

# Tracing the Genealogy of Elementary Education Policy in India Till Independence

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## Abstract

This article attempts to trace the genealogy of elementary education policy in India under the colonial rule of the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and the British till its independence in 1947. It records the development of school education historically and the policy changes with regard to elementary education under various periods of colonial rule. The political economy of elementary education was traced historically from the time of Portuguese arrival in India in the 1400s. The policy changes and the public expenditure on education during the British colonial period have laid a strong foundation for the modern educational development of free India after its independence. The contemporary school educational structure in India has its strong roots in the colonial education structure and management. Despite elementary education being considered as an important area to focus and develop during the colonial period, it has never received the needed resources to strengthen itself. This paper will lay the larger structural map of political economy of school education till the time of independence to understand the contemporary school education in a more nuanced manner.

## Keywords

elementary education, education, social sciences, colonialism, educational finance, political economy, politics and social sciences, political science

## Introduction

Modern education policy, as it came to be elucidated over the 19th century, was driven by colonial imperatives. The emergence of modern education and its institutions in India was the result of foreign rulers' occupation of the country for many centuries. In fact they have initiated various measures and opened up numerous modern institutions, which formed the basis for the development of modern democracy in India. History shows that the domain of elementary education<sup>1</sup> has always been a contentious and ignored domain. Despite recommendations from various committees during the colonial period for the resurgence of elementary education, it was ignored consistently. The role of individuals and agencies in setting up schools and institutions in India could be traced to colonial period.

The compulsory primary education being the aim of governments from the time of colonial period really got transformed into a constitutional guarantee only in the 21st century. The Indian nationalist movement also played an important role in forcing the colonial government in prioritizing more resources for elementary education. This article traces the history of development of modern school education policy from the time of the arrival of Portuguese in India. It also looks into various committees and initiatives by colonial governments to improve the quality of education. It further traces the political economy of education from

colonial period and highlights the role of private players in the domain of elementary education. This paper is significant as it will help us to understand the initiatives of colonial government in identifying the factors responsible for improving the quality of education at elementary level, most of which are still relevant in our efforts to improve the quality of elementary education. This paper is an outcome of a synthesis of relevant literature and its analysis within the framework of history of educational policymaking, with an objective to understand and improve the quality of elementary education in India.

## *Emergence of Modern Education in India*

The emergence of modern education in India could be traced back to 1498, when Vasco da Gama arrived in Calicut. The Portuguese, who were considered as originators of modern education in India, opened educational institutions through Roman Catholic missionaries, as soon as they settled in

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India. According to Indian Education Commission Report (Government of India, 1882, pp. 221-222), these educational institutions could be classified into four divisions. They were,

- I. Parochial Portuguese and Latin schools for elementary education attached to churches and missionary stations;
- II. Orphanages for Indian children, in which, besides rudimentary instruction, agriculture and industrial training was provided;
- III. Jesuit colleges for higher studies; and
- IV. Seminaries for theological instruction and for training of candidates for priesthood.

Printing was first introduced in India by the Portuguese missionaries, who helped the educational development further by printing materials locally for distribution. The first printing press was set up at Goa in 1556, which was followed by four more printing presses at Ambalcatla, Cochin, Angamale, and Panikkayal during the latter half of 16th century (Law, 1915, pp. 102-104).

The Dutch, who came to India in the 1660s, defeated the Portuguese in the southern region of Kerala and pushed them toward the western region of Goa, Daman, and Diu colonies. The Dutch East India company was formed in 1602, but they were strictly commercial with little concentration on missionary enterprises. The French East India Company, which was established in 1664, started factories at Mahe, Yanam, Karaikal, Chandranagore, and Pondicherry in the southern region of India. French started primary schools in their settlements to help their employees to educate their children. A secondary school was established in Pondicherry, where French was taught to children of French settlers and Indian employees (Siqueira, 1952, p. 27).

The British East India Company was established in 1600. Initially the company's motive was restricted strictly to commercial activities. Slowly the Directors of the company started sending Chaplains to India for the spiritual welfare of the company's employees and also for spreading Christianity among the people (Law, 1915, pp. 7-8). A missionary clause was included in the Charter Act of 1698, which asked the company to maintain ministers of religion at their factories in India and to engage a chaplain in every ship of 500 tons or more. It also directed the company to maintain schools in every garrison and factory of its own, according to need (Sharp, 1920, p. 3). St. Mary's school was started by Madras Government in 1715 for the children of company's protestant employees. In 1717, another Anglo-vernacular school was started in Cuddalore for Indian children. The Danish missionaries were given permission and financial aid by the Governor of Madras to start charity schools (Sen, 1930, p. 40).

The British realized the value of English language as the medium of communication between Indians and Europeans.

It was Mr. John Sullivan who, representing the Madras government at Tanjore court, took the lead in suggesting a plan for opening government schools in English medium for educating Indians. The government allotted an annual grant of 250 *pagodas*<sup>2</sup> to each school established, and the *Rajas*<sup>3</sup> and *Zamindars*<sup>4</sup> contributed enormously for establishing such schools. The Missionaries inspected these schools regularly and the financial accounts were submitted to government regularly (Meston, 1936, p. 17). Thus, the current education policy of private participation, inspection, and award of grant were defined and shaped long back during the British period, as state funded education system was absent in England during those times.

Thus, the initiatives for development of education during 1700s mainly came from private persons, officers, and missionaries. The East India Company respected the endowments to educational institutions, and the Permanent settlement of 1784<sup>5</sup> recognized in perpetuity, the rent free grants of land given to the educational institutions. During this time, many English teaching schools came into existence with a sole motive of money making. Throughout the period of two and a half centuries (1600-1858), education was ignored and treated with less interest by the company as they were afraid of educating the people (Basu, 1935, p. 139).

Thus, initially from 1600 to 1698, the East India Company's concentration was more into trade-related competition, and it showed little or no interest toward interfering with local education and development. During the period of 1698 to 1764, the Christian missionaries took some initiative in educating the children of the company employees, both European and mixed parentage. The period 1764 to 1813 was an active era, where substantial funds were set apart for education in India, and also a change in the mind-set that only education can bring about any major social change in India (Howell, 1872). Toward the end of the 18th century, the idea that Western education through English language was the only answer to the educational problems of India was well advocated and gained support. The East India Company Director's disposition to foster indigenous education system was vehemently opposed by missionaries and their supporters in England (Embree, 1962, p. 120).

### *Charter Act of 1813 and Following Developments*

The Charter Act 1813 was considered to be one of the landmark legislation with regard to educational development in British India. This is also the first time the company started looking and moving toward taking responsibility in the domain of education. The Charter Act of 1813 gave permission to Christian missionaries to work in India and spread education. An important clause in the act allotted a sum of not less than 1 lakh rupees each year for the revival and improvement of literature, for encouraging the learned natives of India, and also for the introduction and promotion of knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the

British territories in India. But the act was not clear about the ways through which the money will be spent for educational development. It did not have any clear direction despite having money earmarked for educational initiatives. The company was not clear whether to lay importance on the encouragement of modern Western studies or on the expansion of traditional Indian learning. It was also confused whether to adopt Indian languages or English as the medium of instruction in modern schools and colleges to spread Western learning (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2003, p. 46).

The East India Company slowly started showing more interest in educational matters. It conducted a series of surveys on elementary education through its officials between 1822 and 1838. In a minute, dated March 10, 1826, by Thomas Munro, the Governor of Madras Presidency, it was observed that there were 12,498 schools<sup>6</sup> with 1,08,650 students in Madras province, out of a total population of 1,28,50,941. The survey conducted in Bombay under Governor Mountstuart Elphinstone in 1829 showed the existence of 1,705 schools with 35,153 students in a population of 46, 81,735. Missionary William Adam, appointed by Governor General Lord William Bentinck conducted the survey in Bengal presidency. In his report, he estimated that at the beginning of the 19th century, there were 1,00,000 schools in Bengal and Bihar or roughly two schools for every three villages (Ghosh, 2000, p. 8).

The Charter Act of 1833, which modified the charter act of 1813, empowered the missionaries of other countries also to carry out their educational work in India, and increased the educational grant from 10,000 pounds per annum to 1,00,000 pounds per annum. The Government of India Act, 1833, appointed Lord Macaulay as the first Law Member of the Governor General's Council. He played an important role in building the foundations of bilingual colonial India, by influencing the Governor General, to adopt English as the medium of instruction from the 6th year of schooling onward, rather than Sanskrit or Arabic that was then used in the institutions supported by the East India Company (Mayhew, 1926). In his minute dated February 2, 1835, Macaulay insisted that government should not withhold Indians from Western learning. As mass education was neither feasible nor desirable, Macaulay insisted that best policy would be to "do our best to form a class (of persons) who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Dobbin, 1970, p. 18).

### *Educational Dispatch of 1854*

The educational dispatch of 1854, or popularly called Wood's dispatch, was based on the request by the Court of Directors to frame a General Scheme of Education, applicable to the whole of British India. The dispatch, being the first authoritative declaration of educational policy in India, moved toward the end of the laissez-faire attitude of English

government, and stands as a pivotal point in the history of Indian education. The dispatch clearly enunciated the principles that should govern educational policy in India, and laid upon the government of the country the responsibility of creating a comprehensive and properly articulated system of education from primary to university level. It also provided for a more systematic and extended diffusion of general education in the country (Moore, 1966, p. 108).

It suggested that the government's attention should be directed toward the problem of conveying useful and practical knowledge to the masses. It is considered as the Magna Carta of English Education in India, as it rejected the "filtration theory"<sup>7</sup> and laid stress on mass education, female education and improvement of vernaculars, and favored secularism in Education. The dispatch emphasized on improved arts, and the sciences and literature of Europe, and insisted on English as medium of higher education. But it was not to be substituted for vernaculars. The dispatch replaced the provincial boards and councils of education by creating departments of public instruction in each of the five provinces into which the territory of company were divided at the time—Bengal, Madras, Bombay, the North-Western province, and the Punjab (Richey, 1922). By 1854, only 36,000 pupils were educated in government elementary schools, the missionary schools were instructing almost twice the number. Therefore the education dispatch of 1854 had rightly urged the spread of mass education through grant-in-aid system.

The dispatch also decided to levy fees on the students to encourage greater exertion and regularity in attendance, and the fees thus collected to be used for the benefit of the schools. The dispatch also paid attention to the question of trained teachers and suitable text books in the schools. It also recommended professional training in law, medicine, and civil engineering (Ghosh, 2000). Thus, to achieve the general level of education, some important recommendations of the dispatch were

1. the constitution of a separate department for education;
2. the institution of universities at presidency towns;
3. the establishment of teachers training institutions;
4. the establishment of middle schools;
5. the maintenance of existing government colleges and increase in the institutions of higher learning;
6. increased attention to vernacular schools, indigenous or otherwise, for elementary education;
7. the introduction of a system of grant-in-aid to increase the participation of private enterprises;
8. introduction of a systemized supervision and inspection; and
9. the spread and promotion of female education.

It is true that the dispatch did not bestow on the Indian people certain rights and privileges in education, but some of

the concepts of the dispatch, like promotion of Indian languages, use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction at school stage, institution of university professorship in some subjects, including vernacular and classical languages, law, and civil engineering, concept of mass education, and that of secular education in a plural society like India were the concepts that were significantly valid during the later period in independent India. Although the dispatch does not refer to the idea of universal literacy, it attempted to spread education at wider level through grant-in-aid system. It never tried to recognize the obligation of the state to educate every child below a certain age (Paranjpe, 1941).

### *End of East India Company's Rule*

After the Queen's proclamation of 1858, the power was transferred from company to crown. Lord Stanley, the first secretary of state for India, examined the educational development of India and supported Wood's dispatch with some alterations in the field of primary education. He held the view that the system of grant-in-aid recommended by Wood's dispatch should be confined to secondary and higher education, and the government should directly undertake the responsibility of primary education because the system of grant-in-aid was not beneficial to primary schools. Lord Stanley, impressed by the contemporary British education policy where a movement was launched for levying a local cess to support public education, insisted that the government should levy a local tax for maintaining elementary schools (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2003, p. 49). Elementary education made good progress by 1881-1882 as there were 82,916 schools with 20,61,541 students compared with 16,473 schools with 6,07,320 students in 1870-1871. But compared with the overall population of 1,95,875,127 in the whole of British India, only 20,61,541 attended elementary schools in 1881-1882 (Ghosh, 2000, p. 91).

The First Indian Education Commission with William Hunter as its chairman was appointed by Lord Ripon, the Viceroy of India in 1882. The commission was asked to "enquire particularly into the manner in which, the principles of the Dispatch of 1854 has been implemented, and to suggest such measures as it might think desirable with a view to the further carrying out of the policy therein laid down." The commission was also asked to keep the enquiry into the primary education at the forefront, partly because of an agitation alleging its neglect in India and partly because a national system of compulsory elementary education was built up in England with the passing of the Elementary Education Act in 1880. The commission boldly admitted that

while every branch of education can justly claim the fostering care of the state, it is desirable, in the present circumstances of the country, to declare the elementary education of the masses, its provisions, extensions, and improvement to be that part of the education system, to which the strenuous efforts of the state

should be directed in a still larger measure than heretofore. (Mukerji, 1974, p. 145)

The commission declared that primary education had legitimately the largest claim on the resources of the government and it made several recommendations in connection with different aspects of primary education, such as policy, organization, curriculum, training of teachers, grant-in-aid, and so on. It recommended that primary education be imparted through the medium of the mother tongue and that the district and the municipal boards be entrusted with the responsibility of management of primary education. This was based on the British pattern where primary education has been entrusted to the county councils. Thus, the commission moved toward placing the entire responsibility of primary education on a weak body that could not discharge its own responsibilities properly. The Hunter Commission put forth valuable suggestions on the financial aspects of primary education. The district and municipal boards were directed by the commission to assign specific funds exclusively to primary education. It was also suggested that the accounts of rural and urban primary institutions be separated so that the funds of rural institutions might not be misappropriated by urban primary schools. It also desired that the provincial government should contribute to local funds. Stressing its significance, the commission expressed the opinion that primary education be declared to be that part of the whole system of public instruction that possessed an almost exclusive claim on local funds set apart for education and a large claim on provincial revenues (Paranjpe, 1938).

The government of India accepted the recommendations of the Hunter Commission and transferred primary education to the charge of municipalities and district boards. According to Table 1, the increase in primary schools controlled by municipal boards between 1881 and 1901 is not very impressive. In Madras presidency it increased more than twofold from 1,263 in 1881 to 2,836 in 1901. But the private aided schools also increased from 7,414 in 1881 to 11,125 in 1901. The demand for quality English education that can secure a government job could be the reason for people preferring aided private schools rather than primary schools run by a municipal body. The extent of the transfer of control and of financial support varied from state to state. Between 1885-1886 and 1901-1902, the increase in the number of students was only 660,000, as compared with nearly 2,000,000 between 1870-1871 and 1885-1886. The expenses on primary education by the government rose by a negligible thousand rupees per year from Rs. 16.77 lakhs in 1880-1881 to Rs. 16.92 lakhs in 1901-1902 (Ghosh, 2000, p. 100).

The general observation of the Indian Education Commission (Hunter Commission) of 1882 was that more progress had been made in higher and middle than in primary education, although the importance of the last had been realized by the Indian administration on several occasions. The commission made several recommendations with the object



**Table 1.** Primary Schools in India (1881-1882 to 1901-1902).

Province	1881-1882		1901-1902	
	No. of departmental or board schools	No. of aided private schools	No. of departmental or board schools	No. of aided private schools
Madras	1,263	7,414	2,836	11,125
Bombay	3,811	196	4,670	1,929
Bengal	28	47,374	26	36,046
North-West frontier	...	...	135	17
United provinces	5,561	243	4,598	2,463
Punjab	1,549	278	1,802	636
Central provinces	894	368	931	864
Assam	7	1,256	1,260	1,482
Berar	467	209	640	400
Coorg	57	3	70	4

Source: Mukerji (1974, p. 157).

**Table 2.** Central Grants to Education in India (1902-1919).

Year	Amount	Purpose
1902	Rs. 40 lakhs recurring	General grant for education
1904-1905	Rs. 5 lakhs recurring	Universities and colleges
1904-1905	Rs. 2.5 lakhs recurring	European education
1904-1905	Rs. 2.5 lakhs recurring	Technical education
1904-1905	Rs. 35 lakhs recurring	Primary education
1910-1911	Rs. 93 lakhs recurring	General grant
1912-1913	Rs. 60 lakhs recurring	Primary education (50 lakhs) and Higher education (10 lakhs)
1912-1913	Rs. 387.18 lakhs nonrecurring	General grant
1913-1914	Rs. 55 lakhs recurring	General grant
1913-1914	Rs. 95 thousands nonrecurring	—
1914-1915	Rs. 9 lakhs recurring	General grant
1914-1915	Rs. 12.25 lakhs nonrecurring	Includes Rs. 10 lakhs for Calcutta university hostels
1917-1918	Rs. 30 lakhs recurring	Teachers training and increase in their salaries
1918-1919	Rs. 30 lakhs recurring	Primary education
1918-1919	Rs. 30 lakhs recurring	Agricultural education

Source: Mukerji (1974, p. 179).

of assigning first priority to primary education. However, the educational situation did not improve much, and about two decades later, when reviewing the country's educational development, Lord Curzon observed in 1904 that primary education had received insufficient attention and inadequate share of public funds.

The educational developments during the 19th century were not very satisfactory as the colonial government's interest and financial resources were directed toward higher education through English, whereby they ignored primary education. As English became the language of governance, all other types of education, excluding English, were sidelined and slowly started deteriorating. There was popular support among people for higher education through English as it enabled them to get government jobs, which assured them economic security and social prestige. This policy resulted in growth of secondary schools and colleges and

complete neglect of elementary schools. The missionaries and the private individuals were the first to use this situation and open large number of secondary schools and colleges. The colonial government also devoted most of the funds by contributions made in the form of endowments, donations, subscriptions, and fees toward secondary education and college education. The elementary education was given very less attention, and the local bodies were given the task of elementary education without much financial support by the government. Private individual's entry in elementary education was restricted in numbers and also poor in quality.

The following reasons were given by Kingdon and Muzammil (2003, p. 52) for the slow progress of primary education during 19th century:

- The centralized nature of British government, and its urban-focused developmental activities. The rural

**Table 3.** Expenditure on Primary Education (1901-1902 to 1921-1922).

Source	Expenditure			
	1901-1902		1921-1922	
	Amount (in rupees)	Percentage	Amount (in rupees)	Percentage
State funds	16,27,947	13.5	2,67,46,035	52.8
Local board funds	36,44,386	30.5	89,67,899	17.6
Municipal fund	7,76,485	6.7	50,51,635	9.8
Fees	31,15,211	26.3	49,07,427	9.6
Other sources	27,11,730	23.0	52,35,111	10.2
Total	118,75,759	100	509,08,107	100

Source. Mukerji (1974, p. 193).

**Table 4.** Number of Primary Schools and Expenditure (1921-1937).

	1921-1922	1926-1927	1937
Number of schools	155,016	184,829	192,244
Expenditure	Rs. 39,469,080	Rs. 67,518,802	Rs. 81,338,015
Per school expenditure	Rs. 254	Rs. 366	Rs. 423

Source. Ghosh (2000, p. 160).

areas were neglected and all good schools came up in urban areas;

- The policies of British government, which marginalized the cottage and small-scale industries leading to large-scale poverty in rural areas. This increased the economic pressure on common masses obstructing the spread of mass education;
- And finally, the economic policies of British government, which never encouraged mass education in India. The exploitative taxation policies and restricted government spending on education, particularly elementary education, have completely paralyzed the spread of education among the common masses.

### *Educational Developments During the 20th Century*

When Lord Curzon introduced certain educational reforms in India, there was distrust among the people regarding the reforms. He conducted a secret conference at Shimla in 1901 to discuss the educational development and its hurdles. In 1902, the Indian University Commission was appointed, and the Indian Universities Act was passed in 1904. Lord Curzon's government resolution published on March 11, 1904, elaborated in detail the status of education in India. "Four out of five villages in India are without schools. Three boys out of four grow up without any education, and only one out of forty girls attends any kind of school." This clearly

pointed out the lack of attention paid by the government in the growth of elementary education (Mukerji, 1974, p. 163). This resolution also acknowledged the negligence of the government in providing adequate share of funds for elementary education and agreed with the views of Education Commission of 1882 that the active expansion of primary education is one of the most active duties of the state.

Indian Congress party leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale, influenced by the example in England, which introduced a new era in primary education in 1902, and also by the Education Act of the Baroda state making primary education compulsory in 1906, moved a resolution in the imperial legislative council on March 19, 1910. This resolution suggested that free and compulsory education be given for boys between the age of 6 and 10 years, especially in those areas where 33% of the male population were already at school. It also suggested that the expenditure toward school education be shared between the local bodies and the government in the proportion of 1:2 (Dayal, 1955). Despite support from eminent persons, such as Pundit Madan Mohan Malviya and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the resolution was defeated by 38 to 13 votes. But the Government of India reviewed the whole field of education and issued the Government of India's resolution on Indian Education policy on February 21, 1913. This resolution stressed the urgent need to expand the primary education by starting 91,000 primary public schools in addition to the already existing 1,00,000 primary schools. This expansion will double the already studying 4.25 million students, and it also emphasized the need to allocate more funds, adequate salaries, and proper retirement benefits for teachers (Ghosh, 2000, p. 142).

The Resolution was put into effect immediately, but due to outbreak of World War I, it was not carried out effectively. Despite this hardship, between 1913 and 1917, the central government distributed educational grants amounting to Rs. 328 lakhs nonrecurring and Rs.124 lakhs recurring. The imperial grants were suspended during 1917 and 1919, but still there was increase in the number of students admitted to educational institutions. Slowly national education became part of Swadeshi Movement, and the leaders started putting

**Table 5.** Primary Schools and Enrolment (1921-1947).

	1921-1922	1926-1927	1931-1932	1936-1937	1941-1942	1946-1947
Schools	160,072	189,348	201,470	197,527	181,968	172,663
Enrolments	6,310,541	8,256,760	9,454,360	10,541,79	12,018,726	13,036,665

Source. Mukerji (1974, p. 230).

more pressure on the British government to focus more on educating the masses by increasing financial resources for the same. This had a major impact on the British government during later years, while expanding the elementary education through allotting more financial resources.

The total expenditure on education from government funds rose from Rs. 104 lakhs in 1901-1902 to Rs. 902 lakh in 1921-1922, showing an annual increase of Rs. 39.9 lakhs during the first two decades of the 20th century. The Education Policy of 1904 declared that the rapid spread of primary education as one of the foremost duties of state. The official opinion was mostly influenced by the English Education Act of 1902, which introduced a new era in England's primary education. In India, the imperial grant of Rs. 40 lakhs was increased to Rs.75 lakhs in 1905 and a recurring annual increase of Rs. 35 lakhs was promised. Despite the government's original intention to spend the entire sum on primary education, a major part of it was used for higher education. A recurring expenditure of Rs. 35 lakhs in 1904-1905 and Rs. 30 lakhs 1918-1919 was allotted to primary education.

During the period 1901-1922, primary education received more attention than previous periods due to Lord Curzon's determined effort to improve elementary education in India. Three factors that were considered important for the improvement of concentration on primary education were

- Lord Curzon's declaration that primary education received less attention and needs to be given top priority by both supreme and local government;
- allocation of large grants to local bodies by imperial and state governments; and
- agitation for compulsory and free education raised by national leaders, as part of their national struggle for independence.

By 1921-1922, the financial position and importance of primary education underwent a considerable change compared with previous periods. The colonial government started bearing more than half of the expenditure spent on primary education and the percentage of spending by local bodies had fallen considerably during this period. But, despite these efforts, by 1917 less than one fourth of the total number of boys of school-going age was in primary schools and others were out of schools (Sen, 1930, p. 200). The neglect of primary education for many centuries and the concentration on English education to prepare the people for government jobs

could be the main reason that it took more time for the improvement of primary education.

### *Montford Reforms*

The Government of India Act was passed in 1919 by the British parliament according to the proposal of Montagu and Chelmsford. This Act created a council of states and a legislative assembly with elected majorities. It introduced Diarchy in the provinces where departments with less political weight and little funds, like education, health, agriculture, and local bodies were transferred to ministers responsible to the provincial legislatures. The provincial legislative assemblies readily fulfilled the demands pertaining to grants-in-aid and undertook the responsibility of education among the masses. Under the influence of the national movement, the provincial education ministers passed Bills rendering elementary education free and compulsory in different provinces. The need for a coordinated agency was felt both by the central and provincial governments, and consequently, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) was established at the centre in 1921 (Hartog, 1929, p. 276). The chief function of the board was to offer expert advice on important educational matters referred to it. The board was abolished within 2 years in the interest of economy and was again revived in 1935, according to the suggestions of Hartog Committee.

### *Hartog Committee*

On November 8, 1927, the British government announced the appointment of Simon Commission to enquire into, and report on the working of Montagu-Chelmsford reforms as a basis for further action. Under the Simon Commission, an auxiliary committee under the leadership of Mr. Hartog was formed to enquire into the status of education in India. Hartog committee submitted its report in 1929. While presenting the educational progress during 1917-1927, it mentioned that the socially disadvantaged communities awakened the need for education. But it expressed its concern regarding wastage and stagnation, which crept into the education system. It mentioned that out of every 100 boys admitted in Class I in 1922-1923, only 19 were found studying in Class IV in 1925-1926 (Hartog, 1929). The committee also attributed the following reasons for wastage and stagnation:

- absence of systematic organization of adult education;

- difficulty of providing schools in villages with a population below 500;
- uneven distribution of schools and inadequate use of existing schools;
- shortage of separate boys and girls schools or separate schools on communal or religious grounds;
- ineffective teaching, unsuitable curricula, and inadequate inspecting staff; and
- an unsatisfactory provision for compulsory primary education by the provisional governments.

According to the committee, the progress of literacy was slow owing to the poverty of rural masses, ignorance, and lack of means of transportation, seasonal diseases, caste barriers, conservatism, and early engagement of children in agricultural occupation. It also insisted that too much attention is devoted to higher education and primary education was relatively neglected.

The Hartog committee made the following recommendation for solving the issues in primary education (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2003, p. 57):

- The minimum duration of primary education should be 4 years.
- A policy of consolidation should be adopted in place of expansion of education.
- The standard of general primary school teachers should be raised through provision of training and refresher courses and through educational conferences, and the salary and service conditions should be improved.
- The curriculum of primary education should be more liberalized and be made suitable to local requirements.
- Teaching hours in schools and holidays should be adjusted to seasonal and local needs.
- Special attention should be paid to lowest class in primary schools with a view to check wastage and stagnation.
- The work of rural upliftment should be associated with school work.
- The problem of primary education being of national importance, the government should assume the responsibility of its development and should not feel contented by handing it over entirely to local bodies.
- The government inspection staff should be increased.
- Primary education should not be made entirely compulsory in haste.
- Wastage should also be checked in secondary education.
- The courses in the middle schools should be made more diversified, with a view to preparing boys for industrial and commercial careers.

After the implementation of Hartog Committee recommendations, in elementary education the number of primary

schools rose from 1, 55,016 in 1921-1922 to only 1, 92,244 in 1937. The expenditure by the government also increased minimally from Rs. 39,469,080 in 1921-1922 to Rs. 81,338,015 in 1937. Despite detailed analysis and recommendations by Hartog committee for the improvement of primary education in India, not much progress has been made during the following decades. As the analysis pointed out, the poverty and other caste related barriers cannot be overcome by the minimal suggestions recommended by Hartog. These were well entrenched in Indian society in those times, which has to be confronted and overcome only by strong socioeconomic and cultural changes in Indian society.

The CAGE, which was dissolved in 1923 due to financial crisis, was once again reorganized in 1935 as per the recommendations of Hartog Committee. At its first annual meeting held in December 1935, CAGE recommended three stages of education (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2003, p. 58). They were

- Primary stage, which should provide a minimum of general education and ensure permanent literacy;
- The lower secondary stage, which should have a self-sufficient curriculum for general education that must form the basis of higher secondary education and vocational training; and
- The higher secondary stage, which should include institutions with varying lengths of courses, according to the needs of individual institutions.

CAGE requested the government to invite the advice of experts to construct and reorganize this scheme. Two experts Mr. A. Abbott and Mr. S. H. Wood studied the scheme and submitted a report in 1937. Their main recommendations include the following:

- Provision of trained teachers should be made for primary schools,
- Special attention to be paid for education of girls,
- To bring change in the curriculum of elementary education and base it more upon the activities of children than bookish reading, and
- Education should be given in the mother tongue of the children.

Even though elementary education received the much needed attention during the beginning of 20th century, the insufficient allocation of resources has paralyzed it from achieving its desired goal of providing quality elementary education for majority of population. Various committees during this period recommended changes in curriculum, improving teachers' skills, regulating the schools, educating children in mother tongue and allocating sufficient funds to improve the quality of elementary education, which is still relevant and unfulfilled. The colonial government has not shown the real political will to implement the recommendations of the committee, which has



further weakened the structure of elementary education in India. The formation of committees has been the trend from the time of the colonial period, whereas its recommendations were never given complete attention till date.

### *From 1935 to Independence*

In August 1935, the Government of India Act emerged after the long process, which started 8 years earlier with the appointment of Simon Commission in 1927. By then, Gandhi had suggested a scheme of universal compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6 to 13 years through the medium of their mother tongue and also that vocational training should be a part of the school education. As the government participated in Second World War, the wave of educational expansion was constricted. Postwar reconstruction efforts started in 1945, and in the domain of education, postwar developmental plan, popularly known as the Sargent Plan, was submitted by CABE. The plan aimed at India attaining the educational standard of contemporary England within a minimum period of 40 years. Some of the important recommendations of the plan with regard to elementary education were (Mukerji, 1974, p. 222) as follows:

- A reasonable provision for preprimary education for children between 3 and 6 years of age. It saw the inclusion of more than 1,000,000 children in nursery schools.
- Provision of universal, compulsory, and free primary education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14.
- Full provision for training of teachers at all levels. The scheme would require 2,217,733 teachers, namely, 2,000,000 nongraduate teachers (33,333 for preprimary stage, 1,196,200 for the junior basic stage, 625,560 for the senior basic stage, and 81,320 for the junior department of high schools) and 181,320 graduate teachers for the senior department of high schools.

It was a comprehensive plan to solve the educational problems of the country, and the universal, free, and compulsory elementary education that had been surfacing throughout the period of British rule at various points of time. Despite that, the elementary education is the most ignored area and it took another 50 years and more after independence to make universal, free elementary education as a fundamental right for all children in India.

The above table indicates the increase in both number of schools and enrolment of students between the period 1921 and 1931. But it decreased to a considerable extent between 1937 and 1947. During the period 1921-1931, the acts of compulsory education were passed and provincial legislatures devoted large sums of money for educational purposes. These enabled new schemes of education to emerge and the

expansion of primary education at rapid pace. But the period 1937-1947 was a period of worldwide economic depression, which led to abandonment of new schemes for educational development. Moreover, under the recommendation of Hartog committee, the policy of consolidation was adopted, which rooted out inefficient schools and only efficient ones were allowed to exist. The period from 1917 to 1947, forms an important period in the educational history of India as it includes the economic and social impact of the two world wars, the national awakening in India, progress in economic and social matters, and finally attaining freedom on August 15, 1947.

### **Conclusion**

There have been various efforts from the colonial time to improve the quality of elementary education. The Education dispatch 1854, Hunter Commission 1882, and Lord Curzon's observation in 1904 all pointed out certain issues, such as inadequate educational finance, lack of qualified teachers and appropriate infrastructure, quality text books, and so on, for improving the quality of education, which are still relevant in improving our quality of education. Kothari Commission report, 1966 (Bhatnagar, 1971) also recommended that if education is to develop adequately, educational expenditure in the next 20 years should rise from Rs. 12 per capita in 1965-1966 to Rs. 54 in 1985-1986. This implies that the educational expenditure, which increased from Rs. 1, 144 millions in 1950-1951 to Rs. 6,000 millions in 1965-1966, will further rise to Rs. 40,365 millions in 1985-1986 and that the proportion of GNP [Gross National Product] allocated to education will rise from 2.9% in 1965 to 6.0% in 1985-1986 (Bhatnagar, 1971, p. 184). The National Policy on Education (1986) reiterated the issues of equality of educational opportunity, and free and compulsory education for all children up to 14 years, with sufficient funds to achieve these goals.

Promoting education in one's own mother tongue was also recommended by various committees during that period. Privatization has been promoted as state policy during colonial times, as a strong state funded education system was absent in England in those days. Despite many progressive recommendations, the allocation of funds for elementary education has always taken a back seat, without which there cannot be any major changes. The nationalist movement highlighted the deplorable condition of elementary education in India, but it failed to receive the appropriate attention of colonial government in terms of increased allocation of resources.

After independence, there was a considerable effort from the state to improve the quality of education. But these efforts failed to keep in touch with the needs of the growing population. The successive governments have not shown interest to make the necessary investments in education sector. Instead of reaching the level of investment of 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 1986, as advocated by the Kothari

Commission, the state was spending only around 4% of GDP till now. This has resulted in an ever-widening cumulative gap of investment in education implying less than adequate classrooms, teaching aids, teachers' posts, facilities for teacher training, libraries, laboratories, sports facilities, and so on, till date.

After the initiation of economic liberalization policy in the 1990s, the state's role has been restructured and redefined according to the changing political economy of the nation, which has further curtailed the resources much needed to provide the quality elementary education for all.

## Notes

1. Primary or Elementary education is of 8 years of education from Grade 1 to Grade 8 and it is envisaged in two stages: a junior stage covering a period of 5 years and a senior stage covering a period of 3 years. The term *Primary* and *Elementary* are used interchangeably and both denote the same.
2. Pagoda was a unit of currency, a coin made of gold or half gold minted by Indian dynasties as well as the British, the French, and the Dutch.
3. Kings
4. Landlords
5. Permanent Settlement of 1784 also known as the Cornwallis Code or Permanent Settlement of Bengal was an agreement between the East India Company and Bengali landlords to fix revenues to be raised from land.
6. Government and private schools run by missionaries.
7. According to this theory education is to be filtered to the common people drop by drop, so that it goes to the common public and at due time it reaches everyone.

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