

## **A HISTORICAL STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN INDIA: FROM ANCIENT EDUCATIONAL TRADITIONS TO THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The development of education in India represents an unstoppable and active process formed by cultural connection, social and political transformations, and financial changes across historical periods. This paper critically examines the route of Indian education from ancient educational traditions to the reforms introduced under the National Education Policy 2020. Ancient Indian education emphasized over-all holistic development, moral ethical values, and first hand experimental learning deep-rooted in spiritual idealistic philosophical traditions. The medieval time period introduced a pluralistic educational process influenced by Islamic culture, while the British colonial time period marked an influential change toward Western-oriented education systems, basically changing the overall structure and objectives of education. Post-independence reforms mainly focused on democratization, growth and modernization of education but persistent challenges such as inequality, quality in teaching learning process, and lack of relevance remained. The National Education Policy 2020 represents an allover reform focused at restructuring the education system to meet current global need and requirement while drawing upon India's indigenous knowledge systems. Using a review-based historical methodology, this study highlights continuity and transformation in Indian education. It argues that NEP 2020 reflects a combination of traditional educational values and modern policy. The paper contributes to bridging the gap between historical educational process and National Education policy 2020.

**Keywords:** Indian Education, Educational Transformation, Indigenous Traditions, Colonial Education, Educational Policy, NEP 2020, Historical Analysis

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Education is the most important element of Indian society, shaping its intellectual, academic, cultural, emotional and social development. The change of education in India reflects broader historical processes, including cultural connections, political changes, and social and economic developments. From ancient times to the recent education system has evolved in response to changing needs and requirement of society.

Ancient Indian educational process was deeply linked with philosophical perspectives and spiritual perspectives that help in holistic development, moral values, and experience based learning. Education was not only as the getting knowledge or qualification but as a process of self-realization and character development.

The medieval period introduced a new educational system influenced by Islamic traditions leading to the coexistence of diverse forms of knowledge. However, it was the colonial period that marked a

fundamental transformation in Indian education. The beginning of Western education system particularly through English language as mode of instruction change the objective, purpose and overall structure of education aligning it with administrative and economic aims (Tilak, 2020).

After independence India undertake major efforts to reform and restructure its education system, focusing on democratization, holistic development and modernization. Policies aimed to ensure Educational access to all without any biasness promote national unity, and develop human capital (Govinda, 2021).

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a major milestone in this historical trajectory. It totally focused to address current problems and challenges such as globalization, technology friendly environment and skill learning and development while representing inspiration from India's educational heritage (Government of India, 2020).

This paper aims to examine the historical evolution of education in India and analyze the level to which NEP 2020 represents continuity and transformation of Education system.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the Historical Development of Education in India
- To analyze the Ancient Indian education system and its Pedagogical Relevance
- To study the transition through medieval and Colonial Education systems
- To evaluate the key features and implications of NEP 2020
- To promote research and academic discourse in the field of Education History

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a **qualitative historical and review-based methodology**. Data has been collected from secondary sources including books, journals, articles, Government and commission reports, policy documents, and Government publications. The analytical structure combines historical understanding with policy study.

## 4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholarly literature on Indian education can be grouped into main four broad strands: Ancient Education, Colonial Education transformation, Post-independence educational changes, and contemporary present Educational policy analysis.

A. S. Altekar (1944) emphasized that ancient Indian education aimed at character building, discipline, moral and spiritual development rather than mere vocational training. His work remains foundational for understanding the Ancient Gurukul tradition.

Radhakumud Mookerji (1951) explained the importance of ancient universities such as Nalanda University and Takshashila further arguing that India run globally linked higher education institutions long earlier than Europe's modern up to date universities.

S. Nurullah and J. P. Naik (1974) examined colonial British education showing that British policy modernized up to date the institutions but at the same time marginalized indigenous systems and widened inequality.

Schleicher (2018) focused competency-based learning and skill development which based on the objectives of NEP 2020.

Altbach (2021) Philip G. Altbach situates that NEP 2020 within worldwide higher education trends, particularly interdisciplinary and academic flexibility.

Marginson (2022) discuss the significance and importance of internationally competitiveness and knowledge.

Sharma (2022) point the challenges and problems for implementation of policy such as resource disparity, teacher awareness, readiness and expertise.

Kumar and Gupta (2023) discuss that NEP 2020 focused on flexibility in curriculum, multidisciplinary, Teacher training and research orientation.

The literature overall suggests that Indian education has evolved through adaptation rather than linear progression, and NEP 2020 is best understood in historical continuity with earlier reforms.

## **5. ANCIENT INDIAN EDUCATIONAL TRADITIONS**

The Ancient educational institutions in India were Gurukuls, where students lived with teachers and received intellectual knowledge, moral ethical values, and practical training. Subjects included mathematics, philosophy, astronomy, ayurveda, medicine, fine-arts, and warfare.

### **Key features included**

- All around Holistic development
- Teacher-student bond or coordination
- Moral discipline and ethical values
- Learning by doing or Experiential learning
- Community-support and community participation in institutions

## **6. MEDIEVAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

The medieval period saw plural educational forms including:

- Pathshalas (Primary Hindu Schools)
- Traditional Institutions of higher learning
- Maktabas (elementary Islamic School)
- Madrasas (Higher Islamic School)

Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, and vernacular languages were used in different institutions. Education remained decentralized and diverse.

## **7. COLONIAL EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION**

Colonial rule marked a structural shift.

### **7.1 Macaulay's Minute (1835)**

Thomas Babington Macaulay advocated English as medium of instruction in education to create a class of inter-mediators.

### **7.2 Wood's Despatch (1854)**

Wood's Despatch of 1854, often called the "Magna Carta of English Education in India," proposed a comprehensive educational renovate by recommending the creation of Departments of Public

Instruction in each region, the establishment of universities in major cities, the introduction of teacher training institutions, and a grants-in-aid system to support private schools.

### 7.3 Effects

#### Positive outcomes:

- **Modern University System:** The establishment of universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857, followed by others, laid the foundation for a structured modern higher education system.
- **Growth of Print Culture:** The introduction of the printing press facilitated a surge in newspapers, books, and journals in both English and vernacular languages, which accelerated the spread of ideas and social reforms.
- **Scientific Education:** The curriculum shifted to include Western science, mathematics, and technical training, promoting critical thinking and a shift toward modernism.

#### Negative outcomes:

- **Marginalization of indigenous systems:** Traditional knowledge, local languages, and communal ways of learning are often neglected, regarded as inferior, or completely excluded from formal educational curricula.
- **Elitist access:** Access to high-quality education is frequently restricted to privileged socioeconomic groups, creating a meritocratic system where wealth and social capital determine educational success.
- **Examination culture:** The education system prioritizes standardized testing and rote memorization, treating performance on tests as the sole indicator of student worth and intelligence.
- **Language hierarchy:** The preference for dominant national or international languages—like English—creates an unjust hierarchy that marginalizes students who think, learn, and express themselves in their mother tongue.

## 8. EDUCATIONAL REFORMS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Independent India viewed education as essential for democracy and development.

#### Major milestones:

- **University Education Commission (1948-49):** Led by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, this commission focused on upgrading higher education to meet the needs of a newly independent India, proposing the establishment of the University Grants Commission.
- **Secondary Education Commission (1952-53):** Known as the Mudaliar Commission, it focused on restructuring secondary education, diversifying curriculum to include vocational courses, and upgrading teacher training standards.
- **Kothari Commission (1964-66):** Under D.S. Kothari, this commission provided a comprehensive examination of all education levels, recommending a national structure, the "three-language formula," and setting the goal of spending 6% of GDP on education.
- **National Policy on Education 1968:** Based on the Kothari Commission's report, this was India's first education policy, which aimed at national integration through free, compulsory

education for children up to 14, improving teacher training, and promoting regional languages.

- **National Policy on Education 1986:** This policy, revised in 1992, focused on removing educational disparities, improving the quality of education in rural areas through "Operation Blackboard," and modernizing the system to meet national needs. These reforms expanded enrolment but quality and equity gaps remained.

## 9. NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

The National Education Policy 2020 introduces transformative reforms.

### 9.1 School Education

- **5+3+3+4 Curricular Structure:** The system is organized into Foundational (ages 3-8), Preparatory (8-11), Middle (11-14), and Secondary (14-18) stages to align with cognitive development.
- **Foundational Literacy Mission:** A primary focus is ensuring every student can read, write, and perform basic mathematics by the end of primary school.
- **Competency-Based Assessment:** Evaluation is transitioning from marks-based assessment to measuring core competencies, skills, and conceptual understanding.
- **Reduced Rote Learning:** Curriculum content is being reduced to emphasize critical thinking, interactive learning, and creative abilities rather than memorizing facts.
- **Multilingual Instruction:** The policy encourages teaching in the mother tongue or regional language, particularly up to Class 5, to bridge the gap between home and school learning.

### 9.2 Higher Education

The National Education Policy 2020 aims to transform higher education by establishing **multidisciplinary universities** that foster holistic learning across various disciplines. To provide greater flexibility, the policy introduces a **multiple entry-exit system**, allowing students to pause their studies and resume later with appropriate certifications. This flexibility is supported by the **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)**, a digital repository that enables students to accumulate and transfer credits across different higher education institutions. To boost research and innovation, a **National Research Foundation** will be established as an apex body. Finally, the policy sets an ambitious goal to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to **50% by 2035**.

### 9.3 Historical Significance

NEP 2020 reconnects with older Indian traditions by emphasizing:

- **Holistic Education:** The new pedagogical approach prioritizes holistic education to ensure the development of a learner's cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual dimensions.
- **Mother tongue learning:** To enhance comprehension and foster a strong cultural identity, schools are encouraged to adopt mother tongue learning as the medium of instruction, preferably until at least Grade 5.
- **Ethics and moral values:** Modern education focuses on inculcating core ethics and moral values, such as compassion, respect, and honesty, to shape responsible and well-rounded citizens.

- **Integrated knowledge systems:** By integrating indigenous knowledge systems, such as ancient Indian science, philosophy, and traditional arts, curriculum reforms aim to blend cultural heritage with modern scientific temper.

## 10. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Despite its promise, NEP 2020 faces obstacles:

1. Insufficient public expenses.
2. Centre-state coordination challenges.
3. Lack of trained Teachers and training gaps.
4. Digital partition.
5. Institutional disparities.
6. Rural-urban inequality on bases of resource access.

## 11. FINDINGS

1. The evolution of Indian education is characterized by continuous adaptation.
2. Ancient systems prioritized ethics and integrated learning the core focus of ancient Indian pedagogical systems.
3. The colonial period introduced a rigid, hierarchical structure and standardized examinations to the education system.
4. Post-independence reforms efforts were heavily focused on expanding access to education.
5. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to create a synthesis between traditional Indian values and modern pedagogical needs Implementation remains decisive.
6. The success of these reforms hinges on the quality of their implementation.

## CONCLUSION

The history of education in India reflects continuity, disruption, and reform. From Gurukuls to global universities, Indian education has responded to changing political and social contexts. The National Education Policy 2020 is historically significant because it attempts to move beyond colonial educational legacies while drawing from India's civilization heritage. If implemented effectively, it may become one of the most consequential educational reforms in modern India.

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