



The Evolution of the Indian Education System: A Research Review Article

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Introduction:

The Indian education system has undergone a multi-millennial transformation, beginning with the holistic and spiritual Gurukula and Mahavihara systems of ancient times, transitioning through the theological and vocational structures of the medieval period, and undergoing a radical shift toward Western institutionalization during the colonial era. Historically, the system moved from a focus on self-realization (Moksha) to administrative utility under British rule. In the post-independence era, India significantly expanded its technical and managerial infrastructure, establishing world-class institutions like the IITs and IIMs. Despite these advancements, the modern system has faced criticism for rote learning and a disconnect from cultural values. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 now seeks to bridge this gap by synthesizing ancient Indian knowledge systems with 21st-century technological and multidisciplinary needs, aiming for a holistic, inclusive, and globally competitive educational paradigm.

I. Ancient Indian Education: The Foundations of Wisdom

1. The Vedic Gurukula System Ancient Indian education, dating back as early as 1000 B.C., was rooted in the pursuit of knowledge (Jnana), wisdom (Pragyaa), and truth (Satya).

- Aims: The ultimate goal was self-realization or liberation (Moksha/Nirvana).
- Pedagogy: Students lived with their Guru in a residential setting (Gurukul) for approximately 12 years, beginning with the Upanayana ceremony. Learning occurred through three stages: Sravana (listening), Manana (reflection), and Nididhyasana (meditation).
- Curriculum: Subjects were interdisciplinary, covering the Vedas, grammar, logic, medicine (Ayurveda), and astronomy.

2. The Buddhist Mahavihara System The rise of Buddhism introduced more institutionalized and inclusive learning.

- **Inclusivity:** Unlike the earlier Vedic system, Buddhist education was open to all castes and eventually women, with instruction often in local dialects like Pāli.
- **Centres of Excellence:** Ancient universities such as Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vikramshila became global hubs for subjects like logic, medicine, and philosophy. Nalanda was described as a "magnificent Temple of Learning" attracting scholars from China, Korea, and Tibet.

II. The Medieval Period: Islamic and Mughal Influence

The medieval era (c. 10th–18th century) introduced the Islamic pattern of education, which integrated theological principles with rational sciences.

- **Structure:** Education was divided into Maktabas (primary schools) attached to mosques and Madrasas (higher learning centres).
- **Curriculum:** The curriculum featured traditional sciences (manqulat) like law and history, and rational sciences (maqulat) like mathematics, logic, and astronomy.
- **Vocational Education:** This period saw a significant rise in technical and professional training through Karkhanas (workshops), which produced world-famous textiles and handicrafts.

III. The Colonial Era: The Western Paradigm Shift

The British period marked a "seismic shift," moving India away from indigenous knowledge toward a Western-style administrative model.

- **Macaulay's Minutes (1835):** Lord Macaulay advocated for English-medium education, dismissing oriental culture as "defective" and aiming to create a class of Indians "English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect".
- **Wood's Despatch (1854):** Known as the "Magna Carta of English Education in India," it recommended a graded school system and the establishment of universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras.
- **Impact:** While it modernized education, it led to a disconnect from cultural roots and a low literacy rate among the masses.

IV. Post-Independence and the Modern Era

After 1947, India sought to rebuild its educational framework to support nation-building and industrialization.

- **Institutional Growth:** Key institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) (1951) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) were established to foster technical and managerial expertise. The UGC (1956) was created to regulate university standards.

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- Challenges: The contemporary system has faced issues of fragmentation, rote learning, and high-stakes examination stress. There is also a recognized disparity in access between urban and rural areas.

V. The NEP 2020: A Synthesis of Past and Future

The National Education Policy 2020 envisions a complete overhaul to align India with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4).

- Structure: Replaces the 10+2 system with a 5+3+3+4 design for ages 3–18.
- Philosophy: Aims for holistic, multidisciplinary education, reintroducing Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and mother-tongue instruction.
- Future Goals: Targets a 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education by 2035 and an increase in public education investment to 6% of GDP.

Conclusion

The journey of Indian education reflects an evolution from personalized mentorship and spiritual inquiry to a structured, job-oriented institutional framework. While the modern system has achieved democratic access and technical advancement, NEP 2020 represents a strategic effort to reintegrate the ethical and character-building core of ancient traditions with contemporary innovation to create "global citizens".

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