

Education in Ancient India as a Possible Inspiration for the Future

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This paper examines the key values determined for instruction in the ancient India educational system and how the great cultural achievements of Indian culture were passed down through the generations within the educational system. Getting to know: (1) the values in ancient Indian culture and (2) the structure of the ancient Indian education system reveals the fundamental premises of Indian culture and the method of their transfer. The researchers attempted to answer three questions using the comparative method of juxtaposition: (1) on the limitations of egalitarian policies, (2) the current status of the Indian education system with regard to educational opportunities for underprivileged groups, and (3) existing affirmative actions for students from different social groups. In addition, the contemporary educational system characteristics shaped by the global/post-colonial educational policy are put in a comparative relationship, according to the status of the educational system in India and the value transfer system of the Indian educational tradition.

Key words: *comparative pedagogy, education, history of pedagogy, India, philosophy.*

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*Introduction****

Educational systems are shaped by the societal conditions of the given time. Understanding the constant educational changes and the impact of global educational policies on educational systems presupposes the recognition of the genealogy and socio-political conditioning of education. The focus of this paper is on the education system of India, where the authors attempt to examine the key values determined for instruction and how these great cultural achievements are passed down through the generations within a formalized educational system.

A comparative analysis was carried out to understand the impact of certain prominent elements of values and value transfer systems in the Indian educational tradition on the organization of the modern educational system in India. The characteristics of the present-day educational system as formed by global/post-colonial educational policies are placed in a comparative – juxtaposition relationship, according to the current status of the educational system in India, especially under the aspect of its broad social inclusiveness, which is crucial for a modern democratic society, and the value transfer system of the traditional Brahmanical system of education as a prominent type of education.

1. On the Implication of Education

A great cultural heritage is transmitted through different ways, by oral and written literature, art, religion, technology and more, but most comprehensively through education. The history of education reflects the past of a specific culture, describes its social, economic, legal, and religious history, but also explains its present and forecasts its future. Because of that, the history of education is not a kind of separate museum section closed a long time ago – on the contrary, it is a rich and live source for understanding the culture that is studied and compared to our own culture and society.

For philosophy, the most important interest is in understanding the cosmological and anthropological assumptions of humanity in Indian thought through their ethical and social implications. In this paper the focus is on the Hinduism because it is the religious or cultural identity of the majority of population, with the oldest documented roots in the Vedas, and with very complex history and transformation. The teaching of Vedaṅgas (linguistic disciplines, geometry and astronomy) were the foundation of the educational tradition in

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India. The Pāṇini's comprehensive grammar is probably unparalleled even today – it was orally transmitted which makes it even more impressive. In fact, the six aṅgas of the Vedas are fields of knowledge that were developed from the care to preserve the wording, sense and applicability of the Vedic (oral) texts. In addition to the Brahmanical educational tradition, Buddhist and Jaina educational systems were highly developed and influential in India. Although these traditions will not be considered here, they built Indian thought, as well as education in non-Vedic subjects as education for Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and for special professions like poets, musicians, physicians or astronomers.

All these educational achievements are accompanied by social goals, intentions, and the actions of making an individual person and society better with education. On the other hand, although Khāroṣṭhī script, influenced by the Aramaic script, was known, writing was introduced or internalized very late, and religion and rites were the main topics and a prism for the perception of the world, humanity, and society.

As Brezinka¹ said, education consists of goals, intentions, social norms, and actions by which people try to permanently improve a set of psychological dispositions in any respect. Education, on the one hand, reflects the value of society, and on the other hand, education is a powerful tool for reproducing society's values. In this case, the history of education can serve as a lesson on the values of humanity and society, and on how to acquire knowledge, determining the influence of the connection between education and the social situation and reflecting on the possible improvement of individuals and society by introducing good educational practices inspired by the educational tradition of Indian culture.

2. Research Problem

The overview of Indian culture and traditions provides an introduction to: (1) the values in ancient Indian culture and (2) the structure of the ancient Indian education system, which reveals the fundamental premises of Indian culture and the method of their transfer, which could give us an opportunity to better understand our own culture and to find how our own education system could be improved. The research problem relates to the predetermined position of people in traditional Indian society and the impact of the traditions on the implementation of egalitarian educational policies. In this paper we attempt to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the limits of the egalitarian policy actions in India?

¹ Wolfgang BREZINKA, *Philosophy of educational knowledge: an introduction to the foundations of science of education, philosophy of education and practical pedagogics*. Vol. 3. Dordrecht, Springer Science & Business Media, 2012, 123.

- ii. What is the current state of education in India and the options that are available for students from underprivileged groups?
- iii. What are the affirmative actions that are implemented by the government to balance and support the education of students from different social groups?

3. *Comparative Methodology*

A comparative analysis was carried out with the aim of understanding the impact of certain prominent elements on the historical structure of the educational system and educational-political settings in India, in a comparison – juxtaposition² with elements of the contemporary educational system in India. The paper focuses on the one type of historically attested system of education, the Brahmanical one, especially the Vedic education, the other traditions like the Buddhist system or Jaina educational system, will not be elaborated in this paper. In the process of shaping and verifying the hypotheses, selected elements of predetermined positions, meaning universal primary schooling and affirmative actions, were reviewed concerning the comparative concepts of culture, values, and time. In the focus of comparative education research, it is the connection between education and culture as a ratification of national integration where the view on culture is linked to an anthropological perspective. Comparative researchers focus on the process of the internationalization of education, where in postcolonial discourse it is necessary to challenge development assistance doctrines based on the export of Euro-American educational conceptions³.

While examining some of the conceptual and methodological issues of comparative educational studies across cultures, Mason provides a distinction between »national cultural identities« that correspond to the traditional educational systems and cultural identities in the globalized world.⁴ National cultural identity has traditionally been about belonging to a group that is established and represented by historical narratives, events, and symbols that are discursively constructed, and a shared sense of place⁵. On the other side, globalization is linked to a more deterritorialized and universalist kind of identity. In India, the Western education models were introduced under British rule,

² Cf. George BEREDAY, *Comparative method in education*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964, 28.

³ Cf. Niranjan CASINADER, The globalism of an empirical mutual identity: culture and thinking in comparative education, in: Joseph ZAJDA (ed.), *Second International Handbook on Globalisation, Education and Policy Research*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2015, 337-352.

⁴ Mark MASON, Comparing cultures, in: Mark BRAY, Bob ADAMSON, Mark MASON (eds.), *Comparative education research: Approaches and methods*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2014, 221-257, 232.

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 233.

and the democratic society in independent India demands general accessibility of education. Through time, egalitarian reforms in education have been driven by political and economic circumstances, and different social groups have been influenced to varying degrees.⁶ In contemporary education in India, despite the established egalitarian legislation and progress toward education for all, several issues still require attention. These include lower enrolment rates and high drop-out rates, especially among socially and economically deprived children⁷.

The concept of values in education is wide and ambiguous, but it is significant to educators and academic researchers. Comparative studies have examined how values are promoted in the educational system, the relationship between policy and implementation, the preferred values in society, the interactions between personal values and society values, and the emphasis on values in terms of cultural tradition and social change⁸. These comparisons are made to test the hypothesis of the existence of common educational themes in societies that have a common genealogy but differ in the degree of historical and technological development⁹. Comparisons of concepts, events, and attitudes across different periods facilitates the identification of a spirit of the times or draws logical inferences about continuity, change, and progress¹⁰.

4. Values of Education in Ancient India

Before initiation in Vedas, the young man is on the level of a Śūdra¹¹. Religion was the center of life in India and all human activities were directed by religious and ritual values and practices. The Vedic texts were the source of the world and of language, the divine law that determine the valid life of humanity and society. The main problem for humanity in India was the great

⁶ Cf. Angela W. LITTLE, Education for all in India and Sri Lanka: The drivers and interests shaping egalitarian reforms, in: Pauline ROSE, Madeleine ARNOT, Roger JEFFERY, Nidhi SINGAL (eds.), *Reforming Education and Challenging Inequalities in Southern Contexts: Research and policy in international development*, London, Routledge, 2021, 59-78.

⁷ Cf. Jandhyala B. G. TILAK, *Education and development in India*, Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 96.

⁸ Cf. Wing On LEE, Maria MANZON, Comparing values, in: Bray, Adamson, Mason (eds.), *Comparative education research...*, 259-283.

⁹ Cf. Ivana BATARELO KOKIĆ, Tonći KOKIĆ, Obrazovno-političke postavke u Europskoj uniji: što o obrazovanju možemo naučiti od Sparte i Atene? [Educational Policy Premises in the European Union: What can we Learn about Education from Sparta and Athens?], *Nova prisutnost: časopis za intelektualna i duhovna pitanja*, 19 (2021) 3, 541-556.

¹⁰ Cf. Anthony SWEETING, Comparing times, in: Bray, Adamson, Mason (eds.), *Comparative education research...*, 167-193.

¹¹ (He who has not been initiated) should not pronounce (any) Vedic text excepting (those required for) the performance of funeral rites, since he is on a level with a Śūdra before his birth from the Veda. *The Laws of Manu*, transl. George Bühler, [1886], Sacred Books of the East, vol. 25, II 172. <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu02.htm> (28.12.2023).

efforts directed towards trying to escape from death or suffering in the cycle of rebirths (saṃsāra) following different paths of liberation, e.g. by attaining the highest knowledge of ātman or brahman (jñāna), by the enlightened activity for the universal good (karman), by the devotion to God (bhakti), etc. All this knowledge of connection with the absolute was contained in the Vedas and other sacred books, so they were the main topic and goal in education. To be separated from the knowledge of the Vedas meant to be cut from the connection with the gods in this world and the next, excluded from the power of sacred rites, without the opportunity of liberation from the wheel of rebirth, separated from society and at the end to be placed on the edge or even down below being human, inside rigidity of the caste system. Śūdra (skt) were ritually unclean by default, due to their inability to get an education in the Vedas. The exclusion of the Śūdras was justified by their lack of ability to speak properly, because the Vedic Sanskrit was not their mother tongue, due to which they could introduce errors into the sacred texts¹². This explanation is not convincing, and it is more likely »... that the motive was primarily ... to keep Śūdras in subservient position ...«¹³. There are also outcastes (formerly known as Harijans, Pariah, and now Dalits), polluted or untouchables in a religious and consequently in a social sense. The Indian social system could be seen as the twofold systems, the hierarchical system of social (functional) strata (skt *varṇa*, which means colour, pigment): Brāhmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Śūdras, and outcastes, and the system of endogamous, commensal and professional communities or groups of families (skt *jāti*, which means birth, genus, caste) i. e. groups whose members are allowed to marry within group, to eat together, and who usually share the same profession. The main principle of separation is based on religious (rites) *purity* and *pollution*, but with strong and unbreakable implications for social and economic life. The privileged groups in the Varna system are Brāhmaṇa (priests and teachers), Kṣatriya (nobles and warriors), and Vaiśya (merchants) who were *dvija* (skt) or twice born. The concept of *dvija* denotes a person educated in the traditional Vedic system, the twice-born refers to a pupil who left home and parents and move to the house of the teacher – in his home he was taught and born a second time, in the knowledge of the sacred texts and rites of the Vedas. In ancient India, women from the beginning of the late Vedic period, even from a high-caste, were considered unavailable for education in the Vedas and excluded from studying – they belong to the realm of lust – and students were forbidden to talk to them without a special reason, nor touch them or desire their company. Topics, values, and the goal of the traditional Vedic education system is derived and expressed in terms of religious concepts

¹² Cf. Anant Sadashiv ALTEKAR, *Education in Ancient India*, Benares, Nand Kishore & Bros, 1944, 44-45.

¹³ Hartmut, SCHARFE, *Education in Ancient India: Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section Two, India*, Leiden, Brill, 2002, 64.

found in the Vedas. Again, Hinduism, through its aspects and phases, indicates the various important goals of a human life: the attainment of absolute reality – Brahman and liberation (skt *mokṣa* or *mukti*) from the wheel of birth and death (skt *saṃsāra*) was typical to Bhagavadgītā and to all post Vedic teaching, to the various meaning of the concept of *dharma* (order, law). The concept of *dharma* is at the heart of the Indian way of life and the primary educational goal ... and »in all of its various shades of meaning, was an important objective of education through the centuries«¹⁴. In the long period of Indian culture *dharma* meant fulfilling one's civic and social duties within the strict rules of the caste system, the concrete goal of education was »... to make the student fit to become a useful and pious member of society«¹⁵. *Dharma* also meant what is right and what duties must be performed by the members of caste where a person belongs, keeping the universe and social order stable. *Dharma* is the principle that orders the universe, and humanity as part of it must behave in conformity with that principle. *Dharma* is not considered a human convention or invention; it is an objective universal principle. This principle is reminiscent of the Stoic ethical principle of living in harmony with (the principles of) nature (the universe), *homologoumenos zēn* (gr), which assumed knowledge of physics, logic and logic. *Dharma* is a religious concept but intertwined in a kind of unity with the class duty, morality, and law in that it has become a »paradigm of proper behavior«¹⁶. These rules are extensively described in the *Dharma-sūtras*, for example, the status and obligations of four castes:

(4) (There are) four castes – Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras. (5) Amongst these, each preceding (caste) is superior by birth to the one following. (6) (For all these), excepting Śūdras and those who have committed bad actions, (are ordained) the initiation, the study of the Veda, and the kindling of the sacred fire; and (their) works are productive of rewards (in this world and the next). (7) To serve the other (three) castes (is ordained) for the Śūdra (ĀpDhS I. I. I).¹⁷

In one of the most authoritative law book of Hinduism, *Laws of Manu* (II. 172)¹⁸, to be *dvija* does not guarantee knowledge, it is even more dangerous to be in the upper classes and not properly study the Vedas, so »A twice-born man who, not having studied the Veda ... falls ... to the condition of a Śūdra and his descendants ...« (Manu II. 168)¹⁹. To be outside of society is a severe condemnation worse than the death penalty, similar to Socrates who chose death over

¹⁴ Ibid., 51-52.

¹⁵ Altekar, *Education...*, 10.

¹⁶ Scharfe, *Education...*, 52.

¹⁷ Cf. Āpastamba. Prasna 1, Patala 1, Khanda 1. The Sacred Laws of the Āryas, Georg Bühler, translator [1879], Sacred Books of the East, vol. 2, ĀpDhS I. I. I, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe02/sbe0204.htm> (28.12.2023).

¹⁸ Cf. *Laws of Manu...*, II. 172.

¹⁹ Ibid., II. 168.

exile as a penalty because a person must obey the laws, and second, because life outside of (cultural or civil) society is worthless. The Hindu dharma is a strong universal law based on cultural values and social hierarchy (implying inequality). The traditional Brahmanic/Hindu educational system directs its members in the training of young people for their specific professions in accordance with their predetermined position²⁰, including many secular skills²¹. Indian education put stress on religion and social duties but is not restricted to it. In the *Viṣṇu pūrāna*, there is a list of sciences, some of them are: »... astronomy ... theology ... logic ... Dharma (the institutes of law), the science of archery or arms, ... the drama, the arts of music, dancing, ... science of government« (VP III 6, 28).²² It is necessary to highlight that in reality the caste system made religious education »a monopoly for the Brahmanas only at 300 BC«²³. Although the lower castes were excluded from formal education²⁴, training in various crafts certainly existed but not as a part of the institutional system with a formalized structure and curriculum. It is possible to say that the focal point of Indian culture is the fact of rebirth and an attempt to circumvent that fact, by realizing that life and death are only two phases of the same absolute reality (truth) which cannot be changed. From this focal point is derived the aim of education as »the inhibition of those activities of the mind by which it gets connected with the world of matter or objects«²⁵. The main effort of the Indian was to try to attach himself to the absolute to avoid death, and education was aimed at the same end with the greatest care possible.

5. Value Transfer System

The caste system had an important impact on traditional Brahmanic/Hindu education, but with a variable degree of rigidity over time. Throughout history, this strictness was significantly less in the earlier period than in the later one. During history, it was possible to find non-Brahmans serving as Vedic teachers, and Vedic studies were reduced by giving way to grammar, literature, and philosophy, or even left out of the curriculum in the course of time, and Śūdras and women were permitted to obtain religious education from Purāṇas and Smritis²⁶. Women must be always be under the control of a man, first her

²⁰ Cf. Altekar, *Education...*, 16.

²¹ Cf. Scharfe, *Education...*, 48.

²² *The Vishnu Purana*, transl. by Horace Hayman Wilson, [1840], Sacred Books of the East, vol. 2, III 6, 28, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/vp/vp080.htm> (28.12.2023).

²³ Altekar, *Education...*, 41.

²⁴ Cf. Scharfe, *Education...*, 65.

²⁵ Radha Kumud MOOKERJI, *Ancient Indian Education: Brahmanical and Buddhist*, London, MacMillan and Co, 1947, xxii.

²⁶ Cf. Altekar, *Education...*, 40-45.

father (Manu, IX. 3-4)²⁷ and then by her husband and his family (Manu IX. 2)²⁸. Women were at the level of Śudras, men were more valuable than women, so parents invoked the birth of a boy by a rite that was supposed to ensure a good birth, the birth of a boy (skt *pun̄savana*):

»... a boy was but the father or grandfather reborn, it was commonly held that the man's seed was more important than the woman's womb in determining the child's character, and the inherited traits were stronger than educational efforts«.²⁹

In fact, the wife delivered a boy – her husband (Manu IX. 8)³⁰, and this boy is by his nature predetermined for education in the Vedas and after an early childhood finished at the age of five, six or eight (counting from conception), he is initiated as a student in the teacher house. Before that, during early childhood, boys from wealthy families were tutored in grammar (noun declension), mathematics (multiplication tables), and character building³¹. Following previous initiations *cūḍākarāṇa* (skt) at the age of three or five (the first cutting of the hair),³² and the study of arithmetic after that, the initiation (skt *upanayana*) into the study of the Vedas in the upper classes of Brahmanic India was most often at the age of eight. The ceremony of *upanayana* means a new birth in which a student emerges as born a second time (skt *dvija*): the first time he was physically born from his parents, and second time he was born spiritually from his teacher. This newborn »... unfolds his mind and soul. After this *Upanayana* the child emerges as a Brahmacārin, a new and changed person both externally and internally«³³. Leaving home is not just a physical fact, nor is the house just real estate, the house is the first extension of the human body and the first extension of his real world, so leaving one's own house is leaving the world³⁴. The students move to a teacher's house and by accepting ascetic practices leave the parents' house and by that they leave the material world (of physical illusion). Brahmacārin was a regular temporary phase of Veda study for every boy belonging to one of three upper castes, but brahmacārin could also be referred to as »a student of sorts – but one with a long beard, a grown man who remains celibate in the teacher's house for all his life«³⁵. Although the first evidence of writing in India is assumed to be during the period of Asoka in 3rd

²⁷ Cf. *Laws of Manu...*, IX. 3-4.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, IX. 2.

²⁹ Scharfe, *Education...*, 71.

³⁰ Cf. *Laws of Manu...*, IX. 8.

³¹ Cf. Altekar, *Education...*, 34.

³² Some other ages are also mentioned, from one to seven. Skt. *cūḍākarāṇa* means shaving the head.

³³ Mookerji, *Ancient...*, 111.

³⁴ Cf. Raimundo PANIKKAR, *The Vedic Experience Mantramanjari: Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration*, New Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, ³2016, 267.

³⁵ Scharfe, *Education...*, 93.

c. BC, although we could imagine that the writing might have been introduced earlier, the text of the Vedas continued being exclusively orally transmitted much longer,³⁶ and, even after being written down it continued being learnt by heart exclusively in oral transmission. Due to the impossibility of independent access to the (written) text, students were directed exclusively to the teacher who had the knowledge of the texts stored in his mind. The system of oral education in India was called Gurupāramparya, which means »the uninterrupted ideal succession of pupils and teachers, by which knowledge is conserved and transmitted«³⁷. It was similar in ancient Greece because Socrates and Plato considered writing as detrimental to memory and living thought. For both, the community of the teacher and student was a prerequisite for teaching. An additional reason for worshipping the guru is the nature or methodology of the Vedic teaching where the guru was giving the Vedas to his pupil by uttering them, so the mastery of Vedas knowledge was dependent upon its proper pronunciation and recital. Additional reason was in the substantial meaning of the sound of the (spoken) word, this was a prerequisite for knowledge about the production of sound (of the words).

»The teacher is represented as indispensable to knowledge ... approach a Guru who is learned and dwells entirely in Brahman ... a teacher is regarded as necessary to disperse the mist of empirically acquired knowledge«³⁸.

In India, the guru is more than a teacher, he is a counsellor and a person of great importance, without following his instructions it is not possible to achieve spiritual salvation from the wheel of rebirth. This was a kind of deification with a great psychological influence on students, respecting a guru as king, father, or deity³⁹. In admiring the guru, students had to serve their teachers like personal slaves, taking care of household chores, livestock, the cleanliness of clothes and house, fetching water and firewood. Again, similarly to ancient Greece during Socrates and Plato, teachers in India were prohibited from receiving monetary compensation for teaching, since it was considered ethically unacceptable. Instead of money, »gurus usually took a token gift (skt *guru-dakṣiṇā*) in return for the long years of knowledge they imparted«⁴⁰. Students started their daily activities in the early morning (3-4 a.m.) and after ritual bathing (skt *snāna*) and praying, performed fire sacrifice rituals (skt *homa*). At 11 a.m., they prepared lunch for the teacher, had lunch, and after a break of about 2 hours, classes began, which lasted until the evening. The evening

³⁶ In the *Mahābhārata* there is the condemnation to hell of anyone who would write down the Vedas (cf. Altekar, *Education...*, 49).

³⁷ Mookerji, *Ancient...*, 31.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁹ Cf. Altekar, *Education...*, 50, 58.

⁴⁰ Sahana SINGH, *The Educational Heritage of Ancient India: How an Ecosystem of Learning was Laid to Waste*, Chetpet Chennai, Notion Press, 2017, 9.

was the time for bodily exercise, after which there was prayer, sacrifice to the fire, and then going to the evening meal. The students had to beg (skt *bhikṣā*)⁴¹ for food, which had two pedagogical aims: students learned humility, while other members of society became aware of the need for education as a tool for the transfer of heritage and cultural values. Offering or refusing food to the students had significant spiritual consequences: a householder refusing to offer food to a begging student »was threatened with serious spiritual sanctions«⁴². Every person was thus obliged to preserve their tradition, transfer values, and the important role of education in the maintenance and reproduction of social hierarchy probably required a kind of obligation to participate in some educational processes. Considering this, contemporary Indian authors believe that, based on the interpretation of historical sources, some kind of compulsory education of the three higher social groups can be claimed, the involvement of others at the level of training for certain occupations or the exclusion of the rest (with explainable reasons). Taking into account the context of the time and place, it would be difficult to find in ancient India the equivalent of formal compulsory education as it exists in the world today. Considering these differences, it can be said:

»Thus, as far back as we know anything of India, we find that the years which we in modern times spend at school and at university were spent by the sons of ancient India in learning, from the mouth of a teacher, their sacred literature. Thus, the Vedic succession was never broken—for this oral learning and teaching came to be one of the compulsory religious duties of the people, one of the great yajnas or sacrifices«.⁴³

6. Comparative Relationship – Juxtaposition

The limits of the egalitarian policy actions in India are linked to the values in ancient Indian culture and the structure of the ancient Indian education system, particularly Brahmanical system. Contemporary authors⁴⁴ critique the ways in which educational policy is implemented in the contemporary Indian educational system, noticing that the government is successful in using external financial resources and expertise while minimizing its impact on policy development. More specifically, egalitarian policy actions are not sufficient and

⁴¹ Begging (for food) is in fact an incorrect translation in this case, the original sanskrit word *bhikṣā* refers to the respected practice of ascetics who did not care for the glory or honour of the world but lived in poverty, traveling and teaching.

⁴² Altekar, *Education...*, 65.

⁴³ Mookerji, *Ancient...*, 276.

⁴⁴ Geeta Gandhi KINGDON, The progress of school education in India, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 23 (2007) 3, 168-195; Christopher COLCLOUGH, Anuradha DE, The impact of aid on education policy in India, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30 (2010) 5, 497-507.

that children in India remain out of school.⁴⁵ Furthermore, schooling access is examined in terms of enrolment and school attendance rates, and different schooling quality, emphasizing that primary school enrolment has nearly reached universality, and literacy rates have increased, but secondary school enrolment is low and unequally distributed⁴⁶. According to the analysis of national statistical data, in a hierarchical society such as India, the caste to which one belongs still has a significant impact on shaping one's goals and aspirations by balancing what one wants to do with what one believes is achievable⁴⁷. Students in the Indian tradition acquire humility, at the same time other members of society become conscious of the importance of education as a means for the transmission of history and cultural values⁴⁸. Furthermore, in the traditional value system, the important role of education is the maintenance and further reproduction of the social hierarchy, and the educational goal of preparing a student to become a useful and pious member of society⁴⁹.

While recognizing that inadequate access to education and low levels of participation in education are the single most critical factors responsible for mass poverty⁵⁰, the contemporary educational system in India provides different options for students from the underprivileged groups. Despite considerable advances in both the quantitative growth of education and the reduction of socioeconomic divides, inequalities in the educational system remain relatively severe⁵¹. Apart from the issue of low learning outcomes in India, educational attainment varies significantly among caste and religious groups in the country⁵². Measures such as the provision of a percentage of school seats in private schools for poor children, access to libraries, and participation of women and marginalized groups in school committees are set to assure more equal participation in education⁵³. In today's Dalit community⁵⁴, people are eager to invest in education because they believe that learning and education will lead to better possibilities and chances of their children⁵⁵. Despite that, the Dalit groups'

⁴⁵ Colclough, De, *The impact of aid on education policy in India...*, 10.

⁴⁶ Cf. Kingdon, *The progress...*, 172.

⁴⁷ Cf. Vani Kant BOROOAH, *The progress of education in India: A quantitative analysis of challenges and opportunities*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 48.

⁴⁸ Cf. Altekar, *Education...*, 16.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁰ Cf. Cf. Tilak, *Education...*, 16.

⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵² Cf. Borooah, *The progress...*, 53.

⁵³ Cf. Monisha BAJAJ, Huma KIDWAI, Human rights and education policy in South Asia, in: Karen MUNDY et al. (eds.), *Handbook of global education policy*, Oxford, John Wiley & Sons, 2016, 206-223.

⁵⁴ Term Dalit is used to refer to any member of a wide range of social groups that were historically marginalized in Hindu caste society, [»Dalit«, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dalit> (20.03.2024)].

⁵⁵ Cf. Annie NAMALA, Perspectives on Education and Exclusion, in: Muchkund DUBEY, Susmita MITRA (eds.), *Vision of Education in India*, London, Routledge, 2020, 215-218.

educational backwardness is still attributed to poverty and illiteracy in their home contexts⁵⁶. Dalits have had very little or no say in the creation of their publicly acknowledged identity because of the dominating, upper-caste social and cultural hegemony.⁵⁷ Traditionally, the predetermined educational options in hierarchical society were commonly justified with the present lack of the ability of certain groups to speak properly, because Vedic Sanskrit was not their mother tongue, and they could introduce errors into the sacred texts⁵⁸.

A number of types of affirmative actions are implemented by the government to balance and support the education of students from different social groups and their link to the values in ancient Indian culture and the structure of the ancient Indian education system. On the level of Indian states (i.e., Bihar), there are initiatives such as the preparation of plans for an alternative system of education, and recommendations of a set of norms and standards for ensuring both equity and quality in school education for different educational levels, including physical infrastructure, human resources, and curriculum norms⁵⁹. Focus on teacher education may be linked to the crucial role of teachers in the facilitation of student learning⁶⁰. The Indian educational tradition highly values the teacher, recognizing the concept of the twice born which refers to a pupil who leaves home and moves to the house of the teacher where they are born for a second time. Contemporary educational policy frameworks in India support the notion that teachers are largely accountable for student learning, and as a result, teacher training and professional development are strongly integrated in India's national education policies⁶¹. There are common claims that in addition to poor infrastructural facilities, there is a need for additional pedagogic supports for Dalit children to acquire linguistic, numerical, and cognitive competencies, due to the instructors' and school administrators' apathy towards socially disadvantaged populations' learning experiences⁶². Recent discourse on education reform in India has broadened its attention to include the quality of classroom teaching in addition to access to education for children from Dalit group⁶³.

⁵⁶ Cf. Geetha B. NAMBISSAN, Equity in education? Schooling of Dalit children in India, *Economic and political weekly*, 31 (1996) 16-17, 1011-1024.

⁵⁷ Cf. Shailaja PAIK, *Dalit women's education in modern India: double discrimination*, Routledge, 2014, 232.

⁵⁸ Cf. Altekar, *Education...*, 44-45.

⁵⁹ Cf. Muchkund DUBEY, Report of the Common School System Commission, Bihar, 2007, in: Dubey, Mitra (eds.), *Vision of Education in India...*, 155-169.

⁶⁰ Cf. Mookerji, *Ancient...*, 31.

⁶¹ Cf. Preeti KUMAR, Alexander W. WISEMAN, *Teacher quality and education policy in India: Understanding the relationship between teacher education, teacher effectiveness, and student outcomes*, New York, Routledge, 2021.

⁶² Cf. Nambissan, *Equity...*

⁶³ Cf. Rajendra Kanhu DOIFODE, Archana Rajendra DOIFODE, Balasaheb R. CHAKOR, Changing Educational Inequalities of India, *Information and Research Trends*, 2 (2014) 2, 46-79.

Conclusion

This comparative analysis focuses on the predetermined position of people in traditional Indian society and impact of tradition on the implementation of egalitarian educational policies. The comparative methodological approach examines common patterns or differences in systems that can be the result of a shared ancestry or a shared reaction to certain situations⁶⁴. Hence, by use of the juxtaposition method, three research problems were addressed. The first research problem focused on the limits of egalitarian policy actions, which aim to promote equality and reduce disparities in education. While primary school enrolment rates in India have improved, secondary school enrolment remains low and unequally distributed. It is possible to link this to the choice of profession and the ideology of social structures based on the cultural values and wide aspects of inequality that are probably still present in Indian society. Hence, the support for the transition to secondary and higher education should be increased, especially for marginalized groups. The second research problem focused on the contemporary educational system in India and the options that are available for students from underprivileged groups. While inequalities in the educational system remain relatively severe, the poverty and illiteracy of unprivileged groups are still used to explain educational disadvantages. The third research problem recognizes the affirmative actions that are taken by governments to address historical and ongoing inequalities and promote equal opportunities for marginalized or disadvantaged groups. Following the traditionally significant role of the teacher in Indian education, in addition to comprehensive educational and curricular reforms, national policies focus on the professional development of teachers.

⁶⁴ Cf. Devin GRIFFITHS, The comparative method and the history of the modern humanities, *History of Humanities*, 2 (2017) 2, 473-505.

Ivana Batarelo Kokić * – Tonći Kokić**

Obrazovanje u staroj Indiji kao moguća inspiracija za budućnost

Sažetak

U ovom radu ispituju se ključne vrijednosti poučavanja u obrazovnom sustavu drevne Indije i načini prijenosa velikih kulturnih dostignuća indijske kulture unutar obrazovnog sustava. U radu su prikazane: (1) vrijednosti u staroindijskoj kulturi i (2) struktura staroindijskog obrazovnog sustava, temeljne premise indijske kulture i način njihova prijenosa. Istraživači su komparativnom metodom jukstapozicije pokušali odgovoriti na tri pitanja: (1) o ograničenjima egalitarnih politika, (2) o trenutnom statusu indijskog obrazovnog sustava s obzirom na mogućnosti obrazovanja nepriviligiranih skupina i (3) o postojećim afirmativnim akcijama za učenike iz različitih društvenih skupina. Osim toga, karakteristike suvremenog obrazovnog sustava oblikovane globalnom/postkolonijalnom obrazovnom politikom stavljaju se u komparativni odnos, prema statusu obrazovnog sustava u Indiji i sustavu prijenosa vrijednosti indijske obrazovne tradicije.

Ključne riječi: filozofija, Indija, komparativna pedagogija, obrazovanje, povijest pedagogije.

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