

EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION: FROM THE ANCIENT GURUKUL SYSTEM TO THE DIGITAL ERA

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to explore the shifting paradigm of Indian education system from Gurukul to the modern classroom of digital age. It is going to present a chronicle of India's educational Odyssey. The transition has taken place from traditional models such as the Gurukul system to modern methods like classroom-based learning and more recently, to online and distance mode of education. Several Indian thinkers have contributed to the Indian education system by introducing fresh perspectives, alternative approaches, and practical solutions to address the diverse needs and challenges of education in India. These thinkers, among others, have left a lasting legacy on the Indian education system, influencing policies, pedagogical approaches, and the broader discourse on education in the country.

Keywords: Holistic and inclusive, personalized attention, commercial, death of distance, collaborative learning.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in the augmentation of the hidden potentialities and success of any individual, society, and Nation. It serves as a catalyst for social, economic, cultural and traditional transformation. A well-educated populace, equipped with relevant knowledge, aptitudes, and competencies, is indispensable for fostering both economic prosperity and social well-being. Furthermore, education serves as a potent tool for achieving social mobility and plays a pivotal role in building a fair and just society. Sri Aurobindo opines that the central aim of education is: “the building of the powers of the human mind and spirit; it is the formation or, as I would prefer to view it, the evoking of knowledge and will and of the power to use knowledge, character, culture...” (421). Mahatma Gandhi views education as a means to develop three H's - Hand, Heart, and Head. Rabindranath Tagore believes that “our education should be in full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual aesthetic, social and spiritual; and our educational institutions should be in the very heart of our society, connected with it by the living bonds of varied cooperation. For the purpose of true education is to realize at every step how our

training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings. (1357)

Education System: A Paradigm Shift

The education system has undergone a transformative change in the post-Covid period. Global economic, innovative technological, and pedagogical currents are interweaving to produce paradigmatic changes that challenge many of the traditional practices and environments of educational institutions. The government of India has introduced the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It represents a comprehensive overhaul of the country's education system, aiming to address various challenges and align with contemporary needs. It advocates a more holistic and inclusive approach to education that values multilingualism, cultural diversity, critical thinking, creativity, and experiential learning. It recognizes the potential of distance and digital education to enhance access, equity, quality, and flexibility in our education system. It also promotes the integration of the Indian Knowledge System with modern-day curriculum and pedagogy.

The evolution of the Indian education system reflects a significant paradigmatic shift over time. The transition has taken place from traditional models such as the Gurukul system to modern system like classroom-based learning and, more recently, to online and distance mode of education. Several Indian thinkers have contributed to the Indian education system by introducing fresh perspectives, alternative approaches, and practical solutions to address the diverse needs and challenges of education in India like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Dharampal, J.L. Nehru and Sonam Wangchuk. These thinkers, among others, have left a lasting legacy on the Indian education system, influencing policies, pedagogical approaches, and the broader discourse on education in the country.

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: FROM PAST TO PRESENT

The Gurukul / Ashram system (residential institution) was the traditional educational model in ancient India. The pupils lived with a guru (teacher) in a sequestered environment known as a Gurukul. The emphasis of education was on holistic development—the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual growth of the students. It encompassed along with academic education, moral values, character development, community involvement, cultural promotion, and vocational skills. The guru played a central role in nurturing every aspect of the disciple's growth and development, both intellectually and spiritually. A wide range of subjects, including philosophy, literature, science, and the arts, were taught. The integration of science and the arts offered numerous benefits for students' all-round development, including fostering critical thinking, creativity, interdisciplinary connections,

emotional intelligence, cultural understanding, communication skills, and personal growth.

One of the defining features of the Gurukul system was the personalized attention given to every disciple. This close teacher-student relationship fostered individualized learning experiences and allowed the guru to provide personalized guidance, close mentorship, and support to each pupil. The guru mentored and monitored the special needs, abilities, and interests of each disciple. Lessons were personalized based on the disciple's learning style, pace, and level of understanding, ensuring that every learner received relevant and meaningful education.

The end of the Gurukul system in India coincided with significant changes in the country's educational landscape, particularly following the introduction of British colonial education policies. One pivotal moment was the implementation of Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute on Education in 1835, which laid the foundation for a new direction in Indian education system. The traditional indigenous systems were declined and transformed in the aftermath of Macaulay's Minute. The Minute advocated for the promotion of English-language, literature, and Western educational methods. It aims to create a class that would be Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, opinions, morals, and intellect. These Indians educated through such education would be a help in the expansion and maintenance of empire. The British believed that English education would serve as a tool for spreading Western ideas, facilitating administrative efficiency, and assimilating Indians into British culture and governance. These institutions followed a structured curriculum, standardized examinations, and hierarchical teaching methods, in contrast to the more informal and decentralized nature of the Gurukul system. This system focused more on specialized academic subjects and professional careers, with less emphasis on holistic development, practical skills, and the diverse learning needs of students.

The intellectuals like Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore condemned such European education, which is grossly commercial, materialistic, insufficient and utilitarian in nature. Sri Aurobindo opines that the teaching imparted through such a system is “denationalising, degrading and impoverishing to the national mind, soul and character because it is overshadowed by a foreign hand and foreign in aim, method, substance and spirit.” (417) In response to Macaulay's recommendations, the British colonial government established modern schools, colleges, and universities across India. The legacy of these colonial-era reforms continues to shape the trajectory of education in India today as the country grapples with the ongoing tensions between Western educational models and indigenous educational philosophies.

In recent years, there has been a paradigmatic shift from classroom to screen room and from face to face mode to online and distance education modes, from blackboard to white board, from real to virtual, from chalk to chat driven by

advancements in technology and the increasing demand for accessible and flexible learning options. Such form of education is a panacea for most of the problems besetting the conventional educational system. The progress in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the single most important factor in the growth of such kind of learning in recent years:

Technology offers a host of possibilities for connecting far-flung students with the classroom. It brings geographically disparate individuals together with instructors, allowing for a rich variety of educational resources and interactive materials. It enables those who live far from traditional institutions to take classes and gain access to various types of educational materials. (Darrell: Digital Schools, 83)

Online education platforms and distance learning institutions offer a wide range of courses and programs across various disciplines. These platforms use digital technologies such as the internet, video conferencing, smartphones, apps like zoom, google meet, webex, podcast and multimedia resources to deliver educational content to students:

...Educational uses of digital technology encompass the use of internet-connected computing devices such as laptop and tablet computers and 'smart phones', as well as the institutional uses of these technologies in the form of virtual learning environments, electronic smartboards and so on. These technological devices are used throughout educational systems to support a diversity of forms of educational provision from kindergartens to work-based training. (Neil: Education, 18)

Online learning platforms provide interactive multimedia content, live lectures, discussion forums, and assessments accessible through the internet. The learners can access educational materials at any time and from anywhere, using computers, tablets, or smartphones and cloud computing. Digital education revolutionized the education system by reducing the physical restrictions and 'frictions' of the 'real' world and by 'death of distance', 'end of geography', and privileging 'virtual' arrangements over material arrangements. This mode of education offers flexibility, allowing learners to pace their studies according to their schedule and preferences. Additionally, online learning facilitates collaborative learning experiences and enables access to resources and expertise from around the world.

Distance education, also known as distance learning or remote learning, refers to a mode of education where students and instructors are physically separated and interact through various forms of technology. In it the learning materials, resources, and communication tools are delivered to the students directly, allowing them to study at their own pace and from locations outside of traditional classroom settings. It offers flexibility in terms of time, location, and pace of learning. It allows

individuals to pursue education while balancing work, family, or other commitments, making it particularly attractive for adult learners and working professionals. It requires students to take more responsibility for their learning process. It enhances access to education for individuals who may face barriers to attending traditional on-campus classes, such as geographical distance, physical disabilities, or work commitments. It allows students to pursue education without the need to relocate or commute to a physical campus. It enables students to access a wide range of courses, programs, and educational resources from institutions around the world. This diversity of options allows students to pursue specialized interests, explore new fields, and access expertise that may not be available locally. It supports lifelong learning by providing opportunities for individuals to continue their education at any stage of life. Whether acquiring new skills for career advancement, pursuing personal interests, or engaging in professional development, distance education offers flexible learning pathways for lifelong learners. Overall, distance education is a valuable and increasingly popular mode of learning that expands access to education, promotes flexibility, and supports lifelong learning. Keegan's highlights some key points of distance education (1986): 1. The separation of the learner and the teacher, 2. The provision of student support services, 3. The use of technical media, 4. The provision of two-way communication, 5. The possibility for occasional meetings of learners. All these are attempts to establish linkages between the distance learner and the distance teaching institution and also among the learners themselves.

Distance education offers many benefits, but it also presents challenges such as maintaining motivation, staying connected with instructors and peers, and ensuring access to reliable technology and internet connectivity. Additionally, distance education may not be suitable for all learners, as it requires a degree of self-discipline, independence, and technological proficiency. While offering numerous benefits, it also presents several demerits to holistic development. This teaching and learning process places a strong emphasis on IQ (intelligence quotient) while neglecting other aspects of intelligence such as EQ (emotional quotient), SQ (social quotient), PQ (physical quotient), AQ (Adversity quotient), and CQ (creativity quotient). This focus on IQ can lead to several negative outcomes.

Technological-based education can accommodate large numbers of students than traditional classrooms. Mass communication is easy; personal communication is very difficult through this mode. It has left no space for personal touch, emotional support, or human connection in the teaching-learning process. The pedagogue can't see the responses and reactions of the learners. It lacks the social dynamics and sense of community found in traditional classrooms. The students and teachers are often physically separated by screens and devices, which can create a sense of isolation and detachment. Without face-to-face interaction, opportunities for personal connections and non-verbal communication may be limited. This can lead to a sense

of anonymity and impersonality, with students feeling like just another face in the crowd. Human interaction is crucial for emotional development as it allows individuals to learn empathy, communication skills, stress management, and conflict resolution. Emotional intelligence, such as understanding and managing emotions, requires real-life interactions and experiences that technology-mediated communication may not fully provide. While technology enables connections across distances, relying solely on virtual relationships and it can hinder the development of meaningful, in-person connections. Physical proximity and non-verbal cues play essential roles in understanding and responding to others' emotions. The world can be connected through the heart, not through the brain. Digital divide, technical glitches, internet connectivity issues, and software malfunctions can disrupt the flow of communication and learning in digital classrooms, creating frustration and hindering personal interaction between students and teachers.

Excessive screen time can lead to a sedentary lifestyle, limiting opportunities for outdoor activities and physical exercise that can have adverse effects on physical health, such as eye strain, disrupted sleep patterns, obesity, and musculoskeletal problems. Digital platforms offer endless sources of entertainment and information, making it easy for students to become distracted during learning activities. Constant distractions can disrupt concentration, leading to reduced academic performance and inhibiting the development of patience and focus.

Digital education may prioritize technical skills over traditional skills such as handwriting, drawing, and manual dexterity. In remote or online learning environments, students may experience feelings of isolation, alienation and lack of sense of belongingness to fellow students, teachers, to the department and university due to limited social interaction. Human connection is vital for emotional well-being and holistic development, and prolonged isolation can have detrimental effects on mental health.

Man is a social animal. Society is needed at every step to inculcate in him various understandings of life. The need for companionship, conversation, and interaction is fundamental to his well-being. Interaction with others provides emotional support and validation. When one shares, he is being cared for. Sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences with others helps one feel understood, accepted, and connected. Engaging in conversation and spending time with others can reduce stress levels. Social interaction stimulates the release of oxytocin, a hormone that promotes feelings of relaxation and bonding, while also reducing levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. Conversing with others stimulates cognitive processes such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Engaging in meaningful discussions and exchanging ideas can broaden perspectives and expand the knowledge base. Social interaction fosters a sense of belonging and promotes identity formation. Being part of a community or social group provides one with a

support network and a shared sense of purpose, which contributes to overall happiness and well-being. Regular interaction with others helps to develop and refine communication skills, including listening, speaking, and non-verbal communication. These skills are essential for building and maintaining relationships, both personally and professionally. Social interaction allows us to practice empathy, compassion, and understanding towards others' emotions. Developing emotional intelligence through social interactions enables us to navigate interpersonal relationships more effectively and build stronger connections with others. Social interaction is a fundamental aspect of human nature that contributes to emotional, cognitive and physical well-being. Cultivating meaningful relationships, participating in social activities, and connecting with others are essential practices for leading a fulfilling and balanced life.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the paradigmatic shift in the Indian education system from the Gurukul system to classroom-based learning, and subsequently to online and distance education modes, reflects the evolving needs and aspirations of learners in a rapidly changing world. Each educational model has its own unique strengths and challenges, and the integration of technology in education opens up new opportunities for innovation, accessibility, and lifelong learning. By adopting a more inclusive and balanced approach to education, the teachers can better prepare students for success in the digital age, fostering not only academic achievement but also personal growth, resilience, and well-being in all aspects of life.

To address these concerns, educators and policymakers should adopt a more holistic and inclusive approach to education that values and nurtures multiple intelligences, including EQ, SQ, and PQ, alongside IQ. Ultimately, the key lies in finding ways to integrate technology in education while preserving the personal touch and human connection that are essential for fostering meaningful learning experiences and nurturing students' holistic development. Sri Aurobindo's views on national education appropriately summarize the points that can be used in the conclusion of this paper: This is the aim and principle of a true national education—not, certainly, to ignore modern truth and knowledge, but to take our foundation on our own being, our own mind, our own spirit. (421)

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