

Education Policies, Commissions, and Committees in Colonial and Postcolonial India: Their Role in Spread of Education in the Country

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 24 Jan 2025</p> <p>Revised on: 22 Feb 2025</p> <p>Accepted on: 25 Feb 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords – Education, Policy, Commission, English, NEP</p>	<p><i>The present study aims to do an analysis and evaluation of various language policies in India. It is noteworthy that the Indian government introduced its latest National Education Policy, NEP 2020, on 29th July 2020. 'Fulfilling the requirements of the (twenty-first) century by transforming its education system' is the purpose of this new policy. Besides this, many educational policies, commissions, and committees were announced in pre- and post-independent India in order to improve its education system and make education available for everybody. This research paper deals with the aforementioned things in colonial India in particular and postcolonial India in general. The reason behind mainly focusing on education policies of Britishers time is not only to see the condition of education at that time but also to know what their motives were behind implementing these education policies.</i></p>

I. INTRODUCTION

The English left India in 1947, and it got independence from them. Prior to their departure from here, the local princes (and regional rulers) of the country and Britishers ruled here, which made it two Indias (Ghosh, 2000, X). They first of all here established the East India Company dated 31/12/1600 (Pandey, 2019, 614). The English did not introduce this company here to rule over Indians because it was mainly a merchant or trade company. However, they became interested in Indian society as well. The East India Company Britishers started interfering in India's political issues. They tried to divide the natives of the country in order to rule over them. They succeed in their mission also, as they slowly

and fully occupy the nation (R., 2014, 56). It was not very simple for those non-native government officials (the English) to easily rule and maintain the powerful position here without creating a group of collaborative people between themselves and Indians because of the differences of their cultures. This collaboration was also almost impossible in the absence of the same conversational language between them in order to form a common (homogenous) space of two cultures so that the rulers could coerce and persuade Indians to remain in the power. Therefore, for this purpose, they used education because it was people's/their belief that it (education) had the power of culturally reinforcing the same policies or things the colonialists targeted to achieve at the economic and political level (Basu, 1989,

707). So, the Britishers opened many schools, colleges, and universities and formulated education policies from time to time as they needed.

II. BACKGROUND

It was not just that only the English worked in the field of education in colonial India. The Christian missionaries from the West were previously very active before the arrival of the British East India Company. Though they came here from the perspective of spreading Christianity, they actually initiated the modern Indian education system while attempting to do so. In the ruling areas of Portuguese, the Roman Catholic missionaries were the first of any other who started education classes there. If it was renowned missionary Francis Xavier's street classes, or the schools of missionaries touching their office or church buildings, aimed the conversion of locals to Christian religion. The missionaries from Portugal contributed in the education sector by establishing Porchial schools for elementary education, vocational preparation orphanages, a college (Jesuit) in Goa (1575), an institution like a university (Salsette), and religious colleges and seminars so that any clergyman from India could be trained there. The establishment of the French East India Company took place in 1664. Though they also worked in the same way as the Portuguese in education-related matters, the French did not show inclination only towards Christians. The company was focused only in the South Indian region, where it contributed greatly in educational matters. The establishment of a secondary school (Pondichery) with the purpose of providing liberal education and institutions like Chandernagore, Karikal, Madras, Mahe, and Pondichery was done by them. The French schools were not closed even when the Britishers started ruling India. They continuously worked with the same missionaries as they were working earlier. In the British Empire, India witnessed revolutionary changes in all spheres of life, including education (Pandey, 2019, 614).

III. COLONIAL INDIA AND EDUCATIONAL PLANNINGS

After its establishment in the year 1600, the East India Company did not show any notable interest in improving and enhancing education in India. They also thought of only making profits as any other business and trade company (Basu, 1989, 711-12). It was only in the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century that individuals like Warren Hastings introduced a Calcutta Madarsa (1781), Jonathan Duncan, a Sanskrit college at Banaras (1792), and Lord Wellesley, the Fort William College (1800). If the first one was to provide Persian and Arabic education, the second for Sanskrit, whereas the third was to train civil servants who were going to work for the company. It is noteworthy that the rulers of those times never thought to make arrangements for studying English (Chand, 2015, 111). Small primary schools called Pathshalas for Sanskrit education and Madarsas for Muslim education were still relevant by the end of 1810. As far as higher education was concerned, Hareet Kumar Meena cites that it was reachable to only upper-caste people (Meena, 2015, 85). The company thought only to grant and spend some money on education in 1813, when its charter was formed.

3.1. Charter Act (1813)

The British East India granted an amount of Rs. one lac for the education of Indian people with very difficulty in the 1813 Charter Act when evangelists and Christian missionaries pressurized. There was a provision in the above-mentioned Charter Act that, for the first time, opened the way for missionaries to do education-related work in India who wanted to use English education in removing ignorant and superstitious beliefs of its people and spreading Christianity (Basu, 1989, 711-12). However, the money could not be used in the field of education by the end of that year because of the controversy between Anglicists and Orientalists. The formers wanted to spend money on study of languages of India, while the latter supported using it in English language learning. This matter was resolved during the tenure of William Bentick (Chand, 2015, 111).

3.2 Macaulay Minutes (1835)

Macaulay strongly advocated in favor of English literature, western philosophy, and sciences in English in order to build India as a country of learned people. He said all Indian languages were incompetent for these purposes (Ghosh, 2000, 31). He revealed after a couple of years (31st July 1837) that the company intended first of all to provide education to the high-class people who were supposed or expected to teach the general public. In this way, they wanted to spread education in whole India (Meena, 2015, 87). He mentioned many other arguments in support of English education and language in schools and colleges for Indians. All arguments and recommendations of Macaulay with regard to education, though most of them controversial (Mondal, 2024, 3756) were accepted or endorsed by Governor General William Bentick (Meena, 2015, 87). Macaulay's policy on education paved the way to expand the educational landscape in the country. It was because of his too much attention and stress on English-related teaching of the natives that caused the emergence of education-related basic facilities or infrastructure. A number of schools, colleges, and universities were established in order to give Indians knowledge of the West and to teach them their values. Institutions from Britain were the models followed in establishing institutes of higher education, such as the University of Bombay and Calcutta. These universities produced highly intellectual people of India with education of European knowledge (Mondal, 2024, 3756-57).

3.3. Sir Charles Wood's Dispatch (1854)

On 19th July 1854, Sir Wood brought a practical plan to educate Indians all over the country. The systemization of the hierarchy of education as primary, high school, college, and university was also a provision of him. The private initiatives and enterprises in education were to be encouraged by a grant in the aid system. Whereas a state grant in aid education was also to support education in a state. The financial help to all institutions and related individuals without looking at them from a religious perspective, vocational courses for women, training of teachers, and scholarships for all talented students from private and government schools are some

highlights of Wood's Dispatch. In terms of medium of instruction, the schooling subjects were to be taught in vernacular or local languages, and university education was to be provided in the English language. The dispatch was a very important document of policy because it was the basis for all subsequent rules regarding the spread and dissemination of education in the country. Contrary to the expectations and recommendations made by Wood, the rulers were inclined towards education in universities; they gave priority to such institutions and also provided a grant for it in 1859 regulation (Chand, 2015, 111-12). Before that, the establishment of universities also happened in cities such as Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, as per the recommendation of this policy. Though the spread of education among Indians seemed not as fast as it was expected to be because many important recommendations made by the dispatch could not be implemented properly, the government's grant in aid to encourage individuals so that they could participate and contribute in the education field through their private/aided schools their own funds also played a very vital role in developing the public school system (Meena, 2015, 89).

3.4. Indian Education Commission (1882)

Formulated under the chairmanship of William Hunter, who was an executive of the contemporary governor general of India, its other name is the Hunter Commission as well. The commission did a survey of India and gave recommendations like liberalization of the grant-in-aid system; the rulers should not establish any other institutions for education and management or control of basic education by local bodies, whereas education at the secondary and college levels should be provided under the management of a committee responsible for it. While the state had to work for all branches of education, basic education was the central concern of the Indian Education Commission because of no proper attention was given to it between the period of Wood's Dispatch and this commission (Pandey, 2019, 614). Moreover, it also proposed schemes for the improvement of the educational conditions or statuses of aboriginal tribes, lower castes, Muslims, and females (Meena, 2015, 89). The British government in India

approved the majority of the educational proposals of the commission (Pandey, 2019, 614). The acceptance of whatever the Hunter Commission recommended was effective in bringing about changes in contemporary Indian society and in the field of education. The spread of education was comparatively faster in the post-1882 time period. The contribution of native religion and philanthropy-related institutions in the development of the educational field was very high in comparison to the British Government. Consequently, Western and oriental education was disseminated in India. Apart from the above, Punjab University (1882) and Allahabad University (1887), among others, were also built as teaching as well as examining universities. However, despite all these developments in the area of education, basic education and women's education could not get enough attention even in this time period (Chand, 2015, 112).

3.5 The Tenure of Lord Curzon and Education

The contribution of Lord Curzon was unignorable in the field of education. In fact, it was his priority; he tried to improve education through the 1901 Simla Conference, the 1902 Indian Universities Commission, and the 1904 Indian Universities Act (Pandey, 2019, 615). The University Act of 1904 was in response to the suggestions made by Sir Thomas Ralieggh-chaired university commissions (1902). In order to improve or enhance education at the university level, Lord Curzon said to give an annual grant of Rs. 5 lac per year in this university Act (Chand, 2015, 112). He also worked to improve the condition of basic or primary education in many ways (Pandey, 2019, 615). Whereas the most (earlier) policies of education though talked about education at the beginning level, the rulers also knew how important it was, and they also gave emphasis to its spread; they unjustly even more focused on education at secondary level, college, and universities (Chaudhary, 2007, 2). But it was the impact of the Curzon's right education policy that people became conscious across India, and the experts in the field of education gave their consent to provide education in mother tongue rather than in English. Thus, the number of primary schools increased in the years 1911-12 to 118262, which were 93604 in the year of 1901 (Pandey,

2019, 615). In this way, more than 26% of primary schools increased because of the effective policies of Lord Curzon.

3.6. The Calcutta University Commission, 1917

Dr. E. M. Sadler was the chairman of this commission. It was a commission to spread university-level education among Indian people. The commission recommended 'to each province having a secondary and intermediate education board and intermediate and degree college classes levels with clear definition,' in order to promote higher education. In terms of medium of instruction, it preferred the use of mother language in secondary education English language in the colleges (Pandey, 2019, 615). The Indian government accepted many of the proposals of this commission, including the aforementioned ones. They proved to be really helpful in growing university-level education in the country. The Indians witnessed the establishment of universities such as Aligarh, Banaras, Dacca, Lucknow, Mysore, Osmania, and Patna between 1916 and 1921 (Chand, 2015, 112). Not only this, the intervention of government officers was reduced to a very large extent in the educational institutions (Pandey, 2019, 615) as Curzon thrust it while passing the Indian Universities Act (1904-05). As a result, universities in India freely and democratically grew and became possible only after the proposal of this university commission (Ghosh, 2000, 148).

3.7. Wardha Scheme of Basic Education 1937

Mahatma Gandhi found many drawbacks of English education provided by the British government. The gap between very educated and uneducated people and the irrelevant primary education were some of its examples. Therefore, a conference was conducted on October 22 and 23 in 1937 on the topic of "National Education." The participants here discussed a new education system. They also passed a resolution, which inspired them to formulate a committee led by the renowned educationist Dr. Zakir Hussain. The preparation of a comprehensive syllabus was their work. The members of this committee mainly recommended that the syllabus should include basic handicraft, there should be an opportunity for service in order to make students interact with nearby people and build a school

community, and students should be provided education for free up to 7th grade and even without English. Both the central and state governments of India gave approval to the plan of education in independent India. In this way, there was a universal system for basic education across the free nation in some time (Chand, 2015, 112-13).

3.8. Central Advisory Board Scheme Report (1944)

Mostly it is known as the Sergeant Report because Sir John Sargeant was the advisor of contemporary British government in the country in educational matters. Its aim was to reach a standard in education within a time limit of forty years that England also planned to touch. The Sergeant Report mentioned that basic education to the kids of three to six years, universal mandatory and even without any cost education to the children of six to fourteen years, and a higher education course of three years for beginners at university level who qualified higher secondary exams and got selection for universities. The report was also concerned with the public library system, adult illiteracy, and employment bureaus (Chand, 2015, 113). All these things were very important in increasing literacy in India. K.G. Saiyidain, an associate of the scheme, praised it for many reasons and called it the first complete or comprehensive plan of education at the national level. The Indian government's asking states to formulate five-year plans, establishment of the education department separately (1945), and University Grant Committee in 1946 were the important steps taken towards the spread of education when the Seargent report was submitted. (Ghosh, 2000, 173-75).

IV. EVOLUTION OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICIES IN INDIA

4.1. University Education Commission in 1948

Its other name is Radhakrishnan Commission as well. It was formed just the next year India got freedom from Britishers. They totally made the education system, especially university level, ineffective in their era. The standard of education was not only low; it was impractical as well. Therefore, in order to tackle all these problems, the Radhakrishnan commission was

brought into existence. The well-known University Grant Commission is the result of the recommendations of this commission; it discussed various issues after higher secondary education and recommended UGC, which was founded by the Indian government in 1953. After getting the status of statutory body in 1956, the University Grant Commission is active in the field of higher education in different ways (Sen, 2016, 17). Moreover, it recommended about many things in order to change and enhance higher education: the educational structure, standards of teaching, teaching methods, improvement in examination system, education of morality religions, women's education, various activities of students and their welfare, etc. It was a commission that covered almost all issues of university education (Ghosh, n.d.). As far as the language or the medium in which students were needed to be instructed, the commission endorsed their familiarity in local, national, and English language in the university. Not only this, the commission emphasized the replacement of the English language with any language of India without taking time if it could be done earlier (Ghosh, 2000, 179). Its recommendations were not only established but also recommended. Consequently, the country gradually developed an entirely new system of education (Pandey, 2019, 616).

4.2. Indian Education Commission (1964-66) and National Policy on Education (1968)

The Kothari Commission of 1964 was the basis of the first national education policy of 1968 in India; even now, a lot of people regard it as a milestone in the (educational) history of this nation (Sen, 2016, 17). The commission that was about education at all levels, including sciences, in its report, recommended the practicality of education, among many other things. Like the University Commission of 1948, this commission also favoured the three languages, but with some changes; in educational and administrative works, modern languages of India should be developed and used in the related states, whereas all the mentioned languages were to be learnt at the primary levels and only two at the secondary level (Ghosh, 2000, 182-83). It also requested those who were concerned with

education to bring improvement in its quality by reducing or removing waste or useless things. There was a remarkable increase in education from primary to university at the end of 1966. The number of universities increased from twenty to seventy between 1947 and 1968; there were 18 higher education institutes of university level as well. (Sherman, 2018).

The national policy on education in 1968 came with a goal or agenda with seventeen main points. It emphasized that the children not older than fourteen years should be educated compulsorily. It was a policy to increase literacy among adults and incorporated English at the intermediate level along with other Indian languages. The commission was in favor of spreading Hindi across the nation; it weighted all Indians to learn it. ("The Significant Shift in the Education Policy of India," n.d.) It also focused on research education, education after 12th grades, and the development of a scientific mindset in the students (Balayogi, 2024, 10263). The seriousness of this commission can be understood from the fact that it recommended increasing the expenses on education to six percent of national income (Ghosh, 2000, 188). However, the national policy was not very effective in spreading education in India because it had many provisions found in the reports previously submitted.

4.3. The National Policy on Education (1986)

The 1968 education policy, in many ways, was similar to the earlier plans, commissions, etc. It was criticized also for its flaws and not being as effective as it was expected to be. Therefore, a need was felt to formulate a more useful and comprehensive policy on education. The National Policy on Education brought basic changes in the education system. The scenario of school and college education totally changed when they introduced the 10+2+3 formula of education. It was also concerned with vocational courses to increase the competency of the learners to be adjusted in the job market. (Balayogi, 2024, 10263). In short, the policy included eleven characteristics that were very important in improving education and society ("The Significant Shift in the Education Policy of India," n.d.).

4.4. The National Policy on Education 2020

This is the recent educational policy of India. It came with so many radical changes in the educational sector. If it is education of children, integration of technology, or training of teachers, the policy is concerned with all these things in order to make a powerful education system in comparison to other countries (Balayogi, 2024, 10264).

V. CONCLUSION

India has one of the oldest education systems in the world. It keeps changing as per the demand of the time. So the policies are also formulated as needed. This article covered the educational policies in colonial and postcolonial India. It was not possible to cover all educational plans; some of them are not included. It is evident from the study that every educational policy has some good things and some drawbacks as well. Their role in the spread of education in India can not be totally discarded or ignored; if one educational policy failed in fulfilling its goals, another one was introduced with improvement. In this way, the NEP 2020 came recently. Its effects on education will certainly be seen in education and society.

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