



## EDUCATION SYSTEM IN COLONIAL INDIA A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

### History

**S.K.Habib Jani** Dept of History,OU

### KEYWORDS

#### INTRODUCTION.

The focus is on the emergence of quality in the educational discourse, in India, identified by some eminent scholars in their work, especially pertaining to the elementary education. The pre-colonial and colonial educational history of India and thereafter the post independence changes trace the evolution of the processes in education, teacher quality, the teacher student relation, the student environment, the shift from serving the social good to individual good, and developing a critical awareness in the child and the parent about what the child is learning should be relevant to his life situation.

#### Primary education:

Education is one of the main contributors of social and economic development; primary education is the foundation of it. Primary education has two main purposes: to produce a population that is literate and numerate so that they can be educated enough to deal with the problems encountered at home and to form it as a foundation for further education.

In many developing countries, either the basic aims are not well established or they are unable to meet the following objectives. First, they do not teach children in school the core skills contained in the national curriculum. Secondly they do not provide all school children equally particularly the girls. The first priority of primary schooling should be to increase students' learning in school so that students can utilize the curriculum to the fullest extent and complete the primary cycle. Secondly access should be provided to all school children. Countries like India can progress towards such goals only when available resources are allocated to the most cost effective inputs.

Improving educational effectiveness means increasing the number of primary schools whose students master the core knowledge and skills of the curriculum. Emphasis should be placed on the level of learning and on the basis of that all students get promoted rather than failing. Although poor quality of education exists at all levels, improvements must begin at the primary level, where children develop their basic learning capabilities and attitudes. Improving quality of education at the primary level is important for developing the human resources base required to meet the changing technological demands of the twenty first century (Lockheed and Verspoor 1991)<sup>1</sup>.

#### India: Pre-colonial Period:

The concept of education in India today needs to be understood in the light of the country's history. India came under a series of foreign invasions, the Islamic invasions, and the Christian colonizers from Europe, so under such variety of cultural and religious influences multifaceted system of education was implemented. At the end of the 18th century, the Indian society was stratified, hierarchical, small group of well to do persons consisting of feudal overlords, upper caste people, the bulk of people being poor. This was the socioeconomic background of inequality of the society. India has a long history of formal educational institutions in the pre and early colonial period mostly established under the aegis of religious institutions, or caste and traders associations such as the *madrashah*, *gurukul*, or *pathshala*.

But the formal system of education was limited to privileged few according to Naik (1975)<sup>2</sup>, not organised by the state but by some associations which used to meet to satisfy the needs of a small community and a large system of non-formal education sector. It is a historical fact that in the early times in India quite unlike the West where formal educational institutions were already in place; early learning for children took place at home, not really receiving the formal intellectual inputs from the teachers. This was because some

arenas of education system were closed to the others. The females, untouchables and other lower castes, religious minorities were not allowed to have access to education and the children's early learning experiences were limited to learning only some caste based learning experiences.

Education in Ancient India was based on Vedic philosophical verses. So education in the early times in India was influenced by religious verses like in West where Churches controlled education in schools. During the early Vedic period education was available to most but started becoming discriminatory as the caste system started evolving.

The famous Indian scholar Panini wrote the Sanskrit grammar in the 4th century B.C and it is considered the earliest form of organized grammar. Besides the study of the Veda, several other subjects were included in a typical curriculum in Ancient India. Vyas R.N (1981)<sup>3</sup> has given a list of content areas in a typical Vedic curriculum in 1500 B.C. Some of the subjects included: Shiksha: proper pronunciation, Kalpa: the rule of sacrifice, Vyakarana: the study of grammar and derivation, Chandas: knowledge of composition, versification etc, Jyotisha: the understanding of the secrets of nature in a scientific manner etc.

Under the influence of Buddhism a uniform system of equal provision to all was introduced. The major change introduced under Buddhism was the rejection of rituals, ceremonies, caste discrimination and education was made available to all including women, who desired to learn. Learning continued to be based on the Veda, Upanishad, as well as Buddhist scriptures such as the Dharmapada. So this is evidence of the fact that there was the concept of equal access and relevant meaningful education devoid of unnecessary details was possible and practiced.

Islamic influences on the Indian educational system prevailed in the years between A.D 1000 and the 1700s. Education in these schools was intimately informed by the Islamic religion. Gender segregation occurred in education under their influence. Women would not be heard in public, and with the implementation of the Purdah system, women's lives in Muslim dominated regions of India became even more sheltered and homebound with decreasing rights to education in general, as was the case with members of certain social castes. High standards of education under the rules of other Muslim rulers also lead to the establishment of many village schools and colleges. Islamic education in India is imparted, but restricted to, within makhtabs i.e. elementary schools where reading, learning of grammar and Islamic subjects take place and madrashas, which are religious schools run by mosques and in centres of Islamic studies. Therefore it is clear how the system of education under Islamic rule became restricted in nature and is still considered to be of not quite a high quality (Gupta 2006)<sup>4</sup>.

The traditional society was elitist and hierarchical and since then changed very little. In traditional society education was centred on religion. The three upper or twice born castes, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya held the political and economic power, so also had easy access to education. The rest i.e. the Shudras and the untouchables remained far ways from the access to education. This also did not improve during the Muslim rule, because the society got divided into similar social classes. The aim of transforming the society into an egalitarian one became even more difficult, because and complex as the society was very poor and every one could not afford education.

#### British India: Issues of Elitism and Language of instruction:

The 1600, A.D, the French, Portuguese, Dutch, and British traders and other trading companies in India led to the start of European influences

on the Indian education system. Later on Protestant forms of Christianity based on scientific methods of modern Europe were implemented. This period was marked by the emergence of Christian missionary schools in India with Roman Catholic beliefs and focus on individual's salvation. The modern western values started colouring the educational issues and gradually new forms of educational inequalities started reappearing. (Gupta, 2006)<sup>5</sup>

The education system introduced by the British in India in the early years of 19th century, was quite distinct from the indigenous systems consisting of both higher and elementary institutions between 1813 and 1921. The aim of the British administrators was mainly imperialistic and tried to create a system of education for the upper classes although they eliminated some of the in-egalitarian aspects of the traditional educational system. The British never developed the programme for universalization of education. All that they did was they tried to spread it as much possible on a voluntary basis. But this effort did not have much effect on the problem. The Indian leaders assumed control of education since 1921, made a committed approach to the problem of inequality. Indians made more liberal provision for student support such as free clothing, free school meals, health services, hostels and scholarships. This provision was made on a limited scale. Considerable progress has been made in the expansion of facilities at the elementary stage of education between 1950 and 1975.

The new education was to be confined to the upper classes and was to filter down in time to the masses. This was the famous "filtration theory" on the basis of which the present system stands. Thus it came about that the education of the masses was left un-heeded, the attention of the Government being riveted on the education of the handful of men belonging to the upper classes of Indian society. The main thing was how to pass an examination and to obtain a certificate showing the extent of mastery of English, a passport to service. Criticizing the system, Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India (1895-1905)<sup>6</sup>, said:

"Four villages out of five are without a school; three boys out of four grow up without education and only one girl in forty attends any kind of school."

In 1937, Mahatma Gandhi introduced The Wardha Scheme of Basic education which proposed a 7 years course of basic education starting at the age of 7 imparted through mother tongue. Together with that English would not have any place in the curriculum. This scheme seems to be quite an improvement on the existing system of education but as primary education was neither compulsory nor free there was no rigidity about the age when a child entered a primary school. It depended upon the pleasure and economic condition of the parents and the facilities available.

In addition, textbook centred pedagogy that began under British rule still continues to shape education in schools even today. Criticising the condition of primary education, Syama Prasad Mukherjee<sup>7</sup> has said,

*'The edifice of Indian education resembles a pyramid standing upon its apex'.*

The British realised this and wanted to improve the standards particularly the children's command over English language, rather than just expanding the system. On the other hand, the Indians were not really unhappy in the initial stages probably due to the newness of the system. But gradually they wanted it to be under their control and develop nationalistic sentiments. For demands for universalization of elementary education, the medium of instruction being English were points of dissatisfaction.

#### **Post Independence to the present day:**

The next stage of change in the sector of education took place after the end of British rule when India gained independence in 1947. The essence of modern education introduced by the British was the attainment of knowledge for the improvement of life which was carried forward during the freedom struggle and the consequent movement that took place for the establishment of a national system of education (1906-1947). One movement that occurred just before and after the attainment of independence was the India launched the non-discrimination policy to achieve greater economic development and equality and quality of education. Philosophers and educationists like Raja Rammohan Roy, Vinobha Bhave, Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, JawaharLal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sri Aurobindo

and in the latter half of the 20th century people like Jiddu Krishnamurti among others. They even came up with model education institution like the Shantiniketan (Rabindranath Tagore), an educational ashram at Pondicherry (Sri Aurobindo), Rishi Valley Education Centre (Jiddu Krishnamurti). All these reform measures were taken up by these people to ensure better quality education may not all the time accessible to all (Gupta 2006)<sup>8</sup>.

The modernization of the upper classes did not mean the modernization of the whole society. The gap between the elites and the masses continue to get widened. The benefits of education remain inequitably distributed, the upper and the middle classes get most of the rewards while the masses have continued to remain illiterate. So in the beginning the aspect of access itself was a difficult thing to get hold of and the upper castes that held control of educational resources, considered the mastery of religious literature as the highest form of learning, their idea of quality education. In the beginning of 19th century formal education was restricted to boys. Most of their learning process took place at home. Then it slowly started growing, but mostly the expansion of their education took place after independence. So there is still a long way to go in women's education and provide them with equality of status. This was the idea of quality learning in traditional India, with socioeconomic context as a strong determinant of access and quality learning. (Naik, 1975)<sup>9</sup>

#### **Policies emphasizing quality in education:**

The fundamental rights which are a part of the Constitution include some provisions which safeguard the interests of the children. For instance the Article 15, there should not be discrimination against children on the grounds of gender, class, caste. Article 15 (3) states that under certain conditions special provisions could be made in favour of women and children. Again another, article which makes it mandatory for the children to attend school is the article 24 which prohibits children to work in factory or in any other hazardous conditions. Part of article 39 e) and 1) that is with respect to the interests of the children, is that the state shall secure and develop its policy to ensure that the children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner devoid of any abuse, and they are not subjected to any form of any exploitation. So the importance of education for all children is important and is institutionalised through the constitutional provisions. Moreover, the Convention of the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1989, and ratified by India in 1992, recommended all the states to understand the importance of child rights and make primary education compulsory and available to all and should encourage regular attendance at schools and reduction of dropout rates.

Under the 1990, Jomtien World Declaration on Education for all, greater importance was attached to the universalization of primary education because it benefits the nation. And secondly what seems to be more important is to concentrate on the aspect of outcomes of learning, and the quality of it, i.e. how they learn and what they learn rather than just focusing on access, retention and dropouts.

The current system of education is marked by the failure to enroll, and also ensure basic learning of vast masses of children belonging to different subordinate groups, linguistic and cultural minorities thus linking social and educational underprivileged. The violence that pervades the society seeps into schools and affect children's lives. With increasing competition, school managements have become more authoritarian and teachers often inflict and suffer abuse as a result children are driven to suicide, or commit violent acts., girls traumatized by sexual harassment, dalit children by caste atrocities. Thus schools instead of being safe havens have become compounded with serious problems. Policy the fact that the state is the main provider and financier of national education system, policy analysis has hardly been engaged with theory and debates on the Indian state or has been brought to bear upon policy formation in India, the issues of access has remained intrinsically involved with the issue of quality and has occupied dominant position in educational discourse. Therefore, declining levels of quality has generated much debate, and poor quality is often considered as the main obstacle to achieving universalisation of education (Velaskar 2010).

The post-independence agenda of education whether envisaged by Nehru, (designed on a developmental model of capital accumulation, liberal philosophy of equality, neglected elementary education as a programme of planned development), the Radhakrishnan Commission

(1949), the Kothari Commission (1966) or the National Policy on Education (NPE) (1986), had an emphasis on science and technology. Elementary education received the much needed comprehensive attention with the constitution of an Education Commission in the mid 60s aimed at fostering a 'just meritocracy' and 'mass primary schooling' was essential for the democratic access to education (Velaskar 2010)<sup>10</sup>. The post Nehruvian period witnessed a setback to egalitarian ideology as capitalist state and upper caste-class intellectual elites emerged.

The Kothari Commission emphasised on the Common School system and its emphasis in the NPE in 1986 and its review in 1992 was the expression of the fact that the state had equality of primary education in its agenda. It was reflected through this that it was the responsibility of the educational system to bring different social classes and groups together and thereby promote the emergence of an egalitarian and integrated society and for the fact that British educational system had continued even after independence and it widened the gulf between the classes. The goal of the common school system and thereafter the neighbourhood school were all aimed at having schools which would be open to all children, irrespective of caste, community, religion, economic conditions or social status, where access to good education will depend on talent, and no tuition fee will, be charged. But obviously objection to such an option came from the well to do, who complained about the substandard quality of such schools and that since parents should have the freedom to choose schools for their children, so they should not be forced in anyway. One of the very first attempts to look at the content of education at elementary level was Mahatma Gandhi, and wanted his scheme of Basic education to be built around socially productive work, and constant proposals for non-formal education. Suggestions such as these for the transformation of the elementary education came from late Shri Rajagopalachari and Acharya VinobhaBhave. Through such efforts a large number of children from deprived backgrounds get absorbed into the system but Naik points out that in the long run it legitimises an unequalitarian model of education. (Naik 1975)<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion:

Through these ideas, the theoretical debates in quality have emerged like that of Rousseau, Dewey, Piaget as interpreted by Padma Sarangapani and Krishna Kumar. India has a long history of formal educational institutions in pre-colonial, colonial period established under the guidance of religious or caste associations like madrasah, gurukul, pathshala, has remained one of the most important influences that go onto shape a person's character and intellect. But the formal system of education which still reproduces inequality and hierarchy has accommodated those children who were earlier not a part of the formal system. So the English medium exclusive schools which are private today provide an advantage to the upper caste and class while formal education provided by the government in the vernacular languages cater to those sections of the population which were not a part of formal education. In the present context of neo-liberalism equity and quality are considered to be the important determinants of social justice. Quality is an essential aspect of whatever we do in life need to be defined in a way that is relevant to the subject context.

### REFERENCES

1. Lockheed and Verspoor. 1991. "Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries", Oxford University Press, New York
2. Naik, J.P. 1979. 'Equality, Quality and Quantity: The Elusive Triangle in Indian Education' International Review of Education, 25(2/3) Jubilee Number: 167-185
3. Vyas, R. N. 1981, "Indian and Western Educational Psychologies and their Synthesis". Ambal Cant, India: Associated Publishers.
4. Gupta, Amitava. 2006. "Early Childhood Education, Post Colonial Theory and Teaching Practices in India", Palgrave: p.37-54
5. Ibid.p.55
6. Easterly, William. 2006. "Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much ill and So Little Good". New York, Penguin Press.
7. Mukherjee, Syama Prasad. 1944. "Education in British India, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science", Vol. 233, India Speaking: 30-38, Sage Publications, Inc. In association with the American Academy of Political and Social Science.
8. Gupta, Amitava. 2006. "Early Childhood Education, Post Colonial Theory and Teaching Practices in India", Palgrave: p.70-76
9. Naik, J.P. 1979. 'Equality, Quality and Quantity: The Elusive Triangle in Indian Education' International Review of Education, 25(2/3) Jubilee Number.
10. Velaskar, Padma. 2010. 'Quality and Inequality in Indian Education: Some Critical Policy Concerns' Contemporary Education Dialogue.
11. Naik, J.P. 1975. "Equality, Quality, Quantity: The Elusive Triangle in Indian Education", Allied Publishers.