at Nalanda, Takshashila, Ujjain, and Vikramshila Universities. Takshashila was the first university of the world established in 700 B.C. Takshashila University was famous for medical studies and a galaxy of eminent teachers such as the well-known grammarian- Panini ,Kautilya (Chanakya) the minister of Chandragupta Maurya, and Charaka, a medical teacher of great reputation. Each university specialized in a particular field of study, for instance, the Takshashila specialized in the study of medicine, while the Ujjain laid emphasis on astronomy.

Nalanda University, built in 4 AD, was considered to be the honor of ancient Indian system of education, as it was one of the best Universities of its time in the subcontinent. Nalanda was the highest learning center not just of India but also of the entire South Asia. Students from foreign countries used to come there for higher studies. The Nalanda, being the biggest centre, had all the branches of knowledge, and housed up to 10,000 students at its peak. The main subjects were the arithmetic, the theology, the law, the astronomy, the metaphysics, the Mathematics, the ethics, the medical science, weaponry, architecture and the religion. The school had the student representatives from all classes of the society. Several great minds at work there, contributed in every aspect of life. The concept of zero, decimal system and Pythagoras Theorem were all developed here.

Vikramshila University, Varanasi was famous for religious teachings. In the South, Kanchi was famous for its studies and the Vallabhi University was also of the equal status. Huan Tsang- a student traveler from China, in his records mentioned it to be at par with Nalanda and Vikramshila

universities. Education was widespread in the 18th century, with a school for every temple or village in most regions of the country.

Heterodox Buddhist education was more inclusive and the early secular Buddhist urban institutions of higher learning like Takshashila and Nalanda were very renowned where   grammar, medicine, philosophy, logic, metaphysics, arts and crafts etc. were also taught. Joseph Prabhu writes: "Outside the religious framework, kings and princes were educated in the arts and sciences related to government: politics (*danda-neeti*), economics (*Artha*), philosophy (*anvıksiki*), and historical traditions (*itihasa*). Kautilya's *Arthashastra* was considered to be the most authoritative source.

The traces of women empowerment and education are seen even in the Buddhist period. Maya, mother of the historic Buddha, was an educated queen while other women in India contributed to writing of the *Pali canon*. Out of the composers of the Sangam literature 154 were women. However, the education and society of the era continued to be dominated by educated male population. As India progressed from ancient to medieval period, its education system deteriorated. Various socio- cultural and political factors were responsible for the degradation of this most efficient and most ancient education system of the world.

3. Islamic period
With the advent of Mogul reign in India, the traditional methods of education increasingly came under Islamic influence. With the establishment of the Islamic empires in the Indian subcontinent in the middle ages, Islamic education become ingrained with the education system of India. In the Mogul period, the face of education system as well as religion changed and the Islamic tone appeared in Indian education system. Urdu, Farsi and Arabic languages replaced Sanskrit as a medium of instruction. Islamic institutions of education developed traditional Madresas and Maktabs, which taught Grammar, philosophy, Mathematics, Science, Humanities, Law and Islamic scriptures. Under the rule of Akbar, the education system adopted an inclusive approach, which was quite uncommon in India. He gave respect to Indian scholars like Patanjali, Bhaskara and Charaka and incorporated their principles in the contemporary education system. The conservative monarch Aurangzeb advocated the teachings of subjects that dealt with administration.

4. Modern education System:
4.1 Colonial times
The present educational system of India is nothing but a replica of British education system, introduced and founded by Macaulay in the 20th century. The main purpose of it was to prepare Indian Clerks for running local administration. The instruction of school education was the vernacular languages, while the higher education was granted in English only. British government started giving funds to indigenous schools in need of help and thus slowly some of the schools became government-aided. British education solidified in India with the establishment missionary schools during 1920s. During 19th century in higher education, the British rule did not take adequate measures to help develop science and technology in India and instead focused more on arts and humanities.

4.2 Post Independence Time
After the independence, National Policy of Education (1992) laid down many objectives for the development of education system in India, but it has not been successful in achieving all of them. It has specified that the examination system should discourage the memorizing but it is what is going on. The education in India seems to encourage rote learning instead of experimentation and questioning. There is some disparity in assessment as all the State Boards have different standards of evaluation. The reservation based on caste and religion, is also a negative point in Indian education. Corruption is visible in the allocation of seats of institutions of higher studies and student politics is another sore point.

In prevailing times, the challenges faced by Indian education system are funding and infrastructure, rural education, curriculum design, development of distance learning programmes, universalization of education privatization and commercialization of education examination reforms, research and innovations etc. These are some of the above issues, which need to be addressed. Though there are disparities between the objectives and their implementation in education but still education system in India has come a long way and will continue to improve in the future. The strength of present education system is improvised adoptions in the fields of I.T, Engineering and Medical science. The present Indian education system may lag behind in inventions, but is very efficient in innovations. India produces a large numbers of software engineers and computer programmers. Similarly in Medical science, various pharmaceutical and surgical methods are though invented in foreign countries, their improvised and generic versions are developed and offered to the society at a very cheaper rate.

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