

ഇശൽ
വൈത്യകം
ത്രൈമാസിക ലക്കം: 46

Ishal Paithrkam

Online issue 31

print issue 46

June 2026



Mahakavi Moyinkutty Vaidyar

Mappila Kala Akademi

Department of Cultural Affairs

Government of Kerala-India

June 2026

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പകർപ്പാവകാശം: പ്രസാധകർക്ക്

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പ്രസാധകർ

മഹാകവി മോയിൻകുട്ടി വൈദ്യർ

മാപ്പിള കലാ അക്കാദമി

കൊണ്ടോട്ടി: 673 638

ഫോൺ: 0483 2711432

Ishal Paithrkam

E-ISSN: 2582-550X

Peer-Reviewed

Two issue per year

Bilingual

Issue: 46

Online issue: 31

June: 2026

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Editor

Dr. Shamshad hussain. KT

Publisher

The Secretary, Mahakavi

Moyinkutty Vaidyar mappila

Kala Academy, Department of

Cultural affairs, Government

of Kerala, Kondotty Post

Pin: 673638

India

Ph: +91 483 2711432

Printed at

Kerala state C APT

Kozhikode

www.mappilakalaacademy.org

www.ishalpaithrkam.info

ഇശൽ പൈത്യകത്തിൽ പ്രസിദ്ധീകരിക്കുന്ന രചനകളിലെ ആശയങ്ങൾ മാപ്പിളകലാ അക്കാദമിയുടെതോ, സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാറിന്റേതോ, സാംസ്കാരിക വകുപ്പിന്റേതോ ആയിരിക്കണമെന്നില്ല - എഡിറ്റർ

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India's Education System and the New Educational Policy 2020: A Historical and Contemporary Analysis

Dr. Robinson Jose K

The historical evolution of educational system of the Country reflects from an indigenous Gurukul system with emphasis on holistic and value- based learning to the educational policies of Colonial influence. The track of Indian education has undergone a paradigm shift from tradition to colonial dominated education. The post independent educational reforms primarily aimed to democratize educational system with emphasis on development, equity and national integration. While analyzing historical evolution of education system, it is to be noted that it has undergone continuous changes and evolution from the indigenous Gurukul system to the colonial education policies. Traditionally the education system had focused on spirituality, morality, practical learning and holistic approach. But Colonial education system mainly emphasized administrative system and the introduction of a new class suited to serve Colonial perspective. But after independence, the system focused on democratization, national integration and socio- economic development and with the introduction of New Educational Policy (NEP) in the year 2020, the system further turned into skill – based multidisciplinary approach. The present study is intended to explore the historical evolution of education system in India and analyses various aspects of NEP 2020 with critical approach. The

work also highlights the significance of transformation of education by connecting historical developments with contemporary educational approach, so that India's future can be shaped accordingly for the social, economic and democratic development of the society.

Keywords: Traditional education, Evolution, Colonial perspective, Holistic approach, Continuity and Change, Contemporary analysis - NEP, Philosophy, multidisciplinary, Skill development, Values

Introduction

Education is a key driver of economic growth, innovation, and human resource development and plays a crucial role in the historical development of a civilization and a society. In India, the education system had evolved through various stages. At the same time, it was strongly influenced by religion and culture. Each stage had reflected distinct educational philosophies and institutional structure which spur over to the contemporary education policies of the country. India's educational philosophy and structure have undergone a major shift with the Introduction of New Educational Policy (NEP) of 2020. This policy aimed to transform education system with a multidisciplinary and shift - based learning approach. It promotes critical thinking, flexibility, skill development and even digital education system. This policy also seeks to integrate Indian knowledge systems with world educational standards. This article examines the historical experiences of educational evolution and critical analyses the significance of NEP by addressing contemporary challenges of education and to make balance between the tradition and modernity.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the historical evolution of Indian education system.
2. To analyze the features of ancient, medieval, colonial and post-independence educational system.
3. To evaluate the major provisions and objectives of NEP with possible challenges in contemporary India.
4. to explore the comparison and relationship between the historical education system and contemporary developments.

Relevance of the Study

The study of India's education system in the context of the NEP 2020 is extremely relevant for several academic, social, economic, and policy-related issues. A historical analysis helps to trace out the progress of India's education system from ancient societies going through colonial influences, post-independence reforms, and contemporary deviations. This provides insights into its potential impact on access, quality, and governance in education and how past policies and practices have shaped the present educational landscape. A contemporary analysis can recognize practical challenges and suggest measures for effective implementation of educational policies from time to time. Its relevance lies in its ability to connect the historical evolution of education with contemporary reforms by evaluating the potentials of NEP 2020 so as to reshape India's future educational scenario.

Methodology

This study based on both historical and descriptive methods. The historical method is used to trace out the evolution of educational system including ancient, medieval and modern. The study also adopted analytical approach to examine the educational transformation in India with special reference to new education policy. The important sources consist of books, journals, articles, Govt. reports, policy documents, educational commission reports and scholarly publications.

Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical approaches can be used for the topic depending on the emphasis of the study.

1. The Scholars like Theodore Schultz, Gary Becker propounded Human Capital Theory by which they argue that education is an investment that enhances individuals' knowledge, skills, and productivity, leading to economic growth and thereby national development. This theory can examine how NEP 2020 aims to develop skilled human resources and analyses reforms related to vocational education, skill development, digital learning, and multidisciplinary education.
2. Émile Durkheim brought the functionalist theory of education, which says that education provides important social functions by trans-

mitting culture and promoting social cohesion. It can examine how the policy seeks to preserve Indian culture, values, and knowledge systems and analyses moral education, and holistic development.

3. Another Scholar named Stephen Ball advocated Policy Cycle Framework which argues that the educational policies pass through stages of formulation, implementation, and evaluation. In the light of NEP, this theory investigates how the policy was developed and examines its implementation at national and state levels with the studies regarding the challenges and consequences of policy accomplishment.
4. The Scholars like Paul Pierson and Kathleen Thelen instituted the theory of Historical Institutionalism which provides that the current policies are shaped by historical traditions, and previous policy verdicts. It helps to compare NEP 2020 with earlier educational policies and examines continuity and change in Indian education. This theory explores how traditional, colonial and post-independence educational edifices influence present reforms.

Thus, there is a strong theoretical approach which facilitates a comprehensive historical and contemporary analysis of India's education system with the provisions of NEP 2020.

Discussion and Analysis

Ancient Education System

It is deeply rooted in culture, tradition, religion, ethics and philosophy. Hence it is aimed to have overall development of an individual's personality. The ancient system of education was known as Gurukul system, in which students or learners lived with their teachers (Gurus) in ashrams and engage in learning activities with discipline. The development of holistic approach of body mind and soul, emphasis on discipline and morality, oral transmission of knowledge, practical and experimental learning, development of a strong teacher student relationship and imparting spiritual and ethical education were the significant features of this ancient system.

They taught several subjects like Sanskrit grammar, Vedas and Upanishads, Philosophy, Literature, Grammar, Astronomy, Mathematics, Medicine, Law (Dharma sastras), Politics and Warfare. In

ancient India, the Buddhist educational institutions were expanded within international student participation, organized institutional learning, intellectual debates and discussion and the study of languages, logic, medicine and philosophy. These ancient educational institutions promoted rational thinking and scholarly research by imparting practical knowledge. In ancient India, education emphasized moral values, discipline, and spiritual development.

Thus, the Gurukul system of education of ancient India emphasized a holistic development with the progress in character and wisdom. It did not focus on merely preparing Individuals for employment. But today's education system is meant merely for employment purpose. For example, in ancient India, the Buddhist Universities like Nalanda and Takshasila became renowned centers of learning by imparting wisdom and practical knowledge. They focused on moral discipline, spirituality and philosophy. Vikramasila University also acted as an important center of learning ancient literature. Temple schools were flourished in various regions of India. Therefore, the ancient system of education had attracted large number of students from different parts of ancient continent.

Medieval Educational System

During the medieval period, several Islamic educational institutions were emerged. Muslim rulers established Maktabas and Madrassas for religious and secular education based on Islamic influences and tradition. The Maktabas consists of Elementary schools attached to mosques. In these institutions, children learned Reading and writing, Arabic and Persian languages, Basic arithmetic, and religious teachings from Quran.

The Madrassas were the Islamic institutions which imparted new intellectual traditions. They were the institutions meant for higher learning. They taught Quran, Persian and Arabic languages, mathematics, astronomy, logic, philosophy, medicine, history, theology and Islamic law. They also promoted art and literature. They developed libraries and expanded linguistic studies. They gave emphasize on architecture and culture. Madrasa-i-Rahimiyya located in Delhi was a notable Islamic institution.

During the medieval period, education was largely religious in character and Teachers enjoyed high social status. Oral learning and memorization were the important methods of learning. Manuscripts were handwritten since printing was not yet developed and widespread. Persian became an important language of administration and learning under several Muslim dynasties. Many Muslim rulers supported education in various ways. They granted land and funds to schools and scholars. They established several madrasas and libraries. Firoz Shah Tughlaq established several educational institutions and libraries. They patronised literature, science, and arts.

Moreover, there was an interaction between indigenous and Islamic education system, which helped to enrich India's educational landscape. These institutions played a significant role in preserving and transmitting knowledge from generation to generation. However, the Medieval educational system remained restricted to privileged sections of the society like that of ancient education system, though local schools served broader communities in different areas.

Colonial Education System

During the British Colonial period, Christian missionaries spread western education. The Charter Act of 1813 paved the way for the beginning of colonial intervention in education. In 1835, Lord Macaulay advocated English education and western knowledge with a view to create an elite class of Indians to expand their administrative efficiency. Because, its primary purpose was to create a class of educated Indians who could assist them in the administration of the country. Colonial Masters also promoted English language and literature. As a result, there was a spread of modern science and rationalism. The British introduced Western knowledge, science, and literature and made English as an important medium of instruction. They taught the subjects like Science, Mathematics, History, Geography, English literature and Political science in Schools and Colleges. More over an educated middle class was emerged with political awareness and a concept of nationalism. However, the colonial educational system resulted in cultural alienation and decline of indigenous system of education. They also neglected vocational and technical education.

In Wood's Despatch of 1854, often called the "Magna Carta of English Education in India", Sir Charles Wood recommended the establishment of universities and teacher training institutions. He recommended a systematic education system with the emphasis on primary, secondary, and higher education. He also recommended the introduction of female education and vernacular education at primary level. In 1857, Universities were established in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. The Hunter commission of 1882 called for the establishment of elementary schools for imparting primary education.

The Modern era marked a turning point in the history of education in India. The colonial masters transformed traditional systems and introduced western style of education. They spread modern scientific knowledge and developed a new educated middle class. They created social and political awareness and contributed much to the Indian nationalist movement. Though the colonial education system brought new knowledge, science and political awareness, it also marginalized the indigenous systems of learning. There was also limited access to education, especially in rural areas. They focused mainly on producing clerks and administrative workers. They gave less emphasis on vocational and technical education.

During the struggle of Indian independence, education became an important instrument. The national leaders like Rabindra Nath Tagore, Bal Gangadara Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi criticized colonial education and advocated national education system. Gandhi proposed learning through productive work and moral and practical education.

Education System after Independence

The Indian constitution emphasized equality in education, free and compulsory education and educational rights for minorities. In 1948, university education commission under the chairmanship of Dr. B. Radhakrishnan emphasized quality higher education and moral education. The Kothari commission of 1964 to 1966 recommended common school system, equal educational opportunities and vocational learning. In 1968, the National Policy on Education emphasized on national integration, there language formula and equal opportunities in education. In 1986, the National Policy has focused on women's education,

adult literacy and vocationalization.

During contemporary period, particularly after independence. India's educational system became a crucial instrument for nation building. They tried to improve the literacy, equality, inadequate infrastructure, rote learning, exam-oriented system and lack of skill orientation etc. And also, the problems of unemployment and inequality continued to affect the quality of education. It was in this context, the NEP 2020 stand as a comprehensive educational platform with an aim to modernize Indian education. It seeks to transform learning through flexibility, innovation, multidisciplinary approach and skill development along with the revival of Indian knowledge system.

NEP 2020 seeks to address persistent issues like low learning outcomes, high dropout rates, inequality in educational access, skill gaps and employability concerns and fragmented higher education structures. NEP emphasizes inclusive education for disadvantaged groups, including women, rural populations, tribal communities, and economically weaker sections. The study helps evaluate the policy's role in promoting social justice and reducing educational disparities. The NEP 2020 is the first major educational reform in India aimed to transform Indian educational system. It wanted to meet global standards while keeping Indian cultural values.

The major characteristic features of NEP 2020 consist of a new school structure, which includes four stages namely, Foundational Stage, Preparatory Stage, Middle stage and Secondary stage. It replaced the traditional 10 +2 system into 5+3+3+4 system. The new policy called for a holistic approach which removes rigid academic divisions. It combined the subjects like science, arts, commerce and vocational subjects. This policy emphasizes skill development including vocational education, internship opportunities and practical learning. NEP promotes digital education like online learning, educational technology and digital classroom. It called for flexible entry and exit system in higher system of learning along with establishment of multidisciplinary universities. This policy recommends four-year integrated courses, professional training and merit-based recruitment.

The advantages of the new policy include promotion of criti-

cal thinking by encouraging creativity, problem – solving and analytical thinking. It addresses unemployment and integrates skill education. This policy emphasizes gender inclusion and universal access and seeks to impart education for disadvantaged groups. The new system aimed to compete internationally through innovation and research.

But, despite its advantages, NEP faces certain challenges like the implementation of new system requires huge financial investment, the rural and economically weaker students may face technological constraints, there will be a practical difficulty in multi lingual societies, lack of quality training for qualified teachers, and educational inequalities between states.

Critical Evaluation

NEP reflects continuity and changes in Indian education system. It is true that there is a revival of Indian knowledge system. It imports holistic education similar to ancient system. There will be change in technical integration and flexible learning structures. The implementation of such a policy brings major concern due to lack of infrastructure facilities. Critics argue that the institutions of higher learning will be affected badly as the Central government attempts to tighten and bring them fully under their control. Those institutions which violate the provisions and guidelines of the policy will be heavily fined. They assess that such norms of the policy will certainly affect smooth functioning of the institutions. However, despite limitations, the policy can transform the country into knowledge-based society.

Comparative Analysis

The ancient education was holistic learning, but NEP 2020 adopts holistic education. The holistic learning focused on the experiences, the emotions and practical understanding of students. It integrates theory and real-life applications with experimental learning and critical thinking. But holistic education is a broader system focused on overall development of a student including intellectual, social, moral and physical with emphasis on a curriculum, teaching methods, values and development of students. It is something beyond textbooks and exams.

Ancient education system emphasized moral values, but NEP 2020 emphasized value-based education. Though ancient education system it was teacher- centered, but the present NEP is student-centered. Ancient system focused on practical learning, but NEP focusses on skill-based learning. In ancient education, there was Gurukul interaction, but in NEP there is experimental learning. Hence this comparison indicates slight differences between them though they are closely related notions. The comparison also shows that NEP makes an endeavor to reconnect with indigenous educational philosophies by adapting to modern global concerns.

Conclusion

The history of education system in India reflects social, political and cultural transformations over centuries. The ancient education gave emphasis on holistic development and moral values. The medieval education introduced new linguistic influences and intellectual traditions. The modern education during colonial times transformed Indian society by introducing western knowledge and administrative edifices. But the post independent period tried to democratize education so as to promote national development. The NEP 2020 addresses the modernization of Indian education by emphasizing flexibility, skill development, multidisciplinary learning and digital education. It also attempts to revive Indian knowledge traditions and value based learning. It connects educational philosophies with present global standards of learning. There are challenges remain in relation to implementation, funding, teacher- training and regional inequality. But still NEP 2020 has the potential to transform the educational landscape of India and to have a vibrant profile of education in near future in India.

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