

# **The Evolution of the Liberal Education System: An Historical Perspective**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**The paper highlights the fundamental nature of education that goes beyond rote learning. The ancient education system in India, dating back thousands of years, it is a evidence to the rich legacy and scholar inheritance of the Indian subcontinent. Ethics and value education stayed at the core of learning in the ancient Indian education system. Modern education commences in India under British rule. Before the British, India had its own educational systems like the Gurukulas and the Madrassas. The current education system solely focuses on rote learning. The modernization of Indian civilization is said to have been facilitated by British control. The ancient education system in India was characterized by its holistic advance to learning.**

**Key words: system, education, reform, civilization, autonomy, Corruption, social and moral**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education in ancient India was holistic, and designed to develop a person's character, social consciousness, and sacred illumination. It was communicate through the Vedic and Buddhist education systems. Man is a rational animal; by virtue of the divine gift of reason he is superior to all other living beings under the sky. Yet bare, uncultivated reason does not help man much; at least he remains a little above the level of quadrupeds. He realizes himself only when his mental and other capabilities are trained and developed. It is here that education steps in. the gulf between an educated and an uneducated man is very wide. The former is like an angel, while the latter a mere beast in the shape of a human being.

Education thus both enlightens and broadens a person's outlook. He is expected to be well informed activities. He is no longer an animal who can be ordered about, misled or governed by sheer arbitrary authority or brute force. As he is no conscious of what is right and what is wrong being will not fallow another man's dictators prevail in a land of the educated. A despot or dictators wields supreme power and wields it in an arbitrary and capricious manner. The whims of a despot are proverbial. Nero, the Roman Emperor, chose to fiddle while Rome was in flames. Mohammad Bin Tughlak took it into his head to shift the

capital from Delhi to Daulatabad and back to Delhi, entailing untold misery and privation to the people. Alexander sacrificed his men in vain bid to conquer the whole world. Such quixotic opposition and discontent from the educated citizen of their country.

History tells us that education was the monopoly of the great few in the olden days. Consequently, those few were able to determine the rest of the of people and exploit them for their own benefits. As time passed, education spread, bringing awakening among the common people. Despotism, therefore, found it hard to continue its stranglehold on the masses. The French Revolution, the Civil War in England, the Revolutions of 1832 in Europe, the Russian Revolution, all these were at bottom the fruit of enlightenment among the people, who struck a desperate blow to obtain their rights and privileges and end their exploitation by despotic rulers and potentates.

The progressive advance of education has synchronized with the growth of democracy and democratic institutions the entire world over. Democracy, in the well-known words of Abraham Lincoln, is the government of the people, for the people and by the people. Such government by the people is possible only when the people are educated and enlightened, quite alive to their civic rights and responsibilities. No wonder, then, that democracy flourishes and strikes deep roots in countries like the U.K and America and France where education is almost universal. In many Eastern countries like India, the democratic ideology and traditions have not struck equality deep roots for the simple reason that large sections of the people continue to be not only uneducated but completely illiterate. In Africa and some of the South East Asian Countries, as also Iran and Afghanistan, the position is even worse. These countries are still permeated with a medieval outlook and tribal or other forms of autocracy continue to prevail. Little wonder, if these countries remain backward and undeveloped.

It cannot be gained that democratic countries are able to make greater or quicker progress than those where other forms of government prevail. The secret of the success is not far to seek. In a democracy, the people at least the majority of them, land their whole -hearted support and co-operation to measures of reform and improvement. The leaders of the nation do not find it difficult to arouse the enthusiasm of the people for schemes of national

development. The average citizen knows about the policy of his government and he has his own views about it. He can think, judge and act. Now any well-informed and intelligent person will be able to grasp the significance of a useful measure and contribute his mite to make it a success. After the First World War, the government of several European countries drew up plans for the reconstruction of the war-ravaged areas and crippled economy of their countries. Most of these plans met with phenomenal success, simply because the leaders of the nation were able to lead the people easily on proper lines. In other words, when a person understands the utility of a particular work, he does it willingly and sincerely, in the case otherwise he is driven to work like a beast or a machine and hence, the results are far less satisfactory.

The significance of this principle is well in evidence in the free India of today. We have, no doubt, achieved independence, but we have not yet been able to remove the curse of illiteracy from vast sections of the Indian people. Consequently, the implications of democratic government are not as fully appreciated by the masses as they should be. Public co-operation is sought and invited in connection with the various development schemes, yet the people do not evince the necessary measure of enthusiasm. The schemes are usually looked upon as mere government ventures, while the people are simply to watch them as detached spectators. If the people were educated, the entire situation would change. Very much less coaxing, persuasion and propaganda would have yielded much brighter results. An uneducated citizen cannot be so responsive and enthusiastic for national work as his educated counterpart.

Real education implies, among other things, the fostering of civic sense in the people. Civic sense is the realization of the important principle that individual liberty should not be enjoyed at the cost of the social liberty. A person brought up in the traditions of real citizenship aims at exercising restraint over himself and showing consideration to others, thus bringing about a fine blending of personal and social liberties. Civic sense counts everywhere: an ideal citizen will, for instance, observe the rule of the road, and while using the public highway he will not obstruct other traffic. Again, spitting on the road and other places, violating queues, wasting public or government energy like electricity or water by keeping the switches and taps on unnecessarily, are all offences against the spirit of citizenship. The deplorable habit of pilfering small articles of the public property from railway trains or other places, removing pages and pictures from library books and journals, small apparatus from school and college laboratories are actions which betray a sad lack of civic sense.

The crux of the matter is that a person, educated in the true sense of the term, does not lead a self-centered life. He lives as much for himself as for others. His interest

does not and should not clash with those of the state. His welfare is a part and parcel of the welfare of the nation as a whole. The good of the nation and the country is not sacrificed at the altar of a little personal comfort or gain. Not only that the true citizen will even willingly deny himself comfort and make sacrifices so that the nation may prosper. What he does today in this direction may not yield immediate fruits, but he does not look to the immediate future. He works for himself and much more for the generation to come. He is, therefore, a life fixed with the zeal of the missionary, the spirit of national service.

A nation imbued with the true spirit of citizenship is, therefore, like supple clay, ready to be moulded into proper shape by its leaders. The people respond and co-operate and work is smooth and quick. On the contrary the very same people show themselves as hard and unbending as steel, in case somebody tries to impose his will arbitrarily on them. Since they are enlightened and informed, they will not submit to despotic rule. The uneducated are like a herd of dumb and driven cattle at the mercy of very fortune-seeker, demagogue or dictators. The educated public, on the other, resist all manner of autocracy and arbitrary government. This is the secret of democracy. Whenever the ruling party loses the confidence of the people it has to give up the reins of government. A most remarkable instance of this principle was found in England in 1945, when the war-time Premier, Sir Winston Churchill, the savior of his country, was unhorsed in the general elections. The man who was the idol and hero of the nation during the war was thrown out of power as soon as the war came to an end and his policy did not find favour with the electorate. An enlightened voter cannot be a blind hero-worshiper. A leader in a democratic country cannot drive his followers: he can only lead them and that too with their consent and co-operation.

If an educated people are hard to drive how one shall explain the rise of dictatorship like Fascism and Nazism in the modern world? The answer is not very simple. There were several factors responsible for their growth and one of the most important of them was the grave injustice done to the vanquished nations at the Treaty of Versailles after the end of the First World War. Besides propaganda in the modern world is very subtle, scientific and organized. In these war-ravaged countries the leaders were able, in the beginning, to exploit the sentiments of the people with their highly efficient propaganda machine. But as history has proved the success of the misguided political moves was short lived and eventually brought rack and run to the people. Again, even while Mussolini and Hitler were at the height of their power, there was a considerable section of Italians and Germans who do not only did not see eye to eye with their national leaders but opposed their policies as far as possible. Of course, their opposition could not go a long way for some time because

of the use of brute force and ruthless repression which the Fascists and Nazis brought into play. Mussolini and Hitler met their doom not only on account of the overwhelming might of the Allies, but also because the people themselves turned against them.

The animals of the mankind bear eloquent testimony to the great truth the despotism thrives on ignorance and superstition. Tribal loyalty, feudal states, dictatorship, medieval and modern, proves beyond doubt that it is the uneducated and the ignorant alone who can be driven with a stick. An enlightened and educated people do not normally surrender their self-respect, dignity and independence. They work out their own destiny and in doing so they may make mistakes, turn the hands of the clock back for the time being. But in the long run they get on to the right track and with the help and guidance of their truly chosen leaders, work for the good of the nation in a manner which is foreign to and impossible for their uneducated counterpart

According to Diogenes, "The foundation of every nation is the education of its youth." (Itbach, Philip G) Education is thus the most important constituent of good citizenship, if it has transparency. It implies cultivation of the mind to make life tolerable and the acquisition of skill for making it possible. The strength of a nation lies more in the quality of its people than in its material resources. A nation of weaklings can neither attain nor retain its independence. The youth are the cream of society, the real wealth of nation.

The revival of idealism and regeneration of values were major concerns of the eminent jurist and sharp-witted critic of economic policy late Nani A. Palkhivala. Perhaps the best tribute to this giant, one of the most upright and honest intellectuals, would be to work for the generation of values of life in India. However, the prevailing decadence in human values is immense, wholesale and all pervading magnitude seems to have become an integral part of our life – style and philosophy. It is worthwhile to examine the issue and see if education could play a vital role in remedying the situation.

**Corruption in Education:** Ironically enough, whenever anything goes wrong, something sad or bad happens, we immediately think of introducing new teaching courses in schools and colleges so as to combat the evil. It is presumed that the education system is to blame, and something concrete can be done through new subjects or courses. This largely accounts for the introduction of new subjects, papers on values in human education, moral or ethical education, history of freedom fighters, etc., at various levels. The National Policy on Education (1986, 1992), particularly stresses value education, "the growing concern over the erosion of essential values and an increasing cynicism in society has brought to focus need for readjustments in the curriculum in order to make

education a forceful tool for the cultivation of social and moral values. In our culturally plural society, education should foster universal and eternal values, oriented towards the unity and integration of our people. Such value education should help eliminate obscurantism, religious fanaticism, violence, superstition and fatalism" (Balachander, K.K.1986)

"The 'Right to Education Act' which stipulates compulsory and free education to all children within the age groups of 6-14 years, has brought about a revolution in the education system of the country with statistics revealing a staggering enrolment in schools over the last four years. The involvement of private sector in higher education has seen drastic changes in the field. Today over 60% of higher education institutions in India are promoted by the private sector. This has accelerated establishment of institutes which have originated over the last decade making India home to the largest number of Higher Education institutions in the world, with student enrolments at the second highest" (Shaguri, 2013)

These statements, no doubt, are good and impressive as far as they go, but unfortunately they don't go far. Two things clearly indicate their infirmity: one, things have not improved over the years as envisaged; two one feels that education did not have any discernible interventionist impact in most regions. Our campuses continue to be rocked, rather with a vengeance. All types of cases of corruption, disorderly behavior, indiscipline, moral turpitude and violence are being reported every now and then.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stated that : "The quality of governance of many state educational institutions is a cause for concern. I am concerned that in many States, university appointments, including that of Vice-Chancellors, have been politicized and have become subject to caste and communal considerations. There are complaints of favoritism and corruption. This is not as it should be. We should free university appointments from unnecessary interventions on the part of governments and must promote autonomy and accountability. I urge states to pay greater attention to this aspect. After all, a dysfunctional education system can only produce dysfunctional" (Man Mohan Singh, 2007)

**Doing No Justice:** As our youth are quite aware of this phenomenon, it is becoming increasingly difficult to discipline or tame them, to teach them human values. The students often find their teachers and elders throwing values to the wind in their daily life. Lectures on values or courses on them seem irrelevant, since deeds speak louder than words. As G. B. Shaw holds, before teaching our children honesty is the best policy, we should first ensure the world where it is the best policy. Many students of a (five star) university recently complained that their teachers do not come prepared or meet classes regularly;

they remain busy with lecturing assignments in other departments where they get Rs. 500 per lecture. In fact, academic staff colleges, distance open education institutions, self-financing schemes, foreign and domestic research projects, etc., have created for teachers so many additional avenues for work and income that they have often no time to do justice to their teaching and research guidance.

“As higher education systems grow and diversify, society is increasingly concerned about the quality of programmes, public assessments and international rankings of higher education institutions. However these comparisons tend to overemphasize research, using research performance as a yardstick of institutional value. If these processes fail to address the quality of teaching, it is in part because measuring teaching quality is challenging (Hernard, 2008)

It is one of the reasons that the academic activity and the number of actual teaching days have decreased drastically, a realistic survey of a university put it at 125 to 147 a year. If students are asked to verify the figure, it will surely go still lower. But teachers in India are not prepared to submit to evaluation or performance appraisal by their students, even to mark their daily attendance, as is done in all advanced countries in the world. At times in viva tests of research scholars, their supervisors, even chairmen of departments, are not present for the same or similar reasons. How will students respect such instructors or inculcate values? The teaching-learning process is an integral process, and teachers and students are deeply, intimately involved in it. If the pupil has not learnt anything, the teacher has not taught anything. But in this age of trade unionism, they seem to have different objectives and motives. Students' demand charters may contain some items of teachers' welfare, but teachers' demand lists often include nothing about students' benefit. This has created a further divide, as if students' cause were not teachers.

The draft Act (2010) for the proposed Innovation Universities contains special provisions for ensuring autonomy and accountability and to serve as leading edge universities. The reforms share a common concern regarding the importance of strengthening autonomy with accountability in order to best serve India's future. Higher education plays a unique role in the development of a civil society. In the short, medium and long term this can also benefit the social and economic ambitions for India, and assist the nation's vision to create a more equal society. This requires measures that emphasize increased academic, financial, and managerial autonomy with accountability as fundamental to the development of strong institutions delivering quality services to its students and communities. Institutions should establish, governing bodies (Board of Governors) that ensures academic autonomy. In addition, it is necessary to include

specific provisions of increased financial autonomy to undertake activities according to their own academic and research priorities. Improving the effectiveness of governing bodies can only be achieved when the governing bodies are themselves both autonomous and accountable. Unless, and until this concept is embraced in the legal acts and statutes it is clear that empowering and energizing institutions will progress slowly and India's needs for the future will not be well served. “At present, in reality, few acts and statutes stress the importance of developing autonomy and accountability except the new Universities for Innovation Act, (2010) currently in draft form. The success of the reforms hinges upon the presence of good governance in institutions. Effective governance will underpin these systemic and institutional developments” (UGC 2010)

Although the inculcation of values is a must, it is a very difficult task; it calls for composite endeavours and a multi-pronged approach. Here education in itself has a limited role to play. Mere systems or new courses will not make many differences. Although institutes of Ramakrishana Mission, Sathya Sai Baba Trust and several others offer enviable models, on the large scale only devoted and conscientious teachers backed by honest political masters can make any considerable impact. The idea of equalizing educational opportunities also lies in the fact that “the ability to profit by higher education is spread among all classes of people. There are great reserves of untapped ability in the society; if offered the chance they can rise to the top. A great deal of talent of the highest level is, in fact, lost by an inegalitarian system of education” (Balachander, 1986)

What we urgently need is the indomitable political will to make transparency and human values a way of life. It is also in line with our ancient culture. Patanjalee Rishi, for example, had emphasized righteous living in unequivocal terms and evolved ten practical principles – five Yama, five Niyama for this purpose. Indeed, we have to heed to the ever-meaningful advice of Swami Vivekanand: “Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's feet.”(Kumar, Anuj & Ambrish 2015 )

## **CONCLUSION**

So, education must, therefore, aim at providing future leadership from among the masses. It should aim at the pursuit of excellence. The need of the hour is to reorganize the education system to make it more transparent. Education develops all the faculties of man i.e. physical, mental and spiritual. The body of strengthened, the mind sharpened and the spirit chastened. A properly educated man has characters, clear thinking, discernment and judgment. He realizes his duties and

privileges, his role of society and state as well as within the narrower sphere of personal and domestic life. He knows that if on the one hand he is bread –winner for the family and himself, his cooperation and services for the well-being of the society and nation as a whole.

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