

Digitization on Indian Education System: Role of Social Media

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Abstract

The Indian Education system traditionally had been rooted to a set of core values which had bearings to the ancient religious arenas giving rise to the ‘guru-sishya parampara’ in the Hindu ‘tolas’ and Islamic madrasas. Change had been ushered in by the British who had tried to Westernize, formalize and modernize the traditional Indian education system, mostly owing to the impact of Lord T.B. Macaulay’s *Minutes on Indian Education*. Ever since India’s independence over the last seven decades the Indian education system has undergone multiple systemic changes from the primary to the Higher Education levels and the system itself has been challenged by various socio-economic, linguistic and regional factors. However, none of these challenges stand in comparison to the challenges that the Indian education system has had to face during the advent of the Covid virus pandemic and also the almost simultaneous ushering in of the New Educational Policy (NEP) in 2020.

This paper contextualizes the challenges that the Indian education system has had to face over the last few years and weaves into this narrative of discussion the impact of media, social media and the efforts of digital literacy that the government is attempting to transpose upon a fragile education system that runs across a vast country that is beset with social, cultural, religious, caste, political, linguistic and economic divides. The paper looks into the strengths of the traditional system of education that still runs in the veins of the people of this large country which has over a length of time graduated itself into the Western system of imparting of education by the British. The paper shall look at how this apparent comfort zone of stasis which had been built over the last seven decades now stands challenged by the precepts and demands of NEP 2020 and how media glare and social media narrative is eating into the stasis of comfort that India had built up over the last seven decades. Finally the paper shall also look how far digitization and digital literacy are workable in India.

Keywords: Macaulay’s *Minutes*; NEP 2020; Media; Social Media; Digitization; Digital Literacy

Introduction:

India or Bharat, as some people prefer to call it nowadays, is a vast country geographically and has a rich history and culture to adhere to. Stretched across 3.3 million square kilometers India presents a huge challenge to its administrators in the backdrop of its diversity in terms of its religious, racial, linguistic, caste, economic and sectarian parameters. A country of 141 crore people is an imposing prospect in terms of providing food, shelter, clothing, medical facilities, transportation networks, digital technology and of course education. For centuries India had been cocooned and secure in its ancient parameters, its

own knowledge systems where often religion had been the final word. The population mostly during the ancient times was fully Hindu and it paved the way to set up what we today brand as Indian Knowledge System. This closed and almost sanctimonious religion-based system gave rise to an education system which was guided by rishis, munis and ‘acharyas’ or traditional teachers who imparted education on the traditional Indian Knowledge Systems at their own ‘ashramas’ or homes which were located in the lap of nature. This came to be known as the *gurukul* system. The *gurukul* system imparted education on Vedic Mathematics, Law, Statecraft or Polity, Warfare, Martial Arts, Ancient Medicine or *ayurveda* and imparted the ideas of compassion, resilience, grit, determination, grace, humility and meditation which per se came to be known as *yoga*. The *gurukul* system created a huge knowledge base which was essentially generational and generative---the ‘*guru*’ or teacher handing down knowledge and values to the next generation of learner or the ‘*shishya*’. With time this created a robust system of knowledge which formed the backbone of the education system of our country.

This system of education was essentially oxygenated by royal patronage and well-known gurus as Kripacharya and Dronacharya became wonderful examples of the ‘*acharya*’ became a part of the royal court. However, with the waning of royal influence the basis of the traditional Hindu and religious education base received a jolt and slowly disintegrated to much more private education space known as the ‘*tola*’. Needless to say, both the *gurukul* and the ‘*tola*’ essentially imparted education through Sanskrit. This age-old system received its first jolt when India was attacked by the Islamic invaders like Muhammed Ghazni, Mohammed Gori and Ahmed Shah Abdali as they not only destroyed seats of ancient Hindu learning like that at Nalanda or at Sarnath, burnt scriptures but also stayed back and politically conquered India. At the same time they set up the Arabic and Persian based system of education which came to be known as the ‘*madrasa*’ system of education. Therefore, with time the ancient country of India learnt to embrace not only the Islamic settlers who had originally been the invaders of the country but also the ‘*madrasa*’ system of education. In effect therefore by the 16th century India had two religious-based education systems which ran concomitantly, parallel and were effective in their own ways in imparting education to a part of the population which was privileged enough to receive such education and at the same time could afford it.

The Westernization of Indian Education:

The British under Sir Thomas Roe came to India in the year 1600 and as history tells us that in the garb of the commercial face of the British East India Company they began to exert control over India by the year 1757. During these one hundred and fifty years the British not only began to lord over India commercially but also militarily. In the garb of these two factors the British also brought about the Christianization of India and the arrival of missionaries or Jesuit Fathers as we call them began the process of Christianization of the traditional education system through a network of small missionary schools which targeted very effectively the lower-caste Hindu population and the tribals and the increasingly disgruntled Muslim population. The result would actually be far-reaching for the education system in India and that proved to be the case about a century later when India finally became a part of the British Crown with the declaration of the Government of India Act, 1858. The Act stated that it would be tenable upon the whole Indian population declaring unequivocally “To the Princes, Chiefs and Peoples of India” (Government of India Act, 1858). This political domination was the route for the British to bring about cultural domination over India and as part of this cultural domination the education system could not be far behind.

The Westernization of Indian Education system was actually a systematized onslaught on the traditional education system which had been in place and had deep roots since centuries. The process of Christianization could not be complete unless scientific temper and growth of technology became important by words in the Indian education system that was envisaged by the British. It is in this context that Lord T.B.Macaulay's *Minutes on Education in India* becomes a document of paramount importance when we contextualize Indian education for over a period of nearly a century. Lord Macaulay looked at the Indian traditional system as morally strong and as the backbone of India's culture and history, its strength and he felt that the growth of Western Education in India had to be the weapon through which the very backbone of India's cultural ethos could be broken down. The document notes:

"...I do not think that we would ever conquer this country unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore, I propose we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation" (Macaulay, 1835)

It is in the context of the ushering in of the changes introduced by the Macaulayan system of Western education that we need to discuss the research problem which we are discussing as the focal point of our paper.

Research Problem:

The lengthy historicization of the Indian traditional education system and the ushering in of Western education in India might give rise to a misconception that this paper is only a historiography of the Indian education system and its various parameters. The research problem that is in discussion is obviously as to how we look at Media, Social Media and the Digitization process that of late has been having a massive tentacle impact on the Indian education system particularly in the concomitant influences of Covid -19 pandemic and the ushering in of the NEP 2020. However, while discussing these aspects we would do well to understand that the ancient education system of India which the British like Lord Macaulay both respected, feared and detested as the backbone of Indian ethos went massive changes following the publication of the *Minutes on Education in India* and the subsequent ushering in of British Rule in India under the British Crown. Therefore, for nearly a century till India's independence this system of education guided, nourished and torpedoed on the Indian minds by the British became its matrix which came to the Indian government as a legacy at the time of India's Independence. With the coming of the NEP 2020 following the recommendations of the K.Kasturirangan Committee Draft Resolutions Report 2019 our education system has become a much more challenging scenario. Previous Education Commissions like the University Education Commission or Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49), Secondary Education Commission or the V.Mudaliar Commission (1952-53) and the D.S. Kothari Commission (1964-66) had wished to create a mix between a solid functional base of our education system on one hand and yet to empower students who would become ready with needs of the fast-changing economic scenario chugged along by the Five Year Plan Periods. The motive was to create a skilled and educated workforce. Yet as we enter the third decade of the 21st century we find that the Indian education system cannot afford to be insulated and protected anymore, particularly with the effects of globalization and privatization over three decades now. The question of marketability of the Indian education system has become paramount, driven by open-market economy needs. This paper therefore now shall delve into the challenges that lie ahead for the Indian

education system in the backdrop of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the glare of attention that media and social media throw at us as we enter into an age of digitization.

Literature Review:

Needless to say a lot of material is available on the Indian Education system and its traditional bearings. Books like Sahil Verma's *The Education System: The Fault in Its Code* (Bookscape Notion Press 2019) envisages the darkest secrets of the education system in India. Another discursive book on the education system of Modern India is *History Of Education In Modern India* by Suresh Chandra Ghosh (Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd.2013). *Education In Contemporary India* by M V Srinivasan (Pearson India, 2019) looks into the Indian education system in post-independent India. The book looks at the various problems that the education system in our country is challenged and confronted with. Khritish Swargiary and Kavita Roy look into the historical development of the Indian education system from the ancient Vedic period till date through their book *Education (Then and Now in India)* published from Notion press in 2022. Similarly there are quite a few articles which delve into the influence of social media and its effect on the Indian education system. These include Priyanka Khurana's article "*Digital Education: Impact of Social Media in Quality Education*" (*GAP Interdisciplinarity* (Vol II, Issue 1) and a dedicated, featured article on the website www.shoutoutuk.org titled "*Impacts of Media in Teaching and Learning*". Therefore, it is in the context of a small sample size of resourced articles available to us that we feel that our article holds an empirical value of thought and sifting of knowledge. The Review of Literature therefore offers scope for our article to be treated from an empirical perspective and offer fresh ideas for the enhancement of the scope of research.

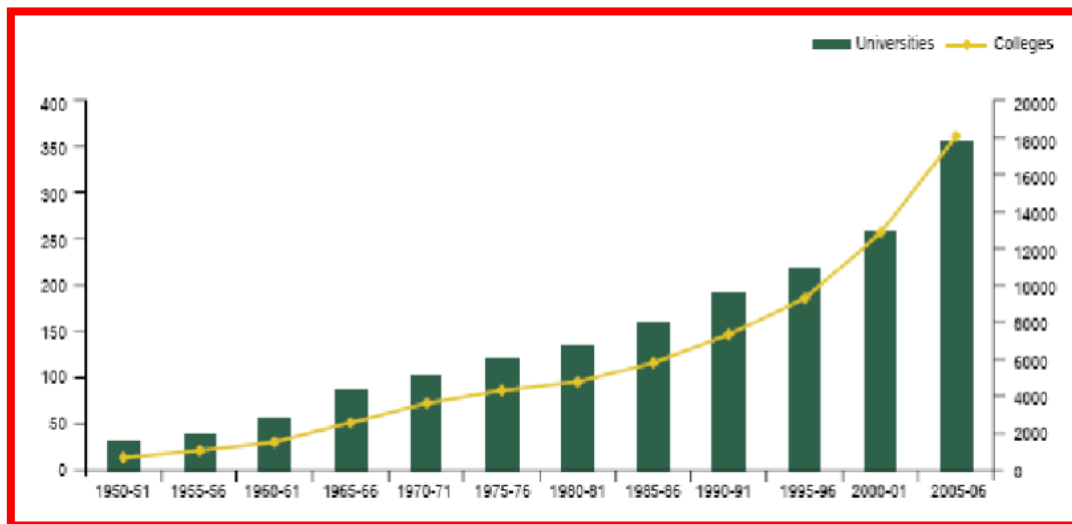
Westernization, Globalization and Changing Face of India's Education System:

From 1835 to the point when India became independent, the Indian Education system remained in a stage of stasis. The Higher Education scenario during the pre-Independence era was on one hand an attempt by the British to paratroop their ideas of Western education on the Indian psyche. Another section of the Indian population felt that a strong resistance movement was necessary in order to blend the ideas of Indian tradition with the outlook of the West. The setting up of DAV Colleges and the Khalsa Colleges were a part of this resistance movement. Post-independence the newly independent government understood that if India had to stand out in the committee of Nations then the Indian Education system, particularly then a solid Higher Education base was an utmost necessity. The setting up of the Radhakrishnan Committee and its subsequent report in 1948-49 was an attempt to consolidate traditional Indian ethos and to reawaken the Indian national psyche and integrate it with the Western education model that had been in place since 1835. The Radhakrishnan Committee in its report envisaged changes in the Higher Education sector so as to produce skilled man-power base and in the enhancement of technical abilities. The Varadaraja Mudaliar Commission set up in 1952-53 looked at the school education system and wished to set up a socially equitable access system through the introduction of vocational training of students, incentivized merit-cum-means scholarship and having a socially expansionist viewpoint by reaching out to the SCs and STs. Between 1964 and 1966 The D.S. Kothari Commission went a few steps ahead with investments on adult education, Agricultural Education, Vocational training, Technical education and improvement of human resource through teacher training programmes. Yet all this was done almost informally and there were no impositions on part of the Central government, respecting the fact that education was on the Concurrent List and

Centre-State relations could well be compromised through interference. Therefore, the cocooned, secure system of the Indian education remained intact in age-old phenomena and changes were slow to be ushered in, particularly in the Higher Education sector.

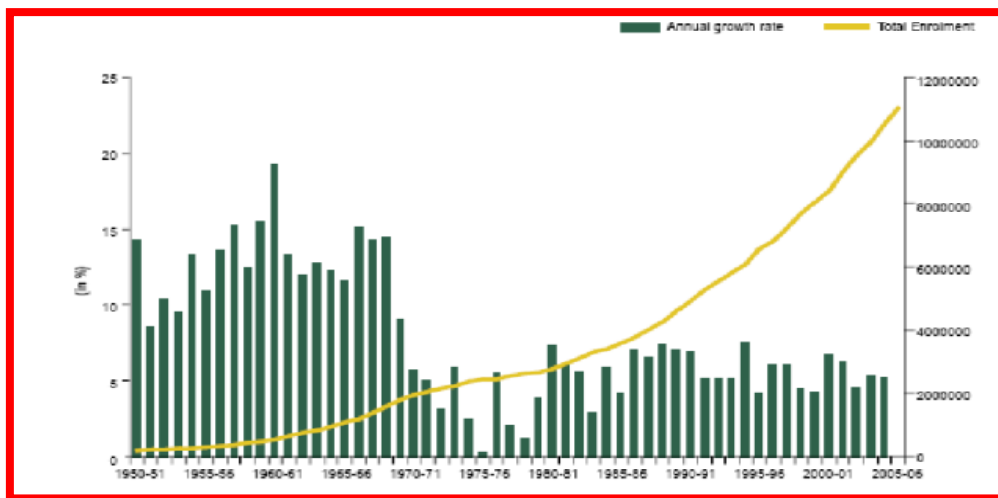
Globalization, Media Glare, Social Media and NEP 2020:

The apparent sleepwalking of the education system in India had never felt the need to be advertised. The Indian ethos had always been one of humility about one’s own achievements and therefore this ethos could not be compromised with. The advent of globalized economy meant that suddenly the Indian education system lay challenged. The world was looking at it and the danger of systemic and infrastructural loopholes being picked became a real threat for Indian education. The aspirations of the Indian education system aspired for by the Radhakrishnan Committee, the Mudaliar Committee and the Kothari Commission suddenly seemed bereft of substance. The sum-total of all these Commissions did not seem to add up to much. Media glare on the Indian education system and its technical and substantive inability to keep up to promises suddenly laid bare the fact that Indian education system on the global scenario was lagging far behind. The IITs and IIMs had for long had shared a place of pride in the Indian education system and the closed nature of governance had given an idea that these institutions were perhaps world class. The advent of ranking systems for Commonwealth Universities and by Times suddenly exposed the fact that even these institutions despite immense government funding had not done too much of empirical research work. Most Colleges and Universities across the country seemed to be in a state of shambles of various magnitudes. Globalization and the threat of privatization had stripped the Indian education system of its sheen.



Source: Researchgate **Growth of Higher Education Institutions in India.**

From a about 50 Universities at the start of the 1960s the number of Universities went up to about 200 at the start of the 1990s when globalization started off in India. The number of colleges during the same period rose from around 4000 to 8000. This exponential growth however did not necessarily mean that quality of education imparted had exponentially risen as well. The media also pointed out the government’s idea of making education more accessible to wider range of people of society could be made from the sharp rise in enrolment during the same period.



Source: Researchgate **Rise in Enrolment in HEIs**

The enrolment in Colleges had risen from under 15 lakhs to over 50 lakhs in the same period. The response of the Central Government and its policy makers was typical as that of a government facing the panic button. It decided that the education sector needed to become more competitive and therefore the private sector's participation in the Education sector was ushered in with trepidation. But the problem was much more deep-rooted and mere private participation in the Higher Education sector could not necessarily turn the tide. In a vast country like India where a large section of the learners of the Higher Education field are first generation learners and hail from the socially and economically weaker sections of society, privatization of Higher Education lay before it like an all-consuming monster. Within a short period of time there was a sprouting of private Universities and Colleges, particularly in the disciplines of Engineering, Medical Sciences, Law, Pharmacy and Management courses. The media lapped up this growth of the private institutions, some of whom undoubtedly deserved the accolades with their state-of-art laboratory and classroom facilities which government-funded institutions could hardly ever match up to.

With the advent of the 2010s, the Government felt that the time had come to re-boot the education system of India. The recommendations and subsequent implementations of the D.S. Kothari Commission Report had become too dated while some of the recommendations of the earlier Education Commissions had not been implemented properly. The appointment of the K. Kasturirangan Committee in 2019 was part of a wider ambit and the Committee itself was comprehensive in its membership. The Draft Resolutions of the Kasturirangan Committee Report have now been adopted as the new National Education Policy 2020 or NEP 2020. The NEP 2020 looks at the education system in a much more holistic manner and incorporates skill and ability enhancement components which actually had been the vision of the Radhakrishnan and Mudaliar Committee reports but had not been implemented aggressively. Only time will tell if in a vast and diverse country like India, it is possible to implement all the recommendations made in the NEP 2020.

But, the NEP 2020 surely does envisage a much more-digital driven era in recommendation. It is here that the role of the social media has come into play in the field of education. The growth of the internet in our country has made it almost mandatory for each and every institution to have its own social media handles. From official websites to institutional pages on Facebook and Instagram, from Whatsapp groups to You Tube channels, the education system is now a market-savvy proposition. Social media

branding has become an important component in the education sector, particularly for Higher Education Institutions. The advent of NAAC, NIRF, AISHE and such other accreditation bodies has made it even more important that marketing strategies and reaching out to the faceless multitudes has to be chalked out. Truly the rat-race is on as grade points and rankings are up for grabs. This in turn has spawned a huge outburst of the use of the digital world on part of the learners.

Covid-19 Pandemic and Digitization of Education in India:

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world in 2020 the global stage came to a standstill. One of the challenges that India faced during this period was how to keep the education sector afloat in a fast-changing and challenging scenario. Demographically India is a very vast country and the fruits of the Sarva Shiksha Mission had been that the school education system had become very robust. But this demographic component with its hugeness now became a major source of headache for the administrators of the education sector because a large part of the learners hailed from socially and economically challenged sections of the population. The digital world was a resource beyond their affordability levels. To keep pedagogy afloat under the circumstances was a matter of grave concern. The almost-parallel floating of the NEP 2020 meant that the challenges in front of the education sector in India became manifold. It is during this critical time that the social media handles and websites of education institutions, particularly the HEIs became an important tool to keep pedagogy alive and kicking in this vast country. For decades India had believed in class-room teaching as the only means of imparting knowledge. The lecture-method in front of the blackboard with the chalk-and-duster method had been the only way known for carrying on with teaching. The physical precincts of the laboratory were the only place for experiments to be detailed out to students. The outbreak of the pandemic literally forced the education system in India to embrace alternate means of teaching.. The digitization of the Indian education system had been a dream for a long time which would be at par with the West. The HEIs in particular had been very lethargic in adopting to the alternative means of teaching and data would prove that only a small section of Colleges had used only a part of funds to change their classrooms into smart classes.

The pandemic now literally shook up the education system to become techno-savvy as almost each and every faculty across higher secondary schools and higher education institutions had to brush up their skills at using the computer and to use Google Meet, CISCO Webex, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. For a long time HEIs in particular had almost sneered at the use of the digital world and had told that the use of such technology was only a matter of fashionable show-off fit enough for private institutions imparting professional courses. The vision of the NEP 2020 for a skill-driven techno-savvy education system was not actually created by NEP 2020 but was almost accidentally ushered in by the exigencies of the pandemic. Hand-written notes were replaced by the increasing use of the Google Classroom. The websites of the institutions had remained in disuse for ages and for most government-funded schools it wasn't even part of the investment plans and for government-aided HEIs the website had been there only because the AISHE and NAAC demanded that they have one. The Covid pandemic and NEP 2020 almost bulldozed institutions to spend money on digitization drives with the focus shifting to sprucing up websites, spending on creating dedicated computer servers and launching social media handles which would be displayed on official websites. Faculty members learnt the skill to make videos of lectures of using the Whiteboard on Google Meet and such other platforms. Science Faculty members had to learn the skill of using virtual labs. The social media platforms were abuzz with activities, websites were

abuzz with information, links and notices. The digital revolution in the education sector was almost a silent one. Teachers who once had told their students not to access the social media too much now felt the need to tell their learners to access You Tube and Facebook Live sessions for lectures and interactive doubt clearing sessions. HoIs who had previously shunned investing on licensed software suddenly went on a spending spree. The INFLIBNET became an important place to access knowledge as the physical library was unavailable.

Conclusion:

The paper therefore has discussed at length the changing face of the education system in India. The topic of discussion carries a wide spectrum of social historiography and has a blend of data and discussion looking into the historical perspectives of the education scenario in India across ages. The role of media and social media are comparatively new phenomena in the education sector. They are literally the children of globalization and privatization. The education system of India had mostly been religion dependent and had loved to be secure in its limited parameters and had never felt the need to be a product. Education was calling, more of a vocation, a way of life and the Westernization of the Indian education system made it into a 'product' over a period of time. When the British left India they threw the Indian education system high and dry, further devastated by Partition of the country. The homelessness of the millions and the trauma of uprooted lives made it impossible for education to have pre-eminence in a torn, freshly-independent country. The first three Five Year Plans and the vision of the Radhakrishnan Committee and the Mudaliar Committee brought the education sector back in focus because the Nehru Government understood that without a stable education system India could never become a major workforce in the world and would lag behind the committee of nations.

However, it has to be realized that globalization ushered in by the Narasimha Rao government and catalyzed by what has come to be known as 'Manmohanomics' changed the face of India irretrievably. Market forces began to work on India and thus the education sector was challenged again. The world was watching one of the most populous countries of the globe and India needed to respond with quality and systemic changes. The recommendations of the Kothari Commission became a bit dated as time went on and therefore the dynamics of the Indian education system had be changed again. NEP 2020 is not fool-proof and there are genuine fears that in the long run it might become restrictive and boil down to jargon and create an education system which becomes pocket-heavy for the average Indian. The concerns of large-scale privatization of the Higher Education system in particular remain a major looming monster. But it is true that just as globalization ushered in choices for the average Indian and increased levels of affordability, it is quite possible that HEIs in particular produce may produce learners who are technologically savvy and understand the market-orientation better. Social media handles might make even age-old deglamorized government institutions to spruce up and become tempting for learners. With NAAC and NIRF poised for a rebranding it is possible that the social media and media might come to the rescue of the education sector and make it much more competitive, skilled and produce learners with greater technical and technological ability. Time is now and India is on the threshold of hope and advancement.

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