

# Development of Education in India: 1947-2012

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*Education is the planned process of inducing those attitudes and transmitting those skills that are essential for local, regional and national development*

**M**ODERN EDUCATION, particularly higher education in India, is considered to have had its beginnings in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were established in 1857. But English education for the upper classes was carried on in princely, wealthy and elite groups in different parts of the country from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although native forms of education were imparted through the Gurukula and other systems in previous centuries, particularly in villages and precincts of religious institutions. The number of people going to school in those days of old was quite limited.

It is only after Independence in 1947 that a more comprehensive system of education for all people in different regions came into being. A separate Department of Education (later on changed to Human Resources Department, HRD) was formed at the Centre and Departments of Education were formed in each State to serve

the massive needs of education and training for the entire population. Education for the masses became a laudable goal only after 1947 as the Founding Fathers of the nation felt that education for all (EFA) was a must to achieve socioeconomic, political and cultural progress. One can say that education of the masses became a priority throughout the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The earlier idea, also called “filtration theory” was that education of the upper classes would lead to a “trickle-down” to the lower levels. Moreover, certain sections of the population, particularly women of all castes and both men and women of the lower caste groups were not to be given any kind of education. Even reading and writing, mathematics and general knowledge were denied to these groups.

The scenario underwent a sea change in the early years of Independent India, although much more remains to be changed even now. With this historical background in mind, let us take a quick glance at the pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary

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sectors of education in 21<sup>st</sup> century India, with some attention on the technical, medical and vocational aspects of overall changes.

### **Pre-primary education**

The Planning Commission of India has stressed the Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) so that the entire system of education becomes beneficial to the nation. This is why pre-primary education is to be concerned less with education than with the healthcare of the children and their mothers, without which the entry of children into the primary school becomes defective and irregular. Sick and unhealthy children may not go to primary school; even if they go, they drop out after some months or years. Thus no amount of attention on the pre-primary children and their mothers is too much. In fact, children born in a particular village (part of the school district) should be cared for properly by the healthcare system prevalent in that area. The healthcare system becomes equally important for the school system.

Moreover, based on the number of children in the village area, the Panchayat concerned can build a proper school for pre-primary education. It is not enough for the Department of Human Resources to count the number of children of pre-primary age in millions for the entire country and leave the matter at that as a statistical piece of information. The provision of proper buildings and required teachers has to be ascertained and publicized, if necessary, through the local Panchayat so that the Panchayat administration can provide the school facilities for the number of children in the Panchayat. Again, this is a matter to be discussed in detail with local authorities but the HRD has to work

with State Governments who in turn will work with the local Panchayat to evolve suitable mechanisms to provide educational and health facilities for all the children of the locality.

### **Primary Education**

If the HRD or the Panchayat is aware of the number of children who need pre-primary education, it is not difficult for them to determine how many primary schools are needed in the village or how many more schools are needed in addition to the schools already available through government and private education agencies. But here one has to go by certain standards such as the facilities to be provided in every school, the number of students in each class, the number of teachers required for the school, the number of well-planned separate classrooms for all the students (instead of having one large hall divided by imaginary lines or actual screens for each class), etc. Each class must have a separate classroom. It is a shame that even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we in India have schools where three or four classes are stationed in a large hall and the students and teachers are subjected to a highly unscientific “sound-mixing” phenomenon that forces each teacher to “out-shout” the other for the sake of his or her students! Why is it that despite all our scientific progress during the past 65 years, we still continue with this system of learning and teaching. Each child in each class must have the “luxury” of learning in an atmosphere of quiet concentration. Is it too much for a child to ask for this basic amenity in modern India?

Certainly, the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), the District Primary Education Programme

(DPEP), the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), the Teacher Education Scheme (TES) and the Kasturba Gandhi Baalika Vidyaalaya Scheme (KGBVS) have worked well in the country and they are still working well in many States. The number of children attracted to primary school education has grown by leaps and bounds, although the number of dropouts on the way is still high.

These schemes have met, no doubt, the massive needs of millions of children requiring primary education. Primary education is now available to children in villages within 1 to 2 kms. This is no mean achievement. However, there are villages where children have to walk for more than 3 or 4 kms. to reach their schools. Perhaps the type of Health and Education Survey (HES) indicated earlier in this article will bring to the notice of the Panchayats, States and the MHRD the actual needs of the children in a more concrete manner. Quoting from a Planning Commission document, “the number of habitations that had a primary school within a distance of one kilometre was 10.71 lakh (87 percent) and the number of habitations that had an upper primary school within a distance of of 3 km was 9.61 lakh (78 percent).”

There are only one lakh habitations yet to be covered for primary (Standards 1-5, Age 6-11 years) and upper primary schools (Standards 6-8; Age 7-14 years) according to the same document.

The progress of enrolment is worth examining in order to understand the volume and the magnitude of our educational efforts and needs. Whereas in 1969, 544 lakh (54.4 million) of lower primary, and 12.5 million

upper primary children were given school education, the corresponding numbers in 2007 were: 1354 lakh (135.4 million) lower primary children and 56.7 million upper primary children.

The number of primary schools in India increased from 6.64 lakh in 2002 to 7.6 lakh in 2005. The majority of the new buildings had separate classrooms, and the number of elementary education students increased from 159 million in 2002 to 182 million in 2005. Although this increase is encouraging, the social and gender disparity existing at the primary and upper primary levels causes concern even now, especially in Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. Since education is closely connected with the socioeconomic conditions in a region, problems of child labour, child marriage and parents' male preference play a deleterious part in many regions of the country. In a country with a very large population, all socioeconomic problems have to be tackled district-wise. There are close to 650 districts in India and each district has approximately 2 million population equivalent to the total population of some countries in the West. In fact, some states of India have populations exceeding the combined populations of countries like Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands. Therefore our planning and priorities of education should be totally different from those of the Western countries.

But it is important that India is trying its best to provide the growing number of children the infrastructure essential for pre-primary and primary education through five essential steps:

- (1) Universal Access
- (2) Universal Enrolment

- (3) Universal Retention
- (4) Universal Achievement and
- (5) Equity

These five steps are essential for every sector of education, but they are more essential for pre-primary, primary and secondary education. And with their implementation, we have succeeded in bringing down the drop-out rate from 3.2 crores (32 million) in 2001-02 to 0.7 crore (7 million) in 2005-06. This is indeed a big achievement, but our aim should be to reduce the drop-out rate to zero.

One of the constitutional goals of independent India was to provide universal, free and compulsory primary education for all. Although the number of government schools is almost four times that of private schools, both types of management are equal in their commitment to provide the least number of toilet and drinking water facilities to the children—a very peculiar situation in India. It seems nobody really cares for the health and hygiene of the growing generation of youngsters—parents, teachers, local panchayats, state governments and the Central Government! Our planners and educators have to give more attention to this unique and universal Indian “problem of excretion.”

### **Secondary School Education**

We have two types of secondary education in India—Secondary (Standards 9 and Ten) and Higher Secondary (Standards 11 and 12). The Higher Secondary classes used to be part of College Education until the 1970s. They were shifted to High Schools which used to have the final matriculation examination for students in the last class, namely Class 10. For some time, the higher secondary classes

used to be called the Intermediate Classes—the first two years in College. But now in most states of India, the Intermediate classes have been shifted to the High School, although a new nomenclature, namely, Higher Secondary has been introduced to describe the Intermediate classes in college. The present practice is to have two types of schools—Secondary and Higher Secondary. It is observed that some educational agencies succeed and others fail in getting the higher secondary classes, and some students do not get selected to the higher secondary stream. Every year we see acrimonious criticisms against governments' educational policies on account of this “Plus One and Plus Two” problem!!

This unnecessary practice can be avoided if High School Education in all States consists of 12 classes as it is done in the U.S. or U.K. It is alleged by critics that some authorities in India perpetuate the system with ulterior motives. Some even point out that “educational corruption” starts at the KG level and carried on to the Plus One level. In fact, no child should be denied the opportunities for a smooth and continuous school education from pre-primary to Standard XII in any part of the country. This national policy will be beneficial not only to the students but the parents, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders.

No child should be asked to terminate his/her studies with 10 years and look for a job; the child is only sixteen when she/he passes the 10<sup>th</sup> Standard and most probably it has not been exposed to any practical or job-oriented education. The 10<sup>th</sup> Standard kid is unfit for any job; and is unemployable, to say the least. All children must complete their school education when they are 18. The age 18 is considered

crucial throughout the world. Those who cross the 18<sup>th</sup> year are not considered children in any part of the world. And he/she is given the right to vote. To exercise the franchise the young voter must know the fundamentals of democratic politics and an awareness of civic rights and responsibilities. Moreover, the young man or woman should be equipped to take up some job or other.

In almost all countries of the world, school education lasts for 12 years and it is free. There is no rush to college. Those who are genuinely interested and are capable of undertaking higher studies go to college. The inordinate rush to college which we see in India is undesirable and wasteful. Recently, some “married” adolescent girls showed their desire to complete their school education in Tamil Nadu and the school Principal refused them admission. The matter raised a lot of debate and discussion, not only in Tamil Nadu but in other parts of India. Child marriages are still very much alive in India. Sociologically, we are a bit behind as we have not been able to discard the heavy burden of the past, yet. Is it true our education system is superficially advanced but really stymied inside? Well, this is a major subject for discussion but there should be another platform for it. Here we want to examine secondary education and its present condition.

First, the access. The total enrolment in 102,000 secondary schools and 0.50 lakh higher secondary schools is 37 million (370 lakh), equivalent to or even greater than the combined population of several countries in Europe. More surprisingly, there is a 62 percent drop-out rate at the higher secondary level! This should be

an eye-opener for educationists. Even higher secondary education is too much for many children, not to speak of college education. What is really needed is vocationalization at the high school level, preferably from the 9<sup>th</sup> Standard onwards up to 12<sup>th</sup> Standard. The high school graduate will emerge a useful citizen after 12 years of schooling and with practical skills in several fields.

Even in the study of languages, we have to evolve a new national system (or revive the three-language policy once practised with enthusiasm) by which along with English and Hindi, students in the Hindi-speaking areas, learn at school the language of a contiguous state. For example, a student in UP should get proficiency in the practical use of English and Marathi/Oriya/Bengali/Telugu and a student in Tamil Nadu should besides earning proficiency in Hindi learn Telugu or Oriya or Marathi—languages of the contiguous states. Language learning is not difficult at a young age and it is fun. This is a matter that needs more deliberation but let us stress the practicality of school education where along with languages, students should get practical skills in technical matters. Their employability in thousands of new engineering and technology jobs opening up in different parts of the country is heightened.

Along with technical subjects, students should be given training in civics, practical knowledge in public affairs and good citizenship, moral values, public service, ethics and responsible behaviour. In 12 years, the high school student will become a good and useful citizen, with the necessary skills in computer operation because the future progress of the country depends on citizens with basic knowledge

and skills in computerized digital technology.

The enrolment of students in the Secondary sector during 2004-05 was 14.2 million boys and 10.1 million girls for a total of 24.3 million; for the higher secondary the total was 12.7 million with 5.3 million girls. The drop-out rate during the year was almost 62 percent. The silver lining is that the decline of the drop-out rate in primary to upper primary is getting closer to 90 percent. It is hoped that the drop-out rate will decline further in the years to come with all the new facilities introduced during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Plans.

The future of Secondary Education in India will be brighter if the two essential changes are brought in:

Twelve years of schooling for every child from age six to 18, with the last four years devoted to certain vocational subjects also so that every child in all parts of India will become a useful, capable citizen qualified to take up some work and maintain a decent living;

All schools in the country will be pucca schools with well-built class rooms equipped with modern gadgets so that all children get an opportunity to learn the latest methods of communication technology, ICT, that will enable them to make use of modern technology in daily life.

There has been commendable progress in providing ICT in schools but much more remains to be done. Moreover, the quality of secondary education can be improved if government and private sectors adopt the National Curriculum Framework, 2005 and recruit qualified, committed and child-friendly teachers who are willing to go that extra mile, when necessary,

to work with the children for their overall development.

There are about 1.4 lakh government and government-aided secondary schools with ICT facilities but the country needs more trained teachers and well-built schools. Many of these schools are likely to be schools with Internet facilities. But there are 28,000 schools in remote areas which require modern facilities and connection with the better developed areas. Some schools are on the satellite circuit and students get the latest programmes on science and technology.

It is hoped that during the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan more schools will be provided with ICT facilities and satellite connection. The steps being taken now in improving girls' education, bridging social disparities, open schooling, teacher education, etc. will go a long way in streamlining secondary education. And whatever improvement occurs in secondary education will serve in heightening the quality of higher education and research at the College/University level, that is, the quality of the tertiary sector.

### **Betterment of the Tertiary Sector**

Modern higher education in India may be considered to have started in 1857 when three universities were established in the same year after the fashion of the London University. India had less than two dozen universities and about 500 colleges (both government and private) at the time of Independence; but it has now 30,000+ colleges and 600+ universities including deemed-to-be universities, and almost 15 million students in the higher education stream, making the country one of the topmost higher-education centres in the world. Some of these students are in the Distance

Education System. The total number includes technical, engineering, and medicine students, but the bulk of the students are in the arts, business, commerce and science colleges. Most higher education institutions are engaged in teaching, research and extension.

According to many education experts, the university system in India has produced outstanding scholars, scientists, social scientists, engineers, physicians and political leaders of eminence during the past 150 years. But there are scholars who bemoan the fact that the large majority of colleges in India are teaching shops not quite different from the tutorials that coach students for various examinations. Obtaining a degree from a recognized institution—a college or a university—is not a difficult task at all. And many students go for higher education either simply because they have nothing else to do or because of a very close connection imposed by job-givers to university/college degrees. In other words, jobs are not delinked from degrees. Or, college degrees have become passports to jobs. In a highly literate state of India, bus conductors, office clerks and even last grade employees are found to have postgraduate degrees. Some of them have the Ph.D. degree. Why should these people have higher degrees? The job they do (or most often do not do) can very well be done by a high school graduate. This writer once came across at least half a dozen postgraduates appearing for an interview for sweepers! The reason for their applying for last-grade jobs is the tremendous unemployment situation and the stiff competition for jobs. Their earnest belief is that their postgraduate degrees will be given preference in the job interview. This is, unfortunately,

the seamy side of higher education in India.

Delinking of postgraduate and even graduate degrees from jobs is a must in India in order to raise the quality of college/university education. There are other issues in higher education, a few of which are mentioned below:

#### **1. Infrastructural facilities:**

Many colleges are situated in crowded city centres and plagued by lack of space for primary needs, physical exercises, games and sports and even fresh air. Colleges should have ample space for curricular and extra-curricular activities, labs and libraries, auditoria and space for recreation, hostels, common rooms, etc. Unfortunately, many colleges do not have these essential facilities.

**2. Affiliation:** This affliction is an old one. Many universities keep under their wings two to three hundred colleges! The universities do not have the administrative set-up to determine what is going on in the colleges affiliated to them because the affiliation system is a cumbersome one.

#### **3. New method of teaching and evaluation:**

Knowledge is expanding by leaps and bounds. Class lectures are not as important as they used to be. Teachers are simply guides to the students who attend classes to exchange views with the teachers and enhance the knowledge they already have. Sometimes the teachers can learn some new things from the students. Both the teacher and the taught in the modern colleges/higher education institutions are regular users of the Internet which provides

many new insights and the classroom is where all of them exchange ideas that they have already gathered.

**4. The Credit and Semester System:**

The modern system of education all over the world is offered in assimilable segments of a particular subject unlike what they used to do in the past, namely study a subject comprehensively for one or two years. The modern approach is to divide knowledge into segments and concentrate on the details in 15-16 weeks. The subject can be divided into several courses which the students can study at their own pace in different semesters. Knowledge is changing fast and from year to year fresh knowledge can be incorporated into a course offering if the teachers are alert and sincere about their profession. The expansion of knowledge in many areas is mind-boggling. If we agree that we are in a Knowledge Society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our mode of learning, teaching and evaluation has to change.

**5. Evaluation:** The evaluation has to be continuous. Credit means the number of hours a course is taught during a semester of 15-16 weeks. If the course is taught for one hour a week for 16 weeks, it is a 1-credit course. All over the world, the system of college teaching and learning has been changed to this convenient mode. The teacher who teaches a particular course is the best evaluator, not an outside teacher who sets unfamiliar questions and goes through the answer papers leisurely. In fact, teaching and evaluation should go simultaneously.

After evaluation, the evaluated material is returned to the student. Transparency of evaluation is of the utmost importance to build bridges of trust between students and teachers.

**6. Decentralization in Management:**

From 1986 onwards, the publication, "National Policy on Education" has discussed this concept and it was reiterated in the MHRD Publication Programme of Acton (1992) but even today the concept has not been fully implemented. These issues have been discussed in my book "Challenges before Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century".

**7. Professional Education:**

The new educational policy has given the opportunity for many private agencies to start new professional colleges for imparting education and training in engineering, medicine, information technology, computer science, computer applications, business management, business communication, management sciences, nursing, educational technology, imaging technologies, etc. The initiatives taken by several private agencies are certainly inspiring and encouraging and they deserve full appreciation and support by government and educational experts. However, we cannot close our eyes to the corruption that has set in, in at least some institutions that charge very huge "donations" (euphemism for bribery) for undeserving students in the so-called "management quota." In certain legal cases filed by aggrieved students

and their guardians, high courts in certain states have observed the injustices and passed strictures against such educational agencies. In a couple of cases, the judiciary has recommended the cancellation of the permission granted to such agencies, and the closure of such institutions where students have performed extremely poorly in their final exams.

Despite all such problems, Indian education scenario embracing all sectors is one of great and gigantic expansion and it is certainly on the upward swing. The steps taken by various agencies such as the UGC, the AICTE, the IMC, etc., and the various educational bodies such as NCERT, SCERT, CBSE and the private professional bodies and management associations will certainly bear fruit in the long run and make India a Knowledge Society and an attractive educational destination for today's globalized world.

Let us conclude this article with the observation made by the UNESCO three decades ago:

'Education is the planned process of inducing those attitudes and transmitting those skills that are essential for local, regional and national development. Social change with economic and political change is most essential to all countries, especially developing countries that are yet to bring about fundamental changes for the fulfilment of the basic needs of all sections of their people.'

Let us hope that the commendable overall development made by India in all sectors of education during the past 65 years will be augmented further in the years to come. □

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