THE HISTORY OF INDIAN EDUCATION AND ITS EVOLUTION

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Anotatsiya: Mazkur maqolada Hindiston ta'lim tizimining qadimgi davrdan XXI asrgacha bo'lgan tarixiy evolyutsiyasi izchil tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda Vedalar davri, buddizm davri, musulmonlar hukmronligi, Britaniya mustamlakachiligi hamda mustaqillikdan keyingi davr ta'lim siyosatining o'ziga xos jihatlari yoritilgan. Har bir bosqichda ta'lim tizimining ijtimoiy-siyosiy, diniy va madaniy omillar bilan bog'liqligi ochib beriladi. Shuningdek, mustamlaka davrida shakllangan zamonaviy ta'lim modeli hamda Indira Gandi, Radjiv Gandi va Narendra Modi hukumatlari davrida qabul qilingan Milliy ta'lim siyosatlari tahlil qilinadi. XXI asrda Hindiston ta'limi global raqobat, raqamli texnologiyalar va inklyuzivlik tamoyillari asosida rivojlanmoqda.
Kalit so'zlar: Hindiston ta'lim tizimi, ta'lim evolyutsiyasi, Vedalar davri, buddizm ta'limi, gurukul tizimi, madrasalar, Britaniya mustamlakachiligi, Milliy ta'lim siyosati, ta'lim islohotlari, raqamli ta'lim, inson kapitali.

Annotation: This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical evolution of the Indian education system from ancient times to the twenty-first century. It examines education during the Vedic and Buddhist periods, the transformations under Muslim rule, the structural changes under British colonialism, and the reforms implemented after independence. The study highlights the interconnection between educational development and broader socio-political, cultural, and ideological processes. Particular attention is given to the National Education Policies adopted under Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and Narendra Modi, aimed at expanding access, improving quality, strengthening vocational training, and integrating digital technologies. The article concludes that contemporary Indian education is the result of long-term historical development combining national traditions with global trends.
Keywords: Indian education system, evolution of education, Vedic period, Buddhist education, Gurukul system, madrasas, British colonialism, National Education Policy, educational reforms, digital education, human capital.

Education has been important in India since ancient times and has laid the foundation of today's system. Before independence it developed as a long historical process and one of the main factors of social progress; as an inseparable part of the state's development, it went through a distinctive evolution [1]. For this reason many Indian scholars, including S. Paleeri, S. Nurullah, J.P. Naik, N.P. Rajashree, C.V. Sindhuja, S. Pednekar, D. Harichandan and R.A. Bankar, have analysed Indian education by dividing it into periods [2–6]. This article continues that approach and examines Indian education from the Vedic period to the twenty-first century by the historical-comparative method, on the basis of

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scholarly literature and government policy documents. The periodisation follows R.N. Sharma and P.K. Sharma's *History of Education in India*: the ancient period (Vedic education, 1500–500 BCE, and Buddhist education, 500 BCE–1200 CE), the medieval period (education under Muslim rule, 1200–1757) and the modern period (British colonial rule, 1757–1947, and the independence period, 1947 to the present). The central line of the analysis is that each stage took shape by building on its predecessor and responding to its limitations, while access to education depended on social, religious and political factors.

This process begins in the Vedic period. The word "Veda" means "knowledge," yet education was open mainly to the upper strata, while members of the lower strata had no right to study. The transmission of knowledge from teacher to pupil held an important place in public life, and pupils were regarded as "reborn"; this principle later strongly influenced India's scientific and spiritual development [8]. At first education was directed at religious rites and rules, but in later stages pupils studied not only Vedic texts and hymns but also secular subjects through the *gurukul* system [9]. The gurukul was a network of ancient schools organised in the teacher's home, where philosophy, astronomy, grammar and mathematics were taught. According to the historian Ram Babu Gupta, from the fourth to fifth centuries CE schools with dedicated buildings, defined curricula and qualified teachers appeared, and interest in medicine, history, economics and the natural sciences grew. These opportunities were not open to everyone, however: women did not study in the gurukul, and they learned literature, dance, music and poetry, along with religious education, mostly at home under the guidance of parents or relatives [10].

Buddhism offered a new answer to precisely these caste and gender restrictions of the Vedic period. Emerging in the sixth century BCE, this teaching directly influenced Indian education: the community of the "Buddha's brotherhood" grew into a network of monasteries and became the main body governing education, and teaching was organised in *viharas*, which later grew into major centres of enlightenment and science. Although the Buddhists rejected Vedic rituals, they developed the progressive aspects of the educational traditions of the time, condemned violence, gave priority to ethical principles, reason, logic and personal experience, and sharply criticised the caste system. This outlook opened a new path for women as well: around 200 BCE, when women's education had slowed, the Buddha, according to tradition, agreed at the request of his closest disciple Ananda to admit women to the monastic community, and educated women such as Shubha, Anupama and Sulidha (third century BCE) became known. But because the caste system was firmly entrenched in the socio-political structure of society, Buddhism did not spread widely across the country at the beginning of the Common Era; even so, it made a significant contribution to science, production, culture and trade.

As Buddhist education did not become widespread, the next powerful influence on India's educational landscape came with Islam. The Islamic scholarly and educational traditions that had spread in Transoxiana and Khorasan in the seventh and eighth centuries later reached India as well; after the campaigns of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (967–1030) into the northern regions in the early eleventh century, Islam and its culture began to spread in the area. Muhammad of Ghor captured Delhi in 1192 and entrusted the conquered lands to his commander Qutb ud-Din Aibak; under the dynasties that followed, mosques and madrasas were founded and the Qur'an, hadith, jurisprudence, logic, philosophy and literature began to be taught. According to E.Yu. Vanina, madrasas in India were religious-educational institutions as in other Muslim countries, and their curriculum also covered rhetoric, law, mathematics, astronomy and medicine. Under the Mughals (1526–1857) this system expanded further, and a wide network of *pathshalas* and madrasas took shape: Delhi, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore and

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Allahabad became centres of learning, with Delhi leading in logic, Sialkot in grammar, and Banaras serving Hindu students in religious theory and Sanskrit literature. In this way the harmony of Muslim and Hindu traditions became the main factor of education in this era.

After Islamic education had prevailed for several centuries, a new system began to form with the establishment of British rule: the foundations of today's modern Indian education were laid precisely under British colonialism. The British first founded educational institutions in order to study the country's customs and laws, in support of their policy of governing India; Indian intellectuals and reformers, Christian missionaries and the East India Company took part in shaping modern education through laws, commissions and programs. This process also affected women's education: under the 1813 decision of the British Parliament, missionaries were permitted to develop education for local women, and the first such school opened in Tirunelveli in 1821, with another founded by Anna Drew in 1837. By the end of the nineteenth century mass primary schools were divided into lower and upper classes, and the growing number of girl students created a need for separate institutions of higher education for women; in response, the reformer Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858–1962) founded SNDT Women's University in Maharashtra in 1916, the first women's university in India and South-East Asia.

Alongside these changes in the colonial period, debate also grew over the content and purpose of education. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) placed the national idea at the centre of educational reform and rejected unconditional imitation of foreign culture. Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) drew village women into satyagraha and in the 1930s put forward *Nai Talim* (Basic Education), based on practical labour, rejecting distinctions of caste, religion and gender in education. These views stood against colonial policy: Lord Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* of 1835 made English the main language of instruction and aimed to raise Indians as "English in taste and opinion", and as a result the status of gurukuls and madrasas declined. It would therefore be one-sided to credit the changes of the colonial period to the humanitarian policy of British rule alone: the decisive factor was the initiative of the Indian people during the national awakening and the efforts of local intellectuals and reformers, while colonial policy itself aimed to prepare cheap labour, produce Anglophile cadres and strengthen British rule through the productive use of human capital.

Overcoming this colonial legacy became the first task of India, which gained independence on 15 August 1947. The government made education a priority of state policy and aimed to create conditions for all citizens to study regardless of language, religion, belief, colour or gender. Higher education was reformed first: the University Education Commission (the Radhakrishnan Commission), established in 1948–1949, reviewed the higher-education system, including women's access to colleges and universities. These aims were then consolidated in law: Article 45 of the 1950 Constitution set the right of children aged 6 to 14 to free and compulsory education. Nehru's advice that to know a nation's progress one should look at the condition of its women shows how much attention this policy gave to women's education. At the next stage the reforms were continued systematically in the form of National Policies on Education (NPE). The first, adopted in 1968 under Indira Gandhi on the basis of the Kothari Commission (1964–1966) recommendations, aimed at social equality and justice, stronger quality and control, and instruction in the mother tongue. The second, in 1986 under Rajiv Gandhi, widened women's right to education and their opportunities, and for the same purpose the Mahila Samakhya programme was launched in 1988. The third was adopted in 2020 under the Narendra Modi government.

As a continuation of these policies, Indian education in the twenty-first century is adapting to the demands of global competition, technological progress and social inclusion. Coverage was widened first: the Right to Education Act (2009) and early-childhood programs made education free and compulsory

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for children aged 6–14 and brought in girls and children from disadvantaged families, while the Digital India and SWAYAM platforms expanded educational opportunities in rural and urban areas. Regional and infrastructural disparities nevertheless remain, which shows that legal guarantees alone do not ensure equal opportunity. The second direction is the modernization of vocational, technical and higher education: vocational training from grade 6, multidisciplinary higher-education programs and skills development are adapting the workforce to the labour market, while multilingual and mother-tongue instruction strengthens children's academic success and cultural identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the periods discussed above are closely interconnected, and Indian education has developed as a unity of continuity and change. In the Vedic and Buddhist periods education was mainly religious and enlightening, in the Middle Ages it was enriched by Islamic traditions, and under British colonialism a modern, secular and institutionalized model took shape. At every stage religion, caste and political power determined who could study, and women's education developed from the limited opportunities of the Vedic period, through the new opportunities of the Buddhist period and the missionary and university initiatives of the colonial period, to the constitutional and policy guarantees after 1947. After independence the state regarded education as the main factor of national development and, through National Education Policies, modernised the system, introduced free and compulsory education and raised the quality of higher education. Today Indian education preserves its historical heritage while developing in harmony with global trends and digital transformation; inclusion, quality and the formation of human capital are strategic factors of the country's progress.

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