

An Analytical Review of the Obstacles Facing The Indian Educational System

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Abstract: *Education policy has consistently been a critical component of the Indian development agenda, and as a result, successive governments have been compelled to confront a variety of significant obstacles since Independence. Currently, primary and secondary institutions, particularly in rural areas, encounter significant challenges, despite the fact that Indian institutes of management and technology are of world-class quality. Despite the fact that new governments frequently make promises to increase expenditure on education and implement structural reforms, this has rarely been achieved in practice. The majority of the reforms implemented by the previous BJP-led government were intended to modernize the national curricula, and they have been criticized for their attempt to "Hindu-ize" India's traditionally secular education system. The current Congress-led government will be put to the test as it endeavors to enhance the quality of education in India. It will be necessary to address the underlying challenges to education, as well as address concerns regarding the content of the curriculum.*

Keywords: Quality of Education, Teacher Training, Infrastructure Deficiencies

I. INTRODUCTION

Each year, India's educational system produces millions of graduates, with a significant number of them possessing expertise in engineering and information technology. This manpower advantage is the foundation of India's recent economic growth, but it conceals the systemic issues that plague the country's education system. Although India's demographics are generally perceived to provide it with a competitive advantage over other countries' economies the domestic political consequences could be severe if this advantage is limited to a small, highly educated elite.

India's education system is confronted with a multitude of obstacles, as 35% of the population is under the age of 15. The actual expenditure on education has remained at approximately 4% of GDP for the past few years, despite the fact that successive administrations have committed to increasing it to 6% of GDP. While India's business schools, Indian Institutes of Technology Indian Institutes of Management and universities produce globally competitive graduates at the upper end, primary and secondary schools, particularly in rural areas, encounter staffing challenges.

Education has been recognized by Indian governments as an indispensable instrument for development. The initial section of this paper offers a historical perspective on the evolution of the Indian education system, emphasizing the evolving focuses of government policy. The education policies of successive administrations have built upon the considerable legacies of the Nehruvian period since Independence, with a focus on excellence in higher education and inclusiveness at all levels, while also addressing the fundamental themes of plurality and secularism. The issue of financing has become problematic in the pursuit of these objectives; administrations have pledged to increase state expenditure while simultaneously recognizing the economic potential of attracting private-sector financial support.

The second section of this paper investigates the manner in which recent governments have addressed these challenges, which have remained largely unaltered since Nehru's era, despite the efforts of previous governments and commissions to reform the Indian education system. The focus will be on the most recent policy initiatives, including those of the previous BJP-led administration and the proposals of the current United Progressive Alliance, which is led by the Congress. It will be evident that the same challenges that were present nearly sixty years ago are still largely unresolved

today, such as the necessity of ensuring that the most impoverished and marginalized communities in India have access to education.

The development of India's education policy Development, elitism, and Nehruvianism

The requirements of Brahmin families were met by traditional Hindu education, which focused on the instruction of males in reading and writing by Brahmin instructors. Education was similarly elitist under the Moguls, favoring the wealthy over those from high-caste backgrounds. These pre-existing elitist tendencies were further exacerbated by British rule.

The concept of a modern state, a modern economy, and a modern education system were introduced by British colonial rule. The education system was initially established in the three presidencies of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. The legacy of an education system that was designed to preserve the position and privileges of the more privileged was influenced by colonial rule, which linked entrance and advancement in government service to academic education. The Indian National Congress advocated for national education in the early 1900s, with a particular focus on technical and vocational training. In 1920, Congress established numerous "national" schools and colleges and implemented a boycott of government-aided and government-controlled institutions. These were unsuccessful, as the benefits of British-style education were so substantial that the boycott was largely disregarded. The British education system was advantageous to the local elites, who ultimately employed it to expelling the colonizers.

Nehru envisioned India as a secular democracy with a state-led command economy. The antiimperial struggle was founded on the principles of education for all and industrial development, which were regarded as essential instruments for unifying a nation that was divided by wealth, caste, and religion. The twin themes of inclusiveness and national pride were thus infused into school curricula following Independence, emphasizing the possibility of India's diverse communities coexisting peacefully as a single nation.

The Nehruvian approach to education has left a significant legacy, with the pluralist/secularist perspective being particularly well-ingrained in the Indian populace. Institutions such as the IITs and IIMs, which provide subsidized quality higher education, have made a significant contribution to the Nehruvian vision of a modern and self-sufficient Indian state. They are now among the world's finest higher education institutions. Furthermore, policies of positive discrimination in education and employment bolstered the argument for the access of previously underprivileged social groups to high-quality education. It has been contended that the upward mobility of a few Dalit and tribal households, which is the result of positive discrimination in educational institutions and state patronage, has created role models that help democracy survive in India, despite the fact that access for some marginalized communities remains limited.

The Kothari Commission: education for modernization, national unity and literacy

The Kothari Commission was established to develop a comprehensive education policy for India, drawing on Nehru's vision and articulating the majority of his key themes. One Education was designed to enhance productivity, foster social and national unity, consolidate democracy, modernize the nation, and cultivate social, moral, and spiritual values, according to the commission. The primary objective of Indian education policy was to ensure that all children under the age of 14 were provided with free and compulsory education. Other features included the development of the equality of educational opportunities and the development and prioritization of scientific education and research. The commission also underscored the necessity of eradicating illiteracy and offering adult education.

Historically, the study of mathematics and science has been the primary focus of India's curriculum, rather than social sciences or the arts. This has been avidly advocated for since the Kothari Commission, which contended that engineers and scientists were more effective in addressing India's development requirements than historians. Despite the recent increase in the prominence of commerce and economics, the perception persists that students only pursue social science or humanities subjects as a last resort.

The need for change: the National Policy on Education

The National Policy on Education which Rajiv Gandhi announced in 1986, was designed to equip India for the 21st century. The necessity for change was underscored by the policy: "Education in India is currently at a juncture." The

requirements of the situation cannot be satisfied by the current tempo and nature of development or normal linear expansion. The 1968 policy objectives had been substantially realized, as the new policy indicated that over 90% of the rural population was within a kilometer of educational facilities and that the majority of states had implemented a unified education framework. The prioritization of science and mathematics had also been successful. In order to address issues of quality and access, the education system needed to receive additional financial and organizational support. Nevertheless, change was necessary. Additional issues necessitated attention: India's political and social system is currently experiencing a phase that threatens to undermine long-standing principles. The objectives of secularism, socialism, democracy, and professional ethics are experiencing an increasing amount of pressure.

The objective of the new policy was to enhance the quality of education and expand access to it. Simultaneously, it would protect the principles of secularism, socialism, and equality that had been advocated since the Declaration of Independence. In order to achieve this objective, the government would solicit financial assistance from the private sector to supplement its own resources. The central government also declared that it would assume a broader responsibility to enforce the "national and integrative character of education, to maintain quality and standards." Nevertheless, the states maintained a substantial influence, particularly in the context of the curriculum. A centrally sponsored initiative currently funds approximately 10% of primary education, as the central government has committed to financing a portion of development expenditure. One of the primary outcomes of the 1986 policy was the continued emphasis on secularism and science, as well as the promotion of privatization.

Another consequence of the NPE was that the quality of education in India was increasingly seen as a problem, and several initiatives have been developed since in an attempt to counter this:

The objective of Operation Blackboard was to enhance the human and physical resources that were available in primary schools.

The Resource for the Continuous Improvement of Teachers' Knowledge and Competence was established by the Restructuring and Reorganization of Teacher Education (1987).

The Minimum Levels of Learning established achievement standards for various phases and revised textbooks.

The National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education ensured that children in Classes 1-5 of all government, government-aided, and local body schools received a cooked meal on a daily basis. In certain instances, grain was distributed on a monthly basis, contingent upon a minimum level of attendance.

The District Primary Education Programme prioritized the enhancement of school effectiveness, decentralized planning and administration, and the development of enhanced teaching and learning materials.

The Movement to Educate All sought to bridge gender and social disparities by 2010 by implementing micro-planning and school-mapping exercises to achieve universal primary education.

The Fundamental Right was the declaration of free and compulsory education as a fundamental right for minors between the ages of six and fourteen.

Other initiatives that are specifically designed to benefit marginalized groups, including special incentives for parents within scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and disabled children, have also been implemented. The NPE was determined to be a viable approach for India's education system during the 1992 re-evaluation of education policy. However, certain objectives were reformulated and adjustments were made to adult and elementary education.⁷ The new emphasis was on the expansion of secondary education, while the emphasis on education for minorities and women persisted.

The development of non-formal education

By the 1970s, a substantial portion of India's young population remained illiterate, despite Nehru's visions of universal education and the Kothari Commission's goal of providing all young children with free and compulsory instruction. The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Non Formal Education was established to address this issue by providing education to school leavers, working children, and children from areas without schools. It was initiated as a demonstration program in 1979 and subsequently expanded to encompass ten states with severely underdeveloped

educational systems over the course of the following few years.⁸ During the 1980s, these states were the residence of 75% of the children who were not enrolled in school.

The 1986 National Policy on Education expanded upon this framework and acknowledged the necessity of a comprehensive and organized program of non-formal education to guarantee access to elementary education. The NPE established the non-formal education system and extended its reach to urban neighborhoods and other regions beyond the initial ten states. It also revised the system, engaged voluntary organizations, and provided training to local men and women to become instructors. For example, the Non-formal Adult Education for Women organization, which is headquartered in Lucknow established 300 centers in rural regions with funds from UNESCO. The literacy rates experienced a substantial increase between 1981 and 1991 as a consequence of numerous local programs. Male literacy increased from 56.5% to 64.2%, while female literacy increased from 29.9% to 39.2%.

Primary and secondary education: access, quality and literacy

Large numbers of young people remain unschooled, despite efforts to integrate all segments of the population into the Indian education system through mechanisms such as positive discrimination and non-formal education. Although primary education enrollment has increased, it is estimated that at least 35 million children between the ages of six and fourteen are not enrolled in school, and the number may be as high as 60 million. Severe disparities in gender, region, and caste also currently exist. The primary issues include a high dropout rate, particularly after Class 10, low levels of learning and achievement, inadequate school infrastructure, inadequately functioning schools, high teacher absenteeism, a large number of teacher vacancies, poor quality of education, and insufficient funding. Schools may not be accessible to other categories of children who are considered "at risk," including orphans, child laborers, street children, and victims of natural disasters and uprisings.

Additionally, there is no unified educational system; rather, children are assigned to private, government-aided, and government institutions based on their social class and capacity to pay. The most prestigious English-language schools are those that are affiliated with the prestigious CBSE CISCE and IB examination boards. These schools provide globally recognized curricula and syllabuses. Those who are unable to finance private education attend English-language government-aided institutions that are affiliated with state-level examination boards. Additionally, the children of the impoverished majority are served by municipal schools or administrations that are inadequately administered. Consequently, the quality of the education that young people in India receive varies significantly based on their background and means, a trend that is both problematic and concerning, despite the fact that the Constitution guarantees education for all and a majority of individuals can now access educational resources.

'Free and compulsory education' is in reality basic literacy instruction administered by scarcely qualified 'para teachers' in India's 600,000 villages and expanding urban slums.

The increasing aspirations of impoverished communities as a result of their involvement in a political democracy and the emphasis on elementary education over the past two decades have resulted in the majority of children at the age of six enrolling in residential bridge courses and schools/learning centers. Nevertheless, the rudimentary physical and human infrastructure and substandard quality of these institutions frequently result in children either falling out of the school system without acquiring any knowledge or continuing to do so with limited knowledge. In order to mitigate the initial disadvantages of the impoverished in the educational sector, which are a result of malnourishment, poverty, and health-related debility, it is necessary to simultaneously prioritize food, subsistence, and health guarantees.

The United Progressive Alliance, the current Indian government, appears to be dedicated to addressing these challenges, as evidenced by their Common Minimum Programme. In this regard, the implementation of a 2% education cess on tax, the emphasis on employment guarantees, and the establishment of a National Rural Health Mission are all positive developments.

As a result of the empowering and redistributive effects of education, India's objective is to ensure that all individuals have access to fundamental education. Literacy and the associated issue of access to education have been prioritized over curricular content until recently. J. Dreze and A. Sen contend that literacy is a critical instrument for self-defense in a society that incorporates written media into its social interactions. An individual who lacks literacy is significantly

less prepared to defend themselves in court, secure a bank loan, enforce inheritance rights, capitalize on new technology, compete for secure employment, board the appropriate bus, engage in political activity, or otherwise effectively engage in the contemporary economy and society.

Dreze and Sen contend that the 1991 census revealed that approximately half of the adult population was unable to read or write. It is not surprising that literacy rates vary significantly between states and between genders. Literacy rates are lower in the northern Hindi-belt states, which have experienced inferior economic performance in comparison to their western and southern counterparts. Male literacy ranges from 60% in Bihar to 94% in Kerala, while female literacy ranges from approximately 34% in Bihar to 88% in Kerala. The most significant gender disparity is observed in Rajasthan, where female literacy is 44% and male literacy is 77%. In the 1990s, education policy was primarily focused on the acceleration of literacy and school attendance, as well as the establishment of an equitable system for females, as had been intended by the Kothari Commission in 1964. Fifteen

However, in recent years, the focus has shifted from the provision of fundamental literacy skills to the content of school curricula, sparking debates. The traditionally secular emphasis within education has been the subject of these debates, which have become increasingly vulnerable as a result of the successes of avowedly Hindu political parties.

Funding and higher education

State and federal governments share education duties under the Constitution. Central government establishes policies, motivates innovation, and develops frameworks. Education is managed by state governments. Since states administer education resources differently, this has worsened issues. Recently, resource shortages have become the biggest challenge. Allocation is another problem. What are state priorities when resources are scarce? Richer southern states outperform poorer northern ones. Central and state governments struggle to allocate 4% of GDP on education. With 59 million children out of school and 90 million in school learning little, the common school system is not a Kothari Commission utopian vision but a need that will determine India's position in the world. Richer states have better elementary and secondary schools than Bihar and Jharkhand. Different higher education access has led to economic inequalities. Southern states' IT success is due to their more engineering universities and graduates.

The multiplicity of engineering institutes in southern India has helped concentrate high-tech businesses. Compared to northern states, Bihar has fewer than one engineering college per 10 million inhabitants, whereas Tamil Nadu has approximately four.³⁸ Growth of the IT and BPO businesses and private sector computer usage and application have had a major influence on the highly skilled labor market and higher education. In reality, private-sector education is rising, accounting for about 2% of GDP. Unfortunately, private-sector educational institutions demand exorbitant fees, limiting this high-quality education to IT industry hubs and according to income.

The Indian government has struggled to divide higher education funds between the public and private sectors. Higher education institutions became more autonomous after the 1986 reforms, although government spending on them decreased. Due to a resource shortage, the government cut higher education subsidies by 50%. Universities and technical education institutes have two committees to raise funds. Universities were pushed to increase tuition and seek commercial support.³⁹ The balance between the public and private sectors becomes nearly synonymous with quality and access. While India needs top-notch graduates, it also needs to ensure that not just the wealthy can get degrees.

This excellence/equity conundrum is mostly negotiated by the UGC. It administers funds to universities and colleges, maintains and raises academic standards, creates policies to do this, and advises the federal and state governments on higher education expansion and improvement. Higher education's share of the education budget has declined from 24% in the 1970s to 9% currently. This is a concern since Indian institutions and colleges differ in quality. Widening access is another issue: just 6% of 18-23-year-olds attend college.

The annual outflow of students from India's second-rate tertiary education institutions shows no signs of abating, and a growing number of foreign universities want to establish campuses in India even as government budgetary allocations for higher education are shrinking rapidly. UGC top brass have no choice but to focus on their mandate to raise teaching and learning standards in academia and teach business illiterate college and university managers.

In view of these trends and issues, the NDA platform committed to protect higher education institution independence, although management was centralized in recent years. The party's policies shifted public money to the private sector while placing party supporters (including RSS members) to higher education's top positions. Pro-Hindustan policies also affected universities, colleges, and other academic groups, which opponents say centralized education control.

Critics argued that university vice chancellors were selected only on their support for the new policies:

In Delhi University, the BJP-led State Government violated all democratic norms and weakened statutory entities like the Academic Council. Governing Bodies of Delhi Administration and other institutions were filled with known supporters with minimal academic accomplishments or interest in education to ensure nomination of associated principals. This approach also assured teaching appointments. These RSS-filled Governing Boards openly undermined university autonomy and supported campus corruption and hooliganism. The BJP administration is devaluing education by violating and removing numerous parts of the teachers' agreement from last year.

The staff changes extended beyond universities. RSS supporters or sympathizers have been appointed to the Indian Council of Social Science Research the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies in Simla, the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, and the All India Council for Technical Education. New ICHR appointees supported the VHP Ayodhya campaign. Also, the National Museum galleries have been renamed and the exhibits shown match the Sangh Parivar's interpretation of Indian history.

The University Grants Commission's power and autonomy over teacher wages, advancement, and working conditions were weakened. Using the UGC to commercialize education and slash state expenditure. NIEPA and NCERT staff were also changed.

The BJP's policies have affected academics beyond educational institutions.⁴⁵ Academics are concerned about these happenings. Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar said: 'Research academics shouldn't trash outstanding persons.

Neither new textbooks nor RSS workers running national education institutions have been the BJP's biggest education policy triumph. The discriminating speech seems to have been accepted by the population, many of whom were raised with Nehru's secular ideas of an inclusive Indian national identity. In addition to education system issues, the BJP worried that education would damage India's inclusive identity.

Recent figures on tertiary-sector education growth show how difficult it is for the new administration to create and execute policies. National colleges and universities increased from 565 and 25 in 1953 to 15,600 and 311 in 2004. Higher education students have increased from 230,000 to 9.28 million and staff from 15,000 to 462,000. Over 2.5 million Indians graduate from university.

The Tenth Plan (2002-7) commission aims to find and designate 25 colleges 'with potential for greatness' nationwide. The UGC concept paper says these institutions would be 'supported at a higher level to enable them to acquire excellence in teaching and research'.⁴⁸ They and a few hundred colleges will have academic freedom to experiment with the curriculum, teach innovatively, administer their own exams, and grant joint degrees with affiliating institutions. In 1994, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India was founded to evaluate and grade higher education institutions on a scale of 1 to 5 due to quality control difficulties.

These recommendations seem to indicate the necessity to invest in higher education to meet the increasing economy's standards. NAAC is crucial to increasing accountability for publicly supported institutions. The present administration recognizes the necessity for university subsidies, but it is unclear whether they will be used to expand access to historically underserved populations..

II. CONCLUSION

In the May 2004 general election, BJP educational reforms had little impact. Some rural regions prioritized roads, electricity, water, and employment above schooling. The NDA education agenda became more 'communal' and patriotic. Three noteworthy points:

Indian culture, tradition, and ethical principles shall be emphasized in syllabuses.

Bharatiya language degradation in schools and colleges shall be addressed.

The mother language will be promoted for teaching.

Increased efforts will be made to promote Sanskrit.

These measures will not be executed under the Congress-dominated United Progressive Alliance administration. Indian politics will still focus on education. For its political survival, the administration must fix the education system's flaws and undo the NDA's modifications.

In its 28 May 2004 Common Minimum Programme, the government pledged to raise public education spending to at least 6% of GDP, impose a cess on all central taxes to 'universalize access to quality basic education' and reverse the five-year communalization of school syllabuses. Illiteracy is a major driver of poverty, and both the budget and Independence Day message underlined the significance of education. President Abdul Kalam wants education spending to rise by 2-3% of GDP.

Parliamentary opponents have criticized the administration many times. The Marxists condemned the UPA's textbook revision for 'falling short of what the new administration has integrated in the Common Minimum Programme in its section on education'.⁵⁰ Relations between the national and state governments will likely remain tight. The BBC reported in August 2004 that ministers from five BJP-run states left a cabinet conference to create a new education strategy.⁵¹

Previous government efforts to desecularize Indian education were intended to boost the BJP's future support base. But they also emerged from a broad realization that India's education system fails many of its young people, either by not providing education or essential skills. The Common Minimum Programme is a commendable effort to restore India's education system's focus on access, quality, and secularism. While these goals haven't altered since Nehru's time, it's unclear whether the present administration can be the first to balance quality with fairness.

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