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A Critical Review of Education in India: Trends, Challenges, and Prospects

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Abstract:

Education in India has deep historical roots, tracing back to ancient times when learning centered on subjects such as Indian philosophy, religion, mathematics, and logic. Knowledge was primarily imparted through prestigious institutions like Takshashila and Nalanda, which served as early hubs of higher learning. Sanskrit-based universities, including Banaras Hindu University and the historic Nalanda University, played a vital role in preserving and nurturing India's rich educational heritage. The medieval period brought significant changes with the advent of Islamic rule, introducing Islamic educational practices and fostering a blend of diverse traditions. The colonial era marked another pivotal shift, as European influence introduced Western models of education. Over time, these Western systems were integrated into the Indian educational framework, evolving alongside traditional modes of instruction to shape the foundation of modern education in the country.

Keywords: Nalanda, Establishment, Hindu, Buddhist.

Introduction:

Indian education is built on a very rich and varied past since it has seen different periods of development. Ancient India had higher education in the form of schools like Takshashila and Nalanda that provided education on different subjects including religion, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy etc. The Gurukula system prevailed and was the most common education form in which students lived with the teachers in an all-inclusive and engulfing system. Stuningly, this period also acknowledged the works of female scholars like Gargi and Maitreyi who loved philosophizing. The education system in India has seen a tremendous growth ever since independence and today the system stands on the number-grand volumes with its millions of schools, colleges, universities and institutions catering to the needs of its huge and diverse people. The recent decades have also seen great tendencies such as greater enrollment at all levels in particular the perception of schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education Act- a legislative enactment that required free and proportionate schooling. The use of technology, which has increased through the COVID-19 pandemic, has placed platforms that offer online learning, such as SWAYAM or DIKSHA at the forefront of changed modes of learning. In addition, the NEP 2020 has created a much larger change as it advocated flexible, holistic curriculum, multilingual education, early childhood care and vocational training. In spite of all these developments, India is struggling



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with some very severe problems. An extensive urban-rural and wealth-poverty gap further has a possible impact on educational access and results. Poor learning performances particularly in the government schools are attributed to the inadequacies of infrastructures, non-appearing teachers and the use of ancient pedagogies. In addition, there is lack of quality higher education whose problems include unemployability, the absence of research work and not being recognized worldwide. Systematic issues are further imposed by gender differences, caste-based exclusions, and digital inequality. Moving forward, the future of education in India depends on successful maintenance of NEP 2020, financing by the citizens, capacity building of teachers, and inclusion by using technology. The future of education in India lies not only in increasing access levels, but in having quality, equity and relevance to produce a skilled lot; one that is able to think critically and socially responsible lot.

In the era of the medievals the coming of the Islamic ruling brought about Madrasas that were concerned with Islamic theology, jurisprudence and literature. These schools were in conjunction with the orthodox Indian systems and thus left a cultural and educational fusion. The colonial period especially during the British rule was a definite change. The British introduced western pattern of university such as University of Calcutta and laid emphasis on teaching through the medium of English. The Minute of Macaulay of 1835 promoted the use of English rather than the use of the indigenous languages bringing about the abandonment of traditional in the mode of education and development of a split in the model of the approach to teaching. The introduction of the Islamic regime during the medieval era came in India with a new shift in educational scenario by introduction of madrasas and makhtabs. Such institutions mainly concentrated on Islamic theology (Ilm-e-Kalam), jurisprudence (Fiqh), Arabic grammar, Persian literature and logic and served the Muslim population alongside the interest of other scholars. Having been patronized by leaders such as the Delhi Sultans and the Mughals, madrasas became institutions of advanced learning, which were usually placed alongside mosques or in royal courts, and also played a vital role in bringing intellectual and cultural developments of the region together. These Islamic institutions did not displace the existing systems such as the gurukuls and pathshalas but rather most of the time co-existed with them hence a synthesis of culture and education was attained. Islamic education coexisted with the Sanskrit and vernacular education, but in the politically marginal areas its patron was weakened.

Colonialism, especially in relationship to British rule was a critical break in this syncretic progression. The British also brought Western version of education that focused on rationalistic knowledge and liberal arts and secular knowledge system that was not part of the traditional Indian systems. Institutions such as the Hindu College (1817), the University of Calcutta (1857) and others were set up in an attempt to produce the English-educated elite portion of Indians who would join the colonial administration. The clearest articulation was during the Minute on Indian Education written by Lord Macaulay in 1835 that had encouraged English as a primary



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language and considered the indigenous systems of knowledge outmoded and as second-rate. The policy transformation did not only contribute to the Sanskrit and Persian education decay but established a dramatic contrast between the traditional and western pedagogics. This gave rise to a generation of Indians who were highly educated in the English language yet strangely detached to the Indian culture, a fact that is commonly referred to as the birth of the brown sahib. Though the British education systems brought in new sciences, liberal thoughts in politics and the study of law, they also depreciated the existing knowledge system of India which had its own indigenous educational system, and left an epistemic break which still forms an issue in the educational discourse of India and its culture.

After its independence, India set off a way to democratise education. Jawaharlal Nehru, more so, visionaries ensured creation of education infrastructure to ensure literacy and fair access. One of the most significant processes was the establishment of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1953 whose role was to manage higher education. This further strengthened the commitment of the state to inclusive education with the passing of the Right to Education Act in 2009 that compulsorily made schooling free and compulsory to children between the ages of 6 to 14, where the quality and equity norms were the driving force. Education became an instrument of nation building and also a source of social justice and economic growth to be enjoyed as a fundamental right even after India obtained its independence. Under the guidance of such visionaries as Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the new sovereign state accorded education pride of place in its developmental strategy. According to Nehru, scientific temper, rational thinking, and some highly skilled human resources were essential conditions towards the modern democratic nation. As a direct result of this, massive movements that tried to bring democracy to learning and teaching emerged in the creation of a strong network of schools, colleges, universities and technical institutions both in the cities as well as the villages. The establishment of University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1953, which has functioned since as the pinnacle regulation organ in the coordination, determination and sustenance of the standards of higher education in India, was one of the most radical steps along this path. It is the UGC which was instrumental in financing universities, creating curricula, and advancing research endeavors thereby establishing the basis of making this the foundation of a vast university system.

Simultaneously, there were introduced by the government a series of national policies and schemes including the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1968 and once more in 1986 (updated in 1992) which focused on universal access, retention, adult literacy and vocationalization. These however did not quite close gaps in access and quality, particularly among the marginalized groups including those belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and girls in rural areas. In its efforts to curb this systematic imbalance, the government came up with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) in 2009, which can be described as a game changer in Indian education. The state was also made legally



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bound by this Act who was required to provide free and mandatory elementary education to every child of 6 to 14 years and norms were also set in the form of infrastructure specifications, ratio of students and teachers, qualification of teachers and inclusive practices under provisions like 25 % reservation of poor children to be given admissions in the private schools. RTE was not just all about access-it marked a paradigm change towards providing quality education as a right. Such dilemmas as bureaucracy inertia, poor teacher preparation, and monitoring lapses have usually hampered the full achievability of the objectives of the Act. That said, the history of post-independence India shows a consistent, albeit inconsistent, commitment toward the transformation of education to a universal, as well as equitable tool of empowerment and national development.

The educational scenario in India has been subjected to a fast modernization process in the last few years. The increased digitalization of educational establishments has become an indication of a significant change in the direction of digital education. The programs of vocational training and developing of skills have become also important, as they respond to the demands of a flexible and competitive labor market. The education system in India today has attempted to reconcile age-old knowledge system and system of pedagogy, making it global in its effort, and responsive to its huge and extremely heterogeneous population.

In parangle with this education revolution, there has been an emergence of the importance of knowledge as a key driver of contemporary economies. Clarke (2001) points out that knowledge management is one of the most crucial issues that will determine the success of an organization in the 21 st century economy. He compares its possible impact to a revolutionary effect of quality management in the past decades. In order to succeed in the age of knowledge, companies cannot just embrace new technologies. According to Clarke, technology is not enough to generate information flow without establishing the culture of sharing knowledge and dealing with the effect of organizational dynamics. He also laments the popular conception of a post-industrial or service world to put in place the old forms of production. Although admitting the increasing relevance of service and knowledge industries, especially concerning managerial efficiency, innovative value structures, and the changing service departments, Clarke draws attention to the danger of claiming the economic blessedness of services as mere myth. Rather, he demands a balanced view of how both industrial and knowledge based elements can work in synergy and be merged in order to shape the future economies.

The notion that there is a shift towards a service-based economy is one of the most widespread ones nowadays but it is also a common myth. Statistical "service economy" The so-called service economy has often been viewed as a statistical artifact a statistical makeup or illusion that has more to do with its statistical coding than with structural change in the economic regime.

Shifting to the area of educational governance, researchers including Mok (2003) have paid attention to the effects of decentralization and marketization of education especially with regard



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to the Singaporean education system. Mok underlines the increasing impact of corporate management ideology and organizational culture into the educational institutions. Due to the growing social and economic pressures as well as the resource limitations confronting countries, there has been an increased need of improving national competitiveness prompting the implementation of the governance models which consider decentralization, privatization and marketization principles.

Within this transforming context, universities and colleges have been more actively undergoing a corporate-like culture of decision-making, in which business performance measurements and productivities are employed. The change is part and parcel of the general move towards a more corporate governance-like educational administration. Institutional planning and policy-making is subject to such integration; moreover, such integration transforms the internal organizational culture of higher education. Business-related insertions into the university government have been very influential as it changed the way universities are to be run, what is to be considered most important, and what it is to be measured against in this world of globalization and competition. The case with corporate sponsored and influenced boards increasing pressure on the institutions in the higher education sector in India and globally is that the various institutions have naturally drifted to a corporate fashioned governance structure which leans more on efficiency, responsibility and strategic performance. This change indicates a larger neoliberal impact on educational sector wherein the academic institutions are being advised to operate less as a public service but more as a business enterprise. Business performance measures are now commonly used methods to access performance in universities; examples include business performance indicators (BPIs), Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), benchmarking, cost-benefit analysis, student satisfaction surveys and placement statistics. It is the norm of strategic planning, performance-based funding and an outcomes based accreditation systems. Such infiltration of corporate thinking into the academy has caused a dramatic shift in the culture of an institution whereby measures commonly become the determinant in the appointment of faculty, granting research dollars, curriculum deising and even the admissions of students. Departments are also being judged an increasing number of times not purely on academic footing but also their money-making potential, employability, graduates abilities to work in the market and so on.

All these transformations have altered the conventional concept of academic freedom, collegial governance and the merit of education per se. On one hand, proponents feel that corporate decision-making approach brings in transparency, promotes greater efficiency in resource allocation as well as global competitiveness; whereas the critics claim that it threatens to commodify education, diminish critical thinking and consign disciplines that are not profit oriented to the periphery like humanities and social sciences. Besides, the faculty are routinely coerced into doing management jobs, being subordinate to job performance evaluations, and competing over fewer grants, which may destroy scholarly independence, as well as cause



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stress and employment insecurity. Nevertheless, the trend towards this governance change is robust that is driven by the international rankings, the international cooperation and the further privatization of education industry. To conclude, it can be stated that the corporate turn in the governance of higher education is not only an administrative shift but a paradigmatic redefinition of the major intention of universities as well as what they are.

Conclusion:

A number of universities were built in India during the nineteenth century under great British colonial rule influenced in the way of the western styles of education. These establishments were fundamental in setting a template on how to develop organized education systems within the Indian sub-continent, such as what is today known as Republic of India, Pakistan and other major parts within the earlier part of the twentieth century. In the past, Indian women too had an impressive intellectual contribution to make, such as Maya who happens to be the mother of the Buddha being well learned and recorded to be one among the women who contributed in the shaping of the Pali canon. In the same vein, the Sangam literature tradition contains the representations of 154 female writers indicating a deep history of female intellectual tradition. However, even all these did not prevent educational establishments and think-tanks of the era being too dominant in male involvement, as men still controlled and influenced disproportionately.

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