

ANTHROPOLOGY AND SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INDIAN CONTEXT: AN OUTLINE

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Abstract

The present article reviews and relates the transformations and transitional phases of schooling in an institutional ways to draw an outline in Indian Context from anthropological perspectives. The study further tries to explore different approaches and national policies in school education in a constructive and critical ways. The authors' experiences with the contemporary school culture and rigorous study of earlier and recent literature may instigates the limitations of applied polices to revise and at the same time expands the scope of future microscopic ethnographic research in the related issues.

Keywords: *Education, Transformations, Anthropology, Policies, Institutions*

Introduction

George D. Spindler (1955) stated that *the relevance for anthropology as a body of knowledge and way of thinking to the development of curricula and programs in general education has been discussed. Now attention shifts to the contributions of anthropology as a frame of reference for analysis of the educative process.* Contrastingly, Wahid Ahmad Dar and Irshad Ahmad Najar (2018) opined that- *anthropological research on education in India, the importance of educational anthropology is not properly acknowledged.* Further they stated that- *the case for strengthening educational anthropology is supported by extensive evidence describing the vast problems of education in India, with accounts of massive deficiencies, permanent crisis, lack of direction and intense political disagreements of various kinds.* Education being one of the major cultural institution have had studied in multiple theoretical perspectives and national policy making. Thus Came, the context of the study sets its goal to understand the changing scenario and national policies in reference to Indian perspective.

The Objective

To understand the transformations and changes in educational systems and policies in reference to school education in Indian sub-continent to reflect the contemporary challenges of education in India for better policies and action.

The Transitional Phases between Pre-British and British Period

Under the ancient caste-hierarchical phase religion greatly influenced education in which study of Vedic literature was obligatory to higher castes and strictly prohibited to the lower castes. In this system the child (up to the age of seven years) used to receive primary education at home. From the age of eight to sixteen years, they had to stay at preceptor's '*Ashtama*' (house) to take formal education (the recitation of the *Vedic mantras*, the auxiliary sciences and astronomy, phonetics and grammar, law, etymology etc.), following the ritual known as '*Upanayana*' or thread ceremony. Initially it was more or less compulsory for upper three castes and later it became exclusively restricted to the Brahmins. It was noteworthy that the syllabus and nature of education varied according to the caste. The students entered in '*Parishad*' or academy to participate in philosophical discussions for advancement of knowledge. This episode of educational practice was discarded in late 6th century B.C. with the introduction of two new beliefs Buddhism and Jainism who promoted education in common languages of people irrespective of caste, religious belief and sex. This step was very crucial in the development of education. The next milestone of educational developmental had been established in Nanda dynasty (413 B.C.). During this phase, the formal schools were constructed in the then towns and the education was imparted comparatively open for all students irrespective of caste, and *Takshashila* (an institution of learning) became internationally famous for learning "law, medicine and military science" (Evolution of Educational Policy in India, p- 36). From 400 A.D. to 800 A.D., remarkable progress of "sciences, mathematics and astronomy" has been attained under the empire of *Maya* (325-187 BC) and *Gupta* (319) during which the universities of Nalanda, Valabhi, Vikramasila, Odantupuri and Jagaddala were situated. In 10th century, formal education was non-residential and practiced at *Pathashala* or *Tola* in Hindu villages under the supervision of Brahmin teacher, known as *Acharya*. This kind of learning often took place at the residential premise of those teachers or mostly at any religious place like temple, for which numerous construction of temples stood as a mark of expansion of education. Such schooling was funded by kings and was highly influenced by religion. The late 18th century feudal period was characterized by hierarchical stratified society, the top levels of which encompassed by upper castes, large scale cultivators, rich traders and money lenders, and the lower levels were occupied majorly by deprived, marginalized and exploited poor people consisting of lower untouchable castes and mainstream-outside tribes. Financial support of rulers was restricted to only few institutions on religious ground. Those were guided by priests where non-formal elementary education was provided along with vocational training to be obtained by student as family profession and as obvious it never encouraged vertical mobility in society. During this period of exploitation, the scope of education became solely narrow. The girls usually took education at home as formal education was prohibited for them till date. In early 19th century, following the Muslim invasion in India there was two types of elementary schools and schools for higher education. First category consisted of two types namely, Persian Schools and schools medium of instruction of which was Indian language, and the schools for higher education covered two types, a) *Pathashala* of the Hindus, and b) *Madrasah* of the Muslims. These institutions were somewhat autonomous attached to religious

place but supported by rulers. The scope of education was also not broad enough rather it enhanced 'conservatism' both in thought and practice (ibid; p- 38).

British Period in its Pace

After the invasion of the British in India, the British Government formulated several strategies of formal education for satisfying their 'colonial interests' (ibid; p- 39). They concentrated on the learning and spreading of English language to get a group of interpreters to communicate with commoners to rule over them and to get cheap educated labour from locality. During 19th century, a few liberal British, intellectuals of Indian, "*Araya Samaj* and Muslim reform movements" (ibid; p- 39) also urged for the development of education in mass level. Besides these, banning of Persian as the formal language in 1837 and preferring English educated Indians for Civil Service since 1844 effectively enhanced the growth of English education. Finally, "Woods Despatch" (ibid; p- 40) promoted the systematized administrative regulation for higher education following the establishment of three universities in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras in 1857. The next few decades experienced a pace in grasping education but the British faced immediate threat after perceiving the relation of English education with flourishing Indian nationalism (ibid; p-40). They attempted to find solution by modification the education system, reforming administrative structure of the university and promoting several measures to curb the growth of nationalism. On the other hand, the Christian missionaries took steps to spread elementary education and encouraged people to learn. Besides this, the development of higher education but having varying aims and scopes had also been conducted in terms of establishing Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, Sanskrit College in 1791, Royal Asiatic Society in Bombay in 1804, Indian Institute of Sciences in Bangalore in 1909 etc. In 1911, Gopal Krishna Gokhale implemented a Bill in the Imperial Legislative Assembly to make education compulsory but did not gain the aim. This idea of compulsory education was revived in 1937, at the All India National Conference on Education held at Wardha following influenced by Gandhi's 'basic education' (a period of seven years of learning through vocational and practical training) but failed again due to lack of resources. The Sargent Plan or Post War Plan of Education Development (1944) recommending free and compulsory education (from six to fourteen years) also faced some inconveniences.

The Period of Post-Independent India

With the intention to reframe the social fabric towards development, the Government of post-independent India promoted 'education' as the basic instrument and mechanism to the national progress, security, welfare and in strengthening national integration. The issues and problems of educational reconstruction has been scrutinized and modified several times. Just immediate after independence, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) established two commissions – (1) The University Education Commission (1948-1949) under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishna to deal with the curriculum in university level. It aimed to treat education as a "powerful weapon" (University Education Commission, 1948-49; Published in 1950, p-19) in promoting prosperity, "effective democracy" (ibid; p-19) and 'economic independence' (Evolution of Educational Policy in India, p- 43) by controlling various national, social and economic problems like inequality in terms of caste and economy. This commission, therefore, focused on improving technical skill to expand

industries and occupational institutions. (2) The Secondary Education Commission (1952-1953) under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishna and Dr. L.S. Mudiliar to deal with the curriculum in secondary level. It encouraged constructing multi-purpose schools to develop technical knowledge along with other skills to enrich national wealth and to raise the standard of livelihood of citizen. Finally, the National Policy on Education was framed in 1968 grounded on the report of Kothari Commission or Education Commission (1964-66) under the chairmanship of D.S. Kothari. Considering education as an instrument for progress, security and welfare of the country, the prime purpose of its appointment was to advise the Govt. about the national pattern and principles of education, and policies for developing education in all possible aspects. It realized that to satisfy its objectives the system of education should face a drastic re-modification for which the Commission adopted three main focuses – (a) internal transformation, (b) Qualitative improvement, and (c) Expansion of educational facilities (Evolution of Educational Policy in India).

a. Internal transformation means, promotion of education in relation to life, needs and desire of the people which further would generate social, economic and cultural transformation. Therefore it imparted 'science education', 'work experience' as indispensable school education. It claimed work experience would help to integrate learning with work and thus it would provide the students 'earn and learn'. It projected 'vocational education' specially for secondary school level to meet the demand of industry, agriculture and trade. Simultaneously, to enhance social and national integration it promoted 'common school system of public education' (equal access to all students from any social background), 'social and national service' (obligatory for all students), 'language policy' (developing modern Indian language, establishing Hindi as the official language and the mother tongue as the compulsory medium of instruction at the lower primary level) and 'promotion of national unity' and consciousness should be attained through school curriculum (Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66; 1970). Its simultaneous attempts found out the basic problems regarding teaching such as, general shortcoming of teachers, inflexibility of existing educational system etc. Hence, it adopted some measures to develop teaching methods and proposed programmes for teachers' improvement as dull and uninspiring teaching method denied interest in learning.

b. Qualitative improvement: To improve the quality of education the Commission gave attention on dynamicity of the system. It proposed increasing the number of working days, lengthening the duration of school hours, effective use of vacations, the 10+2+3 pattern of education, abolition or minimization of tuition fees of students, increasing remuneration, promotion and retirement benefits of teachers etc. Further it brought major modifications in syllabus, process of teaching and system of evaluation. For the operational convenience of this flexibility it provided adequate guide materials, textbooks etc. to the teachers and suggested the school administration to cooperate.

c. Expansion of educational facilities: To expand the facility of learning in mass level it promoted adult literacy, various scholarships and programmes for girls, scheduled tribes, castes and backward groups etc. It suggested that the entire pre-university education should be treated as a single continuous unit and thus divided it into pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher education. According to its proposal pre-primary division

was greatly significant as it provided 'physical, emotional and intellectual development' of children specially come from deprived groups. The objective of primary education was to prepare 'responsible and useful' citizens and secondary education should provide preparation for making effective man power for economic and social development and obviously to uplift standard of livelihood (Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66; 1970).

Following the appointment of the Banaras Hindu University Inquiry Committee in 1969, the government put forwarded several shortcomings of the Kothari Commission. Based on Gandhian model, the Draft Education Policy (1979) assumed that education should be attained to know and improve physical and intellectual skills, promote social consciousness to develop moral character and uplift standard of living, 'democracy, secularism and socialism' (Evolution of Educational Policy in India, p-49). It emphasized on non-formal education and special education for girls, scheduled castes and tribes. Yet the govt. of India felt that in spite of having quantitative facilities enough (the number of primary schools highly between increased during 1950 to 1968) Indian education system denied qualitative satisfaction. Hence, it promoted "Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective" (1985) to demonstrate the challenges of education and to generate new policy to overcome those challenges. Grounded on University Education Commission Report (1948-49) and the Education Commission Report (1964-66) the National Policy on Education had been introduced in 1968 to provide mainly free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. In 1986, Rajiv Gandhi modified the National Policy on Education (NPE) highlighting the achievements of the 1968 policy goals that primacy on science has been provided and school facility became accessible to rural people, but there was still the need for change to minimize inequality in education and, increase monetary and organizational support to maintain the quality and make the education system affordable. The NPE further became refashioned in 1992 as Program of Action (POA) having focus on enrolment, entire retention of children up to age 14 years and qualitative improvement at the primary education levels. The revised version of National Policy of Education (1992) promoted 10+2 pattern i.e., 12 years of schooling to maintain uniformity in school education in India (Shirname, 2007).

Despite, the aim to achieve the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) within the next ten years i.e. by 1960 of 'Education for All' providing free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen years, implemented by the Constitution of India (Article 45) in 1950, was still far from success (Shirname, 2007). The National Council of Educational Research & Training (NCERT) and the National Institute of Educational Planning & Administration (NIEPA) were primarily founded to fulfil the goal of UEE. According to Evolution of Educational Policy in India high drop-out rate up to 1980s from class I to VIII specially of girls' was a crucial enough against any satisfaction of policy. Based on the Fifth All India Educational Survey-1986, the Indian Govt. launched a new education policy in 1986 giving primacy in resolving the problem of drop-out and decided various measures under this policy should be verified after every five years. Yet the rate of literacy had been increased effectively during 1951-2001.

In 1993, as per the announcement of the Supreme Court of India, free and compulsory education for all students within six to fourteen years would be considered as a fundamental right of education in India (86th

Amendment of the constitution of India, 2002) and the whole school education got divided into primary (6-10years), upper primary (11-14 years), secondary (15-16 years) and higher secondary (17-18years) levels. In order to maintain this fundamental right, Right To Education (RTE) Bill was introduced in 2005 and got published by the Ministry of Law and Justice of India in 26th august, 2009. It is also known as Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. Unlike all the preceding policies promoting principles, it deals with obligatory commitment ensuring free and compulsory education to the children of six to fourteen years of age group (The Right to Education Bill-2005, Right to Education Act, 2009). To mass level incorporation in elementary education various steps have been projected under this Act such as, special provisions for children not admitted to or who have not completed elementary education, no capitation fee and screening procedure for admission, no denial of admission, prohibition of physical punishment and mental harassment to child, convenient pupil-teacher ratio (30:1 in class I to V; 35:1 in class VI to VIII), prohibition for private tuition by teachers, building up child's knowledge, potentiality and talent, all round development of child, development of physical and mental abilities to the fullest extent, learning through activity, discovery and exploration in a child-friendly and child-centered manner, making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety and helping the child to express views freely, comprehensive and continuous evaluation of child's understanding of knowledge and ability to apply the same and so on (Right To Education Act, 2009).

In these circumstances, the informal conversations on some practical issues with few school students, their parents and school teachers expressed that levels of satisfaction regarding the measures of RTE, 2009 were remarkably different. Few repercussions were against the Act although a considerable number of the reactors were on behalf of this system since being benefited. The researcher stroked why and how the range of benefits of the same national Act varies among the participants under same educational board. She felt being triggered to investigate the underlying factors of educational attainment of students. The proceeding into the domain unveiled that the performance in education intimately depends on the meaning attached to it and vision to the institution concerned.

The Major Shifts

The focus on education in India has been shifted frequently since the early post-independence period till date. As that era was enriched in reshaping the social fabric towards development, Government of India triggered education as the basic instrument and mechanism to the national progress, security, welfare and in strengthening national integration. The problems of educational reconstruction, therefore, were reviewed by several commissions, namely, the University Education Commission (1948-1949), the Secondary Education Commission (1952-1953) etc. The majority of the researches on education, therefore, were conducted using it as a parameter to measure social uplift. For instances - Chottopadyay (1953), Vidyarthi (1955), Das Gupta (1959), Sachchidananda (1968), Bose (1970), Lakshman & Yadappanavar (1988), Heredia (1992), Jena (1994) and others worked on education in the light of developmental strategy. Consequently, As an extension of the trend to study 'education' as an agent of culture change, Singh (1987) put the light on the tendency of educated persons to be migrated in cities and Attar (1989) tried to present various types of change in the occupational

patterns of the teachers in higher educational institutions at Karnataka. During the period, considerable number of the researchers (namely, Das and Saha, 1968; Srivastava, 1968; Das and Roy Chowdhury, 1972; Das and Bhattacharji, 1972; Siddiqui, 1984; Bag, 1984; Das Gupta and Danda, 1984) dealt with the interrelation of economical and educational backwardness of the SCs, STs and other minorities. Therefore, they tended to focus on education to find out its impact on the concerned society (Roy, 1982) and treat the education as the probable key of solution. In that situation, some personnel showed interests to unfold the hidden causes to promote education in the above mentioned social circumstances. Those studies explored that, drop-outs, teacher's perception about the students, low economy, absenteeism, stagnation and wastage etc. were the living problem of educational development in rural areas (Seetharamu, 1985; Yadav, 1985; Yadappanavar, 2003). Similarly, a few of the researchers like Bharati Devi (1990), Siddiqui (1993), Roy (2005) and others inclined to establish the importance of education to improve the status of women in societies.

Concluding Remarks

Since late 1960s, multiple directions were found among the scholars to expose the value of education in various spheres of society, such as, Mitra & Mukherjee (1968) who discussed about the function of museum in education and the vital role it plays to preserve the knowledge of past, present and future. Lakshminarayana (1979) examined the extent of religiosity among college students who are subject to the forces of modernization and westernization. Reddy (1990) aimed to understand the inter-relations between the education of spouses and the frequency of consanguineous marriages. He revealed that, a low level of education was related to consanguineous marriages and surprisingly, the level of female was hardly related to it. Bharati & Ghosh Dastidar (1990) took an attempt to establish a correlation among the maternal education, the rate of fertility and mortality of the Mahisya agricultural caste group under Amta Police Station of Howrah District. Again, a few researchers showed interests in observing the relation of education and level of intelligency (Basu, 1980) or even conservatism (Mullick & Panchbhai, 1977) in the groups. Thapan (2006) offered sociological platform to study the Rishi Valley School of South India, from multiple angles and minutely focused on the school organization, school culture, teacher's culture, teacher-pupil interaction and so on. In addition, the mentioned discussion, it is quite clear that, taken school education into consideration, a multidimensional study is required in India to manifest a school not only as an organization to channelize formal education to the students, but as a space for open ended interaction of its participants and agencies to reflect the cultural essence within a particular geographical, social and political boundaries of a culture.

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