



## AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

A. Jyothi

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati – 517 502, Andhra Pradesh

**ABSTRACT**

Education is the passport to the future and tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today. Primary education, also called an elementary education, is the first stage traditionally found in formal education, beginning at about age 5 to 7 and ending at about age 11 to 13. The primary stage is very crucial stage in the life of the child. The primary school lays the foundation for children to learn moral values. India has achieved significant progress in recent decades regarding access to schooling and enrolment rates in primary education. The paper makes an attempt on the history of the primary education in India.

**KEYWORDS** : History, Primary Education, Objectives, Problems**INTRODUCTION**

The modern school system was brought by Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay in the 1830s to India, including the English language. Primary education or elementary education lasts 8 years in India. Samuel Wilderspin is one of the founders of preschool education. Pupils aged 6 to 14 complete the following 2 stages: primary stage, grade I-V; upper primary stage, grade VI-VIII. History in the National Curriculum can be summed up in just a few statements: ordering events in time; finding differences and similarities; writing and talking about the past; using different sources for information; asking and answering questions. The school system was changed with the Education Act 1944. Education was restructured into three progressive stages, which were known as primary education, secondary education and higher education. Horace Mann is copiously considered as the inventor of the concept of school. He was born in 1796 and later became Secretary of Education in Massachusetts. He was a pioneer in bringing educational reforms into society.

**History of primary education in India**

Primary Education in India has not received adequate attention and there are many issues confronting education, especially primary education. In India, education has a rich and an exciting history<sup>1</sup>. It is strongly believed that in the ancient days, the sages and scholars imparted the education orally, and the information was imparted on from one generation to the other. The temples and community centers formed and played a pivotal role of schools. Later, the Gurukul system of education came into existence. The Gurukuls were the traditional Hindu residential schools of learning which were typically in the teacher's house or a monastery. Even though the education was free, the students from well-to-do families paid the Guru Dakshina, a voluntary contribution after the completion of their studies. 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. This system is referred to as the oldest and the most effective system of imparting education. However, education "was primarily the privilege of the upper castes. Learning was an intimate relationship between the teacher and the pupil called the Guru- Shishya Parampara. The process of learning began with a religious ceremony, 'Upanayana' (sacred thread ceremony)". The centre of learning was called 'Gurukul,' which was considered the second womb for the child. The home of the teacher (Acharya) was the centre of learning in the Vedic period. The Guru acted as the super-ego or conscience and inculcated in the minds of the students the high ideas of morality and spirituality.

**Main Features of the Vedic Education**

The main features of Vedic Education were the high status of

teachers, residential schools, no state control on education, free education, widespread education of women, individual teaching and forests as centers of education. Sanskrit, as the medium of instruction, self-control and self-discipline, the teacher acted, as parents were core features of the Vedic Education.

**Educational Institutions in Vedic Era**

"The Gurukul was the house of the teacher who was a settled house-holder. After the initiation ceremony, a child would leave his natural parents and reside in his preceptor or Guru's house until the end of his studies. Parishads where the students gathered for advanced learning and enriched themselves through discussions and discourses. Being the seat of learning, they were originally conducted by three Brahmins. Sangam was gathering of scholars to adjudge the literary excellence of works submitted for criticism and to set the standard style. Kings patronized these gatherings. Goshtis or Conference was a national gathering or Congress summoned by a great king in whom representatives of various schools were invited for meeting as well as exchanging their views. Ashramas or hermitages were another Centres where students from distant and different parts of the country flocked together for learning around famous sages and saints. Vidyapeetha was an institution for spiritual learning founded by the great Acharya, Sri Shankara, in places like Sringeri, Kanchi, Dwarka, Puri and Badri. The Vidyapeeth had a teacher whose influence extended to a thousand villages roundabout and was presided by a Jagadguru.

Ghathikas was an institution of the highest learning where both the teachers and the taught met and discussed and whereby the clash and contact of cultured scholars, the highest knowledge could be obtained in religious literature. Agraharas were settlements of Brahmins in villages where they used to teach. Mathas was a place where pupils used to reside and receive instructions, both religious and secular. These mathas belonged to both Shaiva and Vaishnava sects and were normally attached to some temples or had some temples attached to them. Brahmapuri was a settlement of learned Brahmins in parts of towns and cities or in any selected area where education was imparted. Vihara was a Buddhist monastery where all subjects concerned with Buddhism and its philosophy were taught" (Jayapalan, 2013)<sup>1</sup>. In Medieval India, imparting education was the most significant duty. During that period, the aim of education was the extension of knowledge and the propagation of Islamic principles, laws, and social conventions. Education was based on religion, and the main aim was to make persons religious-minded. The Muslim students were required to memorize certain portions of Holy Koran. There was no scientific method of teaching in the Maktabs. Akbar tried to give a scientific basis to education so that the students might

be trained in life's practical affairs. To make educational procedure systematic, Akbar urged that the student be first given the knowledge of alphabets, then word-knowledge, and afterward sentence-knowledge (Sharma and Sharma, 2004)<sup>2</sup>. The Zamindar or landlord got their children, particularly daughters, educated at home.

A few missionary schools came up for conversion, with English as the medium. Education was still mostly oral, and so everything had to be learned by rote, remembered and understood. There were no printed books (these came much later with the missionaries)-only slate and chalk, if at all. By the late 18th century, "schools languished because there were no big donors among the zamindars or the Peshwas (who used to give Dakshina (funds) to Brahmins for running schools), as Peshwa rule came to an end in 1818. Vernacular education suffered as English was the language of the new rulers and traders. English schools became very popular from 1817 onwards in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Madras (now Chennai) and Bombay (now Mumbai)".

### Primary education In British India

The present system of education was introduced and founded by the East India Company and later, British India. "Beginning in 1858 the Crown via British administrators controlled education policy until 1919, when education was transferred to the control of Indian ministers at the province level". Under the indigenous system, schools were of two types – "elite religious schools geared toward students interested in a lifetime of higher learning and local elementary schools where village boys were introduced to the three Rs in the vernacular medium" (Chaudhary, 2009)<sup>3</sup>. Wood's Education Despatch of 1854, "the first official document to present a National Education Policy, outlined the Company's role in providing schooling in British India. At the time of Wood's Despatch, primary education in the country was in terrible shape due to the reason that the Company's attention was primarily diverted towards university education.

Thus, the primary education remained neglected, Wood's Despatch "made the Company responsible for primary education and suggested certain reforms. It made the Company responsible for primary education. Even then, the situation could not improve because the rules of the grant-in-aid system were impracticable" (Sharma Shilendra, 2016)<sup>4</sup>. During the 1860s, a new schooling system emerged, which incorporated public schools managed by provincial governments and local boards (rural and urban) in addition to the privately managed schools, which could be aided or unaided.

### Indian Education Commission, 1882

Lord Ripon appointed the Indian Education Commission on February 3, 1882, under the chairmanship of William Hunter, a member of the Executive Council of the Viceroy. The Commission is popularly known as Hunter Commission, after studying primary education problems from every angle, it made the following recommendations: The policy should be encouraged to make students self-dependent; Students should be given primary education through the medium of their mother tongue. District Boards, Municipal Boards, and Town Areas are responsible for primary schools. Open schools for the training of primary school teachers (Jayapalan 2013)<sup>5</sup>.

Hartog Committee on Education (1929)<sup>6</sup> was appointed for reviewing the overall position of education in the country. The Committee felt that primary education was ineffectual because there was a good deal of wastage and stagnation. Hence, there was a dire need for strengthening the institutional structure rather than an expansion. The Zakir Hussain Committee (1937) and the Central Advisory Board of

Education(1938) emphasized the medium of instruction in primary schools. According to both committees, the medium of instruction should be vernacular or Indian languages. The Second Committee of Central Advisory Board of Education (1939) and Sargeant Commission (1944) mentioned that primary education should comprise eight years from the age of 6 to 14 and be divided into two stages (junior basic and senior basic).

### Primary Education In Post-independent India

Education became the States' responsibility, and the Central Government coordinated technical and higher education by specifying the standards. Indian Constitution recognized the importance of education for "free and compulsory education for all the children until they complete the age of fourteen years, in Article 45 of the Directive Principle of State Policy". Before 1976, education was the exclusive responsibility of the states. With 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976), education change from being a State subject to a Concurrent list subject. The Education Commission (1964-66) under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S.Kothari, Chairman in particular was to advise the Government on the national pattern of education and on the general policies for the development of education at all stages ranging from the primary to post-graduate stage and in all its aspects besides examining a host of educational problems in their social and economic context.<sup>7</sup>

### National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986

According to NPE, Education is a unique investment in the present and the future. Since the adoption of the Policy on Education in 1968, "there had been a considerable expansion in educational facilities all over India. However, the general formulations incorporated in the 1968 Policy were not translated into a detailed study of implementation. Problems of access, quality, quantity, unity and financial outlay, accumulated over the years, assumed such massive proportions that they needed to be talked with the utmost urgency. Therefore, in January 1985, the Government of India announced that a New Education Policy would be formulated. A review of the NPE 1986 was conducted during 1990-92. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) recommended the following modifications: a) Universalisation of Elementary Education, b) equalization of educational opportunities, c) women's education and development, d) vocational education in schools, e) consolidation of higher education, f) modernization of technical education, g) improvement of quality content and h) The process of education at all the levels continues to be the themes of national endeavour in the field of education."<sup>8</sup>

### Eighty-Sixth Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002

The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 inserted Article 21-A in the Constitution of India made elementary education a fundamental right, i.e. the State shall provide free and compulsory education of all the children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. This changed the subject matter of Article 45 in Directive Principles that now reads, "The State shall endeavour for providing early childhood care and education for all the children until they complete the age of six." Hence, it added a new fundamental duty under Article 51-A, that reads, It shall be the duty of every citizen of India who is the parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or ward between the age of six and fourteen years."<sup>9</sup>

### Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was started in 2001 is a Government of India's flagship programme for "the achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time-bound manner, as mandated by 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory education

to the Children of 6-14 years age group, a Fundamental Right. This Programme seeks to open new schools in those habitations which do not have schooling facilities and strengthen existing school infrastructure by providing additional classrooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grants, and school improvement grants." (<http://ssa.nic.in/>)<sup>10</sup>. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2012 "Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2012, what represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full-time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards. Article 21-A and the RTE Act came into effect on April 1, 2010 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/rte>)."<sup>11</sup>

### **National Policy on Education (NPE), 2016**

New Education Policy 2016 endorsed the revision of No-Detention policy, promotion of Sanskrit, inculcation of values through education, regularity and punctuality in school, cleanliness, self-control, industriousness, and a spirit of entrepreneurship. Also, focus on the sense of duty; desire to serve with responsibility, creativity, and sensitivity to greater equality, respect towards women, and care for the elderly. (<http://www.nuepa.org/new/download/NEP2016/ReportNEP.pdf>). The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Scheme, along with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2012 and Mid-Day Meal Scheme are in force for primary school education. SSA covers all the minor programs/projects/Schemes of Centre and State governments like Operation Blackboard, DPEP, EGS and AIE, KGBV, Mahila Samakhya, Lok Jumbish, Janshala, and others. However, the following provisions are now covered and implemented for primary schools by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2012 and SSA.<sup>12</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

Primary Education in India changed from time to time. A journey of imparting primary education from the Vedic period to present India had many versions to see. Like, right to access a school, discrimination based on caste, class, religion, creed and many. Moreover, the framework of National Education Policies also senses these issues, but many programmes failed to deliver solutions to these exigent issues. Therefore, an in-depth analytical study is required to understand the National Education Policy 2020, India, with recalling history of the primary education in India.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Jayapalan, N. 2013. History of Education in India. New Delhi: Atlantic Publication.
2. Sharma, R.N. and R.K. Sharma. 2004. History of Education in India. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors.
3. Chaudhary, Latika. 2009. Determinants of Primary Schooling in British India, *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 69, no.1, p. 271.
4. Sharma, Shailendra. 2016. Access to Education. *Yojana*, vol. 60, January, pp. 49-53.
5. Jayapalan, N. 2013. History of Education in India. New Delhi: Atlantic Publication
6. Hartog Committee-1929, quoted in J.C. Aggarwal. 1939. Landmarks in the History of Modern Indian Education. London: Oxford, 45-48.
7. Kothari Commission (1964) Report
8. National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986
9. Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002
10. <http://ssa.nic.in/>
11. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/rte>
12. <http://www.nuepa.org/new/download/NEP2016/ReportNEP.pdf>