

Development Of Education System in India till British Period: Historical Perspective

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Abstract—Education is not a new concept. It was originated from the early civilization of human being. Education is very important for human being. It helps to develop child harmoniously. Education not only develops oneself but also contribute in the development of nation and world. By the help of Education human being reaches up to the moon and other planets. Today's education is not same as the ancient education. But, roots of education based on ancient period. Aims, concept, methods, values, vision etc. of modern education are different from ancient Education system. In this paper, education from ancient time will be explained. Education from Vedic age to Independence of India is the result of educational reformers. These reformers may be Britishers as well as Indians.

Index Terms—Education, Ancient Education System

I. INTRODUCTION:

Education assures survival of the human race, maintains its intellectual and cultural tradition and helps in developing enlightened civilization. Unlike other creatures' humans are capable of learning and of being educated. The necessity of education in human life has assumed much greater significance in modern times. During the earlier ages of civilisation, the human child needed to learn less to lead an effective way of life. With the advancement of human civilisation, technological advancement, AI and social innovation the accumulated experience, knowledge, information and skill increased tremendously. Therefore, the modern individual needs more preparation through education for learning an effective adult life.

Education makes individuals fit for their environments-both natural and socio-cultural through the development of their abilities and it continues throughout the life. Education is the lifelong process of acquiring and transferring knowledge, skills, values, and habits. Far beyond memorizing facts, it is a holistic tool for personal growth, societal advancement, and shaping character to help individuals navigate and positively impact the world.

II. ETYMOLOGICALLY MEANING

Etymologically, the word “Education” is derived from the three Latin words.

- 1) ‘Educare’ means ‘to bring up’, ‘to nourish’ and to ‘raise’.
- 2) ‘Educere’ implies ‘to draw out’, ‘to lead out’.
- 3) ‘Educatum’ means "the act of teaching or training”.
- 4) Education means nourish the good qualities in individual and draw out the best in every individual. Education seeks to develop the innate inner capacities of individual.

III. HISTORICALLY BACKGROUND OF EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA:

The development of India's education system has started from the ancient *Gurukul* tradition to a massive, modernized framework, heavily shaped by British colonial policies.

Vedic Education:

The Vedic Period’s educational system was oldest education system of India. Its roots were found in the Guru-Shishya tradition where Guru Ji imparted knowledge to their Shishyas in Gurukulas. The Vedic Period known from the India’s intellectual and cultural heritage, laying the foundation for its rich educational traditions. The Vedic education aimed to produce individuals with a strong sense of duty, morality and intellectual curiosity, laying the foundation for India’s rich educational heritage. This era shows the emergence of the Vedas, ancient texts that not only shaped spirituality but also influenced the development of education. Education focused on – Memorization and recitation of Vedic texts, Spiritual growth and Self-realization, Development of intellectual and moral character, Reservation of education for elite classes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras). This period's educational framework was deeply rooted in spirituality, philosophy and cultural values, aimed to produce individuals with a strong sense of duty, morality and intellectual curiosity. The Vedic Period’s legacy continues to influence Indian Education, with its emphasis on the teacher-student relationship, respect for tradition and pursuit of knowledge for self-realization.

Buddhistic Education

Buddhistic education is a holistic system developed in ancient monasteries (*Viharas*) aimed at achieving *Nirvana*. It focuses on holistic personality development, deep self-discovery, and moral discipline. Emphasizing compassion and inherent wisdom, it replaced caste-based hierarchies with democratic, mass-accessible learning. Buddhist period in Indian education roughly starts from 600B.C and last for about 1200 years till 600A.D. Buddha lived at around 400 B.C. He belongs to the royal family of Nepal, but decided to pursue further life in the search of God during his adulthood. While wandering on different places, he taught about the 4 Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

The 4 Noble Truths

1. Life is full of suffering.
2. Suffering is caused by our worldly desires.
3. Our suffering can be brought to an end.
4. Our suffering can be ended by following the Eightfold Path (Dharma).

Eight-fold path:

- Right view
- Right intention
- Right speech
- Right action
- Right livelihood
- Right mindfulness
- Right effort
- Right concentration

Muslim Education:

Islamic education integrates both spiritual and secular learning to cultivate well-rounded individuals. It was Rooted in the belief that seeking knowledge is a religious obligation, it emphasizes both the study of the Qur'an and the development of skills for practical success. The system makes holistic moral growth with professional capability.

At the start of Muslim period there was no formal or well-defined education system. There was no central curriculum. No doubt the rulers of Muslims provided a remarkable support for different Maktabas and Madrassahs. During Mughal period remarkable developments had been committed in order to promote education of revealed knowledge and curriculum development. But on the other hand, they did not establish a linked and centrally managed network of Maktabas and Madrassahs. Education was imparted to both girls and boys. No doubt, a separate department was established to manage affairs of education but instead of modernization of education system it maintained the continuity of traditional system of education. After Muslim Education British government implemented policy to promote English education.

British Education:

Different facets of life changed when British territorial rule over India was established. Before British period there were colonial rulers in India who created the educational system in a colonial part to legitimise their rule and meet their own economic needs. The British Education System in India was formally established through the Charter Acts. In 1813, when the Charter was up for renewal, the British Parliament ordered the East India Company to set aside Rs 1 lakh annually.

Charter Act of 1813:

The Act was the first step towards education being made an objective of the government. It enabled the Company to set aside one lakh rupees for the revival and improvement of literature encouragement of learned natives of India- Administrative needs of the Company required Indians well-versed in the classical and vernacular languages. Indians with Sanskrit, Arabic, or Persian skills were required to assess and explain Hindu or Muslim law in various departments of British administration.

The Macaulay Minute (1835):

It was a landmark colonial policy document. Written by British politician Thomas Babington Macaulay, it argued for the use of English as the medium of instruction and the promotion of Western sciences and literature over traditional Indian education. Lord Macaulay Minute was an important document in colonial India's educational history as it advocated the introduction and promotion of English education for Indians. British historian and politician Thomas Babington Macaulay introduced this document on 2 February 1835. Macaulay's vision was to create a class of Indians who could act as intermediaries between the British rulers and the Indian masses. He aimed to develop individuals who would be "Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, morals, and intellect."

Macaulay dismissed the worth of traditional Indian learning, claiming that European knowledge especially in science and social thought was way above.

- English education should be imparted in place of traditional Indian learning because the oriental culture was 'defective' and 'unholy'.
- He believed in education a few upper and middle-class students.
- In the course of time, education would trickle down to the masses. This was called the infiltration theory.
- He wished to create a class of Indians who were Indian in colour and appearance but English in taste and affiliation.

Woods Despatch (1854)

Sir Charles Wood was the President of the Board of Control of the company in 1854 when he sent a despatch to the then Governor-General of India, Lord Dalhousie. This is called the 'Magna Carta of English education in India'.

Sir Charles Wood gave following recommendations for the improvement in Indian Education:

- Regularise education system from the primary to the university levels.
- Indians were to be educated in English and their native language.
- The education system was to be set up in every province.
- Every district should have at least one government school.
- Affiliated private schools could be granted aids.

- Education of women should be emphasised.
- Universities of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay were set up by 1857.
- University of Punjab – 1882; University of Allahabad – 1887
- This despatch asked the government to take up the responsibility of education of the people.

IV. HUNTER EDUCATION COMMISSION (1882-83)

In 1882, Lord Ripon, recognized the need for a thorough review, responded by appointing a commission, chaired by Sir William Wilson Hunter, to evaluate the state of education since the Wood's Despatch of 1854. Sir Hunter recommended following points for improvement in Indian Education:

- **Involvement in Primary Education:**

The commission emphasized that the state should take special care in extending and improving primary education and that instruction should be provided in the vernacular languages.

- **Transfer of Control to Local Bodies:**

It recommended the transfer of control over primary education to newly established district and municipal boards, promoting decentralization in educational governance.

- **Reform in Secondary Education:** Secondary education was to be divided into two streams:

- Students should be prepared for university education.
- Vocational education should be promoted.

- **Promotion of Female Education:**

The commission drew attention to the inadequate facilities for female education, particularly outside the presidency towns, and proposed measures to expand education for women.

- **Expansion of Universities:**

The Hunter Commission's recommendations contributed to the establishment of more universities in India, such as Punjab University (1882) and Allahabad University (1887). This period also saw increased participation of Indians in secondary and higher education.

V. SADLER COMMISSION (1917):

The Saddler University Commission was known as the Calcutta University Commission appointed in 1917 under the chairmanship of Dr. Michael E. Sadler, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds.

The Saddler Commission made many recommendations that influenced the trajectory of Indian higher education:

Teaching Universities

Calcutta University should be reorganized as a full-fledged teaching and residential university, rather than functioning just as an affiliating and examining body.

Expansion of Universities

A separate teaching and residential university should be established at Dacca (now Dhaka). More universities should be opened in India, and existing ones should gradually evolve into residential and teaching universities.

Autonomy and Academic Governance

Universities should be granted freedom from excessive official control and interference by the government. New academic councils should be set up to deliberate on academic matters. The traditional governing bodies like the Senate and Syndicate were to be replaced with more effective structures such as the Court and Council.

Administrative Reforms

Focused on Appointment of a full-time salaried Vice-Chancellor as the chief executive officer of the university. Better organization of departments, faculties, boards of studies, and statutory academic bodies.

Curriculum and Courses

- Introduction of Honours courses to promote specialization.
- Incorporation of tutorial and practical work alongside lectures.

Inter-University Cooperation

Established of an Inter-University Board to coordinate activities and standardize academic practices among Indian universities.

VI. HARTOG COMMITTEE (1929):

Hartog Committee was a committee appointed by the British Indian government in 1929 to study the state of education in India and recommend reforms, with a focus on improving quality, reducing wastage, and prioritizing mass education over higher education.

He recommended on following points:

- Reducing exclusive reliance on local governments for managing primary education.
- Introducing primary education gradually rather than making it immediately compulsory for all children.
- Increasing the number of elementary school inspectors to ensure quality control.
- Closed non-functional primary schools to optimize resources.

- Ensuring a minimum four-year duration for primary schooling.
- Incorporating practical courses in the curriculum.
- Making primary schools centers for village transformation, including adult education programs, recreational activities, and community engagement.
- Employing qualified and trained teachers to ensure better learning outcomes.
- Enhancing teacher training, including specialized courses for working educators.
- Improving teachers' pay and working conditions to boost morale and effectiveness.
- Taking steps from the outset to reduce stagnation and wastage
- Revising the middle school curriculum to include utilitarian and practical subjects that would benefit students in everyday life.
- Conducting public examinations at the middle school level, with guidance for students to pursue vocational and technical training based on aptitude.
- Introducing vocational and technical subjects in the secondary school curriculum to prepare students for employment and practical professions.
- Designing alternative courses at the high school level to allow students to choose subjects aligned with their interests and abilities.
- Establishing institutions dedicated to research and teaching excellence.
- Developing libraries, laboratories, and research facilities to support higher learning.
- Offering honors programs superior in quality to general courses.
- Introducing industrial and technical education programs to enhance employability.
- Setting up employment bureaus in universities to guide students toward appropriate job opportunities.
- Regulating college and university admissions strictly, ensuring that only capable and competent students enroll.

VII. WARDHA SCHEME OF EDUCATION (1937):

It was also known as Nai Talim or Basic Education, was an educational reform proposed by Mahatma Gandhi. Designed to break free from British colonial systems, its core philosophy was to make education free, compulsory, self-supporting, and deeply rooted in practical, craft-based learning

“Nai Talim”, literally meaning “New Education”, formed the core of the Wardha Scheme. Gandhi believed education should be rooted in manual work and productive craft- not separate from life.

Key features included:

Education through Productive Craft:

Gandhi ji promoted productive work (spinning, weaving, agriculture) rather than only classroom learning.

Mother-Tongue as Medium of Instruction

He focused on the use of mother tongue in education

Free and compulsory schooling for seven years:

He stressed on free and compulsory education up to seven years of age.

Integration of Manual Work and Thinking

He Integrated manual work with thinking to build dignity of labour, self-reliance and full personality development.

VIII. SARGENT PLAN OF EDUCATION (1944)

The Sargent Report (1944) was a comprehensive plan for educational reconstruction in India. Drafted by Sir John Sargent, the Educational Advisor to the British Indian Government, it proposed establishing a national education system equal to England's standards over a 40-year timeframe. Sir John Sargent recommended following points for improving Indian Education System:

Pre-Primary Education:

There should be preprimary education for children aged 3 to 6 to build early learning habits before entering formal primary schooling.

Primary Education:

It should be proposed for free and universal education for the 6-11 age groups with compulsory attendance to sharply reduce mass illiteracy.

Secondary Education:

He suggested high school education for selected children aged 11-17, divided Secondary Education into Academic and Vocational streams.

University Education:

He recommended a three-year university degree after higher secondary education and abolition of the intermediate course for efficiency.

Vocational and Technical Education:

Emphasis should be on skill-based training aligned with agriculture, industry and services to support economic needs.

Teacher Training:

Stress should be on systematic training institutions, better salaries and improved working conditions to raise teacher quality and professional status.

Adult Education:

He aimed to liquidate adult illiteracy within 20 years through organized literacy programs and community-based learning initiatives.

Education for Differently Abled:

Included special provisions for physically and mentally handicapped learners to ensure inclusive education.

Physical Education:

Highlighted physical training as essential for healthy development alongside intellectual growth.

Independence of India:

On 15th August, 1947 India Got Freedom from Britishers. Indian Constitution framed and implemented since 26th January,1950. Different committees, commissions constituted after independence to improve the Indian Education.

IX. CONCLUSION:

The evolution of education in pre-independence India transitioned from ancient, community-driven religious and indigenous learning systems to a formalized. While the British introduced a structured curriculum and promoted higher education to fewer to serve administrative needs, it left a legacy of low mass literacy and cultural alienation.

For a layman education is benevolent and venerable. The system developed during the colonial period continued after Independence. Britishers came in India for Business Purpose but make many changes in Indian Education. There were many merits and demerits of Britishers education implemented. Slowly -slowly many reformers put their efforts to reform Indian Education.

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