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REVIEW ESSAY

Miseducation in India: Historiographical Reflections

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India, a country with more than 1.3 billion people living in an area of 1,269,219 square miles has only three teaching positions dedicated to the history of education. This denotes little importance given to the discipline. India produced no historian of education during the first twenty-six years after attaining independence. Bhagaban Prasad Majumdar, the first historian of education in independent India, published his *First Fruit of English Education* in 1973, through a local publisher that no longer exists.[1] The book analyzed the answers written in annual examinations during the first half of the nineteenth century to evaluate the growth of modern education in India. It is indispensable for anyone seeking to understand curriculum history in India, particularly a teacher education student. However, the book is seldom quoted and difficult to find. In all of Delhi, only one library holds a single copy. This is representative of the fate that has befallen even scholars who have worked in the field at the international level and published books and papers in recognized journals.[2] This year, India is celebrating seventy-five years of independence, and so far, it has produced six sets

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[1] Bhagaban Prasad Majumdar, *First Fruits of English Education, 1817-1857* (Calcutta: Bookland, 1973).

[2] For instance, the following works by Indian, British, and American scholars have been ignored: D.H. Emmott, "Alexander Duff and the Foundation of Modern Education in India," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 13, no. 2 (May 1965), 160-69; M.A. Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1837* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Hayden J.A. Bellenoit, *Missionary Education and Empire in Late Colonial India, 1860-1920* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007); Elmer H. Cutts, "The Background of Macaulay's Minute," *American Historical Review* 58, no. 4 (July 1953), 824-53; Natalie Robinson Sirkin and Gerald Sirkin, "The Battle of Indian Education: Macaulay's Opening Salvo Newly Discovered," *Victorian Studies* 14, no. 4 (June 1971), 407-28; Robert Eric Frykenberg, "Modern Education in South India, 1784-1854: Its Roots and Its Role as a Vehicle of Integration under Company Raj," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 1 (Feb. 1886), 37-65; Robert Eric Frykenberg, "The Myth of English as a 'Colonialist' Imposition upon India: A Reappraisal with Special Reference to South India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 120, no. 2 (1988), 305-15; Clive Whitehead, *Colonial Educators: The British Indian and Colonial Education Service 1858-1983* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); Clive Whitehead, "The Concept of British Education Policy in the Colonies 1850-1960," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 39, no. 2 (2007), 161-73; Clive Whitehead, "The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy, Part I: India," *History of Education* 34, no. 3 (2005), 315-29; Catriona Ellis, "Remembering Pre-Independence Childhoods in South India: Interrogating Autobiographies and Identities," *Social History* 44, no. 2 (2019), 202-28.

of major historical works and five micro studies that are limited in scope, again, are seldom quoted and recognized in the public debates on education in India.[3]

The marginalization of education history in India does not owe to a lack of domestic developments worth investigating. Indians established the first modern educational institution in Asia that taught Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Byron, Pope, Scott, Homer, Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, David Hume, and John Locke, as well as algebra, differential and integral calculus, trigonometry, and astronomy—in other words, the entire gamut of disciplines taught in modern universities of the West.[4] This institution, known as Vidyalaya, or "abode of knowledge" (later as Hindu College), was founded by the people of Calcutta in 1816-17. The first teacher training institution was set up in 1820 at Ratnagiri.[5] The history of education as a discipline was introduced as early as 1882-83 in teacher training colleges.[6] Comprehensive data of more than sixteen thousand indigenous schools, containing information about education access, curriculum, textbooks, and teacher's income, are available for the early part of the nineteenth century.[7] There are thousands of handwritten and printed documents in the archives, and Indians had established hundreds of institutions that exist to this day. So, there is no dearth of data available to write India's history of education. Although other countries have individual school-level studies and dictionaries of educators, few scholars in India know the names of the Indian educators who pioneered modern education. For instance, two brothers, Joy and Raj Kissen Mukherjee, were

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[3]Besides Majumdar's *First Fruit of English Education*, the other four are Aparna Basu, *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898-1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974); Aparna Basu, *Essays in the History of Indian Education* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1982); Suresh Chandra Ghosh, ed., *Development of Educational Services, 1879-1896* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992); Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Modern India 1757-2007*, 2nd ed. (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2010); Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, ed., *The Contested Terrain: Perspectives on Education in India* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1998); Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, ed., *Education and the Disprivileged: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2002); Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, ed., *The Development of Women's Education in India: A Collection of Documents, 1850-1920* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2001); Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, ed., *Educating the Nation* (New Delhi: Kanishka, 2003); Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002); Rosinka Chaudhuri, ed., *Derozio, Poet of India: The Definitive Edition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008); Parimala V. Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism: Discrimination, Education and Hindutva* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2011); Parimala V. Rao, ed., *New Perspectives in the History of Indian Education* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2014); Parimala V. Rao, *Beyond Macaulay: Education in India, 1780-1860* (New Delhi: Routledge 2020); Parimala V. Rao, "Modern Education and the Revolt of 1857 in India," *Paedagogica Historica* 52, no. 1-2 (2016), 25-42. The micro studies are: Jata Shankar Jha, *Beginnings in Modern Education in Mithila* (Patna, India: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1972); Archana Chakravarty, *History of Education in Assam, 1826-1919* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1989); Hamlet Bareh, *Progress of Education in Meghalaya* (New Delhi: Cosmos Publications, 1996); Zenobia E. Shroff, *The Contribution of Parsis to Education in Bombay City (1820-1920)* (Mumbai: Himalaya Publishing House, 2001); Sita Anantha Raman, *Getting Girls to School: Social Reform in the Tamil Districts, 1870-1930* (Calcutta: Stree, 1996).

[4]Majumdar, *First Fruits of English Education*, 17.

[5]*Board Collections,* No. 50501, 1817, General Department, No. 13 of 1824, Note by T.B. Jervis, Maharashtra State Archives.

[6]*Progress of Education in India, 1882-1887: First Quinquennial Review* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing), 137.

[7]Parimala V. Rao, *Beyond Macaulay*, 14-44.

the first to propose the establishment of a girls' school in 1846. They went on to establish twenty-four schools in the Uttarpara in Bengal.[8] Although the schools, colleges, and the library established by the Mukherjees still exist, along with a good biography recounting their work, these are seldom referred to either in academic discussions or in public debate on education.

Acknowledging such accomplishments could upset some conventional narratives. It could suggest, for instance, that the British did not ruthlessly impose English education upon helpless Indians. It also implies that Indians had agency and were proactive in the institution-building process. Clive Whitehead rightly states that "to date, much of the criticism of British policy appears to have been motivated more by emotion rather than by detailed scholarly analysis." Whitehead calls for "more 'plodding' in archives—something urgently needed at the present time to substantiate, refine or refute the claims of India's educational historians."[9]

Such ignorance is the natural result of not making the history of education an essential course for students in history departments and education programs at most universities and teacher training colleges. Although History of Education courses appear in the catalogues of bachelor's and master's programs in education degrees as an optional subject, the students who have gone through the courses mention that the discussion is limited to the "flagging of important recommendations of the Wood's Despatch of 1854, the Education Commission of 1882 and Gandhi's educational ideas."[10] From 2015 to 2019, I interviewed 125 PhD students from various teacher education institutions.[11] They had not heard of the term *archives* or knew the name of a single historian of education—Indian or international. This was confirmed when I interviewed 165 assistant professors of teacher training institutions across India between February 2018 and February 2022. The lack of familiarity with archives, the history of education, and the methodology of historical research has meant that further research in the field remains curtailed. As a result, seventeen thousand teacher training institutions have failed to publish even a single credible work in the history of education.

The Origin of Miseducation

The concept of "miseducation," sustained by the "active construction, maintenance, regulation, and diffusion of ignorance," is relevant to analyzing the content taught in teacher education institutions.[12] Two theories came into prominence in the public domain during the last decades of the freedom movement (1920-1947). The first was that modern education was an "alien western imposition, alien to Indian soil and has

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[8]*Returns to the House of Commons* 1859, *Part II*, 79-81, The British Library, London, UK.

[9]Whitehead, "The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy," 315-29.

[10]Whitehead, "The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy."

[11]The interviews were conducted in preparation for lectures on historical methods of educational research. Students asked such questions as, "What is an archive?" and "Can we go inside it?" This inspired annual surveys of students about their knowledge of archives and what historical works they have read. Similar findings were observed when I interviewed teacher education faculty. On this general topic, both groups only demonstrated awareness of Krishna Kumar's *The Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas* (New Delhi: Sage, 1991).

[12]A.J. Angulo, *Miseducation: A History of Ignorance-Making in America and Abroad* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 6.

enslaved millions."[13] The second was that the British destroyed indigenous education in India. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi first advocated these two theories through his writings and speeches. The opposition to modern Western knowledge was not civilizational opposition to the West; instead, it was a deeply embedded disdain toward the masses, derived from English elites. English elites in the nineteenth century feared that if education was given to the masses, it "would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture."[14] Questioning Indian education reformers, Gandhi said: "A peasant earns his bread honestly. But he cannot write his own name. What do you propose to do by giving him knowledge of letters? Will you add an inch to his happiness? Do you wish to make him discontented with his cottage or his lot?"[15] Gandhi admitted that he had benefited from modern education, but he emphasized that "I make use of the education I have received. And, if I am making good use of it, even then, it is not for the millions."[16]

If modern education had helped Gandhi, why was it bad for millions of his fellow countrymen? Gandhi was born into privilege; his father was a prime minister of the princely states of Porbandar and Rajkot. By his own admission, he was an average student and barely managed to pass the examinations, yet family wealth enabled him to go to England for higher education.[17] He defended the feudal interests by projecting himself as the leader of the underprivileged sections of the society. On the one hand, Gandhi declared that "untouchability is a sin."[18] On the other, he defended the caste system as scientific and universal. He argued that the caste system is "not a human invention, but an immutable law of nature—the statement of a tendency that is ever-present and at work like Newton's law of gravitation."[19] The castes considered as untouchable were the most marginalized of Indian society (today they are called Dalits). When they were attacked for sending their children to a local primary school in a village in Ahmedabad District, Gandhi suggested that "they go elsewhere." This attitude has been defended by Krishna Kumar, who stated that it was "incompatible with Gandhi's preference for reform without coercion."[20] However, this episode clearly shows Gandhi's dismissive attitude towards the marginalized sections of the society. Gandhi, who had the power to humble the mighty British Empire, did not even attempt to hold a dialogue to convince the attackers to let the Dalit children study in schools.

There is a widespread popular narrative that celebrates Gandhi's uplift of the Dalit communities whom he called Harijans (children of Hari-the Hindu god) and eulogizes the activities of his Harijan Sevak Sangh (an organization for the uplift of Harijans). B.R. Ambedkar, who fought for the rights of the Dalits, keenly contested Gandhi's tokenism, which did not lead to any empowerment. Laura Jenkins, in her comparative study of the Dalit educational institutions in India, the educational

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[13]M.K. Gandhi repeated this many times. See, for instance, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (1946; repr., Ahmadabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1998), 63-67.

[14]Clyde Chitty, *Education Policy in Britain* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 5.

[15]Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or India's Home Rule*, 67.

[16]Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or India's Home Rule*, 67.

[17]M.K. Gandhi, *The Problem of Education* (Ahmadabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1962), 54.

[18]Gandhi often used the phrase "untouchability is a sin." For instance, see *Harijan*, Feb. 11, 1933, 3.

[19]Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or India's Home Rule*, 13.

[20]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 104.

institutions established for African-Americans in the United States, and those established for non-whites in South Africa, quotes B. R. Ambedkar's statement that "American whites spent $85,000,000 between 1865 and 1930 on the advancement of the Negroes," whereas "the Harijan Sevak Sangh spent a few thousand rupees a year on petty and insignificant and insubstantial purposes."[21] The efforts of writers like Krishna Kumar to present Gandhi's educational ideas as progressive and beneficial to all sections of the society could be considered as the beginning of miseducation in India.

Education as an Empowering Tool

British and Indian liberals viewed education as an empowering tool in a country that had faced devastating famines that killed millions of peasants, agricultural laborers, and others in the rural population. Charles Grant, a Scottish highlander, was the first to suggest the introduction of modern education in India in the late eighteenth century. After witnessing the 1768-70 Bengal famine that killed millions of people, he recommended the government introduce modern education to help the peasants "improve the existing modes of culture, pasturage, of rearing cattle, defence against excess of drought, and rain . . . to the prevention of famine."[22] In the 1830s, Robert Shortrede, another Scottish officer, established sixty-five schools in Purandhar Taluka, in Western India, to empower the peasants.[23] He suggested the government establish more schools so that the peasants "understand their own affairs and vigilantly observe and scrutinize the conduct of the native functionaries and successfully resist all unauthorized actions by seeing that the sums paid by them to the government were properly entered into their Receipt Books. . . . It would be a powerful and operative check on the native functionaries."[24] In Bengal, in 1840, after witnessing the oppressive treatment meted out to the peasantry by Bengal landlords (zamindars), the judge of Jessore, W. Seton-Karr, suggested a system of village schools that would "enable a peasant to write a letter of business, to draw out a bond, to understand the terms of a mortgage, to cast up his accounts to

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[21]Laura Dudley Jenkins, A College of One's Own: An International Perspective on the Value of Historically

Dalit Colleges, in Rao, ed., *New Perspectives in the History of Indian Education*, 79.

[22]Charles Grant, *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to Morals and on the Means of Improving It—Written Chiefly in the Year 1792* (London: House of Commons, 1813), 153. There are various estimates of the total deaths in the famine, ranging from two to ten million people.

[23]For more information on Scottish intervention in Indian education, see P.V. Rao, "Class, Identity and Empire: Scotsmen and Indian Education in the Nineteenth Century," *Social Scientist*, 44, no. 9-10 (Sept.-Oct. 2016), 55-70; P.V. Rao, "Beyond Monolithic Colonialism: A Defiant Scot against British Elitism, Thomas Munro's Policies on Education and Employment of Indians," *Paedagogica Historica*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Feb. 2022), https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2022.2034171; P.V. Rao, "Entangled Histories of Reforms: Scottish Radicalism of Joseph and Allen Octavian Hume and Indian Education," *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación*, 9, no. 1 (2022), https://www.espaciotiempoyeducacion.com/ojs/index.php/ete/article/view/434.

[24]General Department 10 of 1836, "A Note on Purandhar Schools," Feb. 24, 1836, Maharashtra State Archives.

know if his receipts for rent are correctly signed."[25] Indian reformers, too, supported the establishment of schools in rural areas. Krishna Rao, Gazulu Lakshminarasu Chetty, C. Narayanaswami Naidu, and C. Srinivasa Pillay, Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahdev Govind Ranade, Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Jotirao Phule, G. Subramanya Iyer, Heramba Chandra Moitra, and others urged the colonial government to establish more schools to benefit all sections of the society.[26]

However, the feudal backlash was powerful enough to stop the government proposal for rural education in the 1870s. Peary Mohan Mukherjee, the Indian member of the Governor-general's Executive Council and one of the most powerful Indian in India at that time, opposed the proposal, stating that the government should aim to make the masses into useful members of society, such as "servants, shepherds, apprentices and not scholars," as "the educated mock at all distinctions of caste, wealth and lineage which had enthralled them for centuries."[27] In the 1880s Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the leading political leader who opposed colonial rule, told the government, "You take away a farmer's boy from the plough, the blacksmith's boy from the bellows and the cobbler's boy from his awl with the object of giving him liberal education . . . and the boy learns to condemn the profession of his father, . . . the boy looks up to the government for employment: you remove him from a sphere where he would have been contented happy and useful to those who depend upon him and teach him to be discontented with his lot and with the government."[28]

Proponents of modern education wanted to protect the peasants from feudal oppression by empowering them to read the receipts of their payments to landlords, and moneylenders. They also wanted the peasants to adopt improved methods of agriculture and introduce innovations in rural economy as a protection from floods and drought. However, Gandhi was not in favor of such empowerment. He reduced the importance of education from being a source of empowerment to that of imparting the fashionable skill of writing one's own name. After downplaying the importance of education, Gandhi virulently attacked the existing curriculum and textbooks and called them "harmful to children." He declared, "If I had the powers of a despot . . . I would certainly destroy the majority of the present textbooks."[29] Gandhi promoted his ideas of education with the argument, "I myself was once a teacher. And the claim may be advanced that I am still one. I have experience in education since I have made experiments in that field."[30] After facing criticism from leading liberals and educationists like V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, a strong supporter of

[25]William Adam, *Reports on the State of Education in Bengal 1835 and 1838*, ed. Anath Nath Basu (repr., Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1941), 59-60.

[26]Report by the Bombay, Bengal, Madras Provincial Committees with Evidence taken before the Committee, and Memorials Addressed to the Education Commission (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1884), 451-55. For more details of the educational activities of some of these reformers, see Rao, *Foundations of Tilak Nationalism*, and Rao, *Beyond Macaulay*.

[27]T. N. Mukherjee, *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of the Late Raja Peary Mohan Mukerjee* (Calcutta: Tarak Nath Mukherjee, 1914), 31-34.

[28]"Our System of Education—a Defect and a Cure," *The Mahratta*, May 15, 1881, 3-4.

[29]*Young India*, Sept. 1, 1921, 276.

[30]M.K. Gandhi, *The Problem of Education,* (Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1962), 12.

compulsory education in India, and Madan Mohan Malaviya, who was instrumental in establishing a university at Banaras, Gandhi conceded, "I admit my limitations. I have no university education worth the name. My highschool career was never above average. I was thankful if I could pass my examinations. Distinction in school was beyond my aspiration. Nevertheless, I do hold very strong views on education in general, including what is called higher education."[31]

Gandhi led the successful Non-Cooperation Movement against the British during the years 1920-21. He called on the people to boycott existing schools and colleges, describing modern education as "godless."[32] His supporters established "national schools," which provided little instruction in literacy but did teach how to spin yarn from wheels called *charka*s. In spite of his persistent advocacy for "national education," the schools were a failure. Gandhi admitted as much when he said that "out of 30,000 boys and girls, hardly one thousand are spinning on 100 charkhas at the rate of ½ hour per day. Hundreds of charkhas are lying idle and neglected."[33] The attendance of Dalit and Muslim children was also poor. Between 1917 and 1922, the number of modern educational institutions increased from 150,091 to 169,288, and the number of students increased from 7,057,704 to 7,609,519.[34] These growth figures show that the people who gave massive support to Gandhi's political agitation did not support his educational ideas. Gandhi's intention that the national schools would end the existing modern schools was overwhelmingly rejected by the people.

Prominent political leaders also opposed Gandhi's idea of rejecting modern education. Aurobindo Ghosh criticized it as "false and narrow patriotism."[35] Lajpat Rai declared, "I feel thankful for its being godless. But for this (English/modern) education, there may have been no awakening."[36] To quell the opposition to his educational ideas, Gandhi argued that his ideas were rooted in Indian tradition and indigenous educational practices, as "the *rishi*s (sages, or teachers) taught without books. They only gave them a few *mantra*s (sacred chants) which the pupils treasured in their memories and translated into practical life."[37] He emphasized, that the entire indigenous education system was oral, and was based in religion. His example of *rishi*s as the only teachers, and his support to caste system created an image that Brahmins controlled knowledge.

There is no historical evidence to support Gandhi's ideas about indigenous education. India had produced five hundred texts in the areas of literature (Kalidasa's Sakuntala), philosophy (the Upanishads), mathematics (Bhaskara's Lilavati), astronomy (Aryabhata's works) and so on, so it was clear that the transmission of knowledge was not fundamentally oral. Moreover, the argument that the Brahmins controlled knowledge is inadmissible, as a large number of great Sanskrit poets—such as Valmiki, the author of *Ramayana*, and the renowned poet Kalidas came from lower castes, while Vyasa, the author of the epic *Mahabharata*, was of mixed parentage (a Brahmin and a

[31]M.K. Gandhi, *The Problem of Education*, 54.

[32]*Young India*, June 1, 1921, 172.

[33]*Young India*, Aug. 7, 1924, 260.

[34]Education, March 5, 1923, 2-5 A, Education Department Files, National Archives, New Delhi, India.

[35]S. Bahttacharya et al., *Educating the Nation: Documents on the Discourse of National Education in India 1880-1920* (New Delhi: Kanishka, 2003), 34.

[36]Bahttacharya et al., *Educating the Nation*, 25.

[37]*Young India*, Jan. 29, 1925, 44.

fisherwoman). One of the most respected sages, Parasara, was the son of a Brahmin father and a Dalit woman.[38] In the indigenous vernacular schools of the early nineteenth century, nearly 65-70 percent of teachers and students were from non-Brahmin castes. In Bengal and north India, non-Brahmins studied in Sanskrit schools.[39] Thus we see clearly that Gandhi's ideas about India's historical past were inaccurate.

As Gandhi continued to advocate his ideas, an opportunity came in 1937 to implement them. The British administration introduced an act in 1935 that gave autonomy to the provinces. In the subsequent provincial elections for the respective legislatures, held in 1937, the Indian National Congress won in seven provinces. On October 22-23 of that year, a conference of the newly appointed education ministers of these provinces took place. Gandhi presided over the conference, which endorsed his ideas and adopted them as policy. The scheme has been variously called the "Nai Talim," the "Wardha Scheme," "Basic Education," and the "Self-Supporting School System." In this scheme, the teaching of the language, literature, history, geography, mathematics, and the sciences was relegated to the background. The children had to spin yarn to contribute toward the salaries of the teachers and the maintenance of schools.[40] These schools operated for five and a half hours a day, of which the children worked for three hours and twenty minutes on *charka*s. Subjects like music, drawing, and arithmetic were taught within a period of forty minutes, which allotted thirteen minutes for each subject; both social studies and general science were taught thirty minutes, of which teachers devoted fifteen minutes to each subject.[41] Clearly, no one could expect the teachers to convey any substantive knowledge in so short a time. These schools were open 288 days per year, or twenty-four days a month, without summer or winter break.

These ideas were acutely opposed by educationists like M.R. Paranjpe, who saw that the attack on English education would strengthen the existing social hierarchies.[42] However, Syed Nurullah and J.P. Naik supported Gandhi's ideas in their book, *History of Education in India,* published in 1943. They argued that the history of education was "a great drama" between "the non-Indians to impose a cheap imitation of the British educational system on India and the desire of the people of the country to create a new system to meet their own peculiar needs and problems."[43] Although their book is eighty years old, many teacher training institutions still use it as a textbook, and thus the teaching of the history of education is frozen in time in such institutions.

After India achieved independence in 1947, attempts to introduce Gandhi's Nai Talim faced severe opposition. The people who supported his agitation against the British rule did not support his educational views. In the view of the National Planning Committee of 1948, "the idea that the output of children's work at school

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[38]D. R. Bhandarkar, *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture* (Madras: University of Madras, 1940), 58.

[39]Rao, *Beyond Macaulay*, 14-37.

[40]C.J. Varkey, *The Wardha Scheme of Education: An Exposition and Examination* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 82-84.

[41]Varkey, *The Wardha Scheme of Education*, 85.

[42]M.R. Paranjpe, *A Source Book of Modern Indian Education 1797-1902* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1938), v-vi.

[43]Syed Nurullah and J.P. Naik, *History of Education in India during the British Period* (Bombay: Macmillan, 1943), xi-xiv.

should financially sustain the school was unacceptable." The committee believed that "such a system will mean the existence of child labour in schools."[44] However, Gandhi's supporters, such as Vinoba Bhave, J.P. Naik, and others, were prominent figures and acted as a pressure group to influence government education policy. As a result, the government decided to divide its resources between promoting modern education and supporting Nai Talim. It established numerous Nai Talim schools, and when they did not successfully enroll students, they were quietly closed down.[45] C. Rajagopalachari, the chief minister of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, introduced a similar scheme in 1953. It was called *kula kalvithittam*, or "caste-based education system."[46] Rajagopalachari argued, like Gandhi before him, that this new education scheme would "revolutionise the education system," because in the current system of modern education, children were alienated from their family and environment, and it was necessary to reorient them to their natural environment.[47] According to this scheme, the school hours were reduced and the children had to spend half a day helping their parents in their traditional occupations.[48] Because the scheme was essentially a strategy to reproduce caste differences and social inequalities, it faced a massive backlash. Rajagopalachari resigned and the scheme was dropped.[49]

Feeding the Myth

A Gandhian activist, who went by the sole name of Dharmapal, wrote *The Beautiful Tree* to defend a statement Gandhi made in 1931, in which he said that "the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished."[50] To prove Gandhi's argument, Dharmapal relied on the data collected by British administrators while still condemning "the writings of foreigners," including the data for South India collected by Thomas Munro in 1822-23 and for East India by William Adam in 1837-39.[51] By this point, the period of British rule over those two regions had extended over sixty-two years and eighty years, respectively, and Dharmapal could conveniently argue that the British officers had destroyed indigenous education in India. He deliberately ignored the data of the Ratnagiri district, collected by Thomas Best Jervis within two years of the establishment of the British administration in 1820, and the subsequent data collected in 1823-24 for Western India.[52] All three provinces

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[44]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 179.

[45]Minutes of Meetings of the Managing Committee, 1951-1958, Hindustani Talimi Sangh, New Delhi.

[46]D.Veeraraghavan, *Half a Day for Caste: Education and Politics in Tamil Nadu 1952-55*, ed. A.R. Venkatachalapathy (New Delhi: Leftword, 2020). Rajagopalachari was very close with Gandhi, as his daughter had married Gandhi's son.

[47]Veeraraghavan, *Half a Day for Caste*, 87.

[48]Veeraraghavan, *Half a Day for Caste*, 85.

[49]Veeraraghavan, *Half a Day for Caste*, 108-23.

[50]Dharmapal, *The Beautiful Tree: The Indigenous Education in the Eighteenth Century* (New Delhi: Biblia Impex,1983), 1.

[51]Dharmapal, *The Beautiful Tree*.

[52]General Department 63 of 1824, Thomas Best Jervis to the Secretary to the Government, Sept. 8, 1824, Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai.

saw a similar trend with regard to the condition of schools, learning access, teacher's salaries, curriculum, and textbooks. Dharmapal also ignored post-1840s data, because it would have proved Gandhi wrong, as the British had adopted thousands of indigenous schools by providing regular salaries, pensions, blackboards, and printed books while continuing the indigenous curriculum, textbooks, and method of teaching. As a result, the government saved nearly seventy thousand schools across British India.[53] *The Beautiful Tree* remains highly influential in both the academic and public domain, and a wide range of people still believe that the British destroyed indigenous education.

While Dharmapal's book succeeded in terms of defending a dominant idea of Gandhi, he wrote as an activist, so his writing and his treatment of the subject were non-academic. Thus, there remained a need for sophisticated academic work that could be used in the universities and colleges for teaching the history of education. Krishna Kumar's *Political Agenda of Education* addressed this need by bringing together the myths created by Gandhi, backed up by a couple of Hindu mythological stories and sustained by a few stray facts. The book is a collection of essays, probably written at different times, as there are repetitions and contradictory statements. For instance, at one point, it asserts that Gandhi's approach to education is "modernist" and, at another, calls opponents of Gandhi "modernists."[54] It identifies the liberal insistence on children's literacy as a colonial legacy, asserting that "the educated Indian was now socialised to regard this illiteracy as an aspect of their moral and intellectual decadence."[55] Kumar's contradictory approach seeks to both disparage modern and Western education and yet situate Gandhi's educational ideas within the core of modern Western educational thought. He argues that "to Gandhi, Western education, even in the emaciated form it had taken in India, was a negation of the principles of non-violence and truth, the two values he regarded as crucial." At the same time, and indeed on the same page, he places Gandhi's educational ideas "in the tradition of western radical humanists like Pestalozzi, Owen, Tolstoy and Dewey."[56] Elsewhere, Kumar declares, "the stance Gandhi took appears to be most radical of all."[57]

Another essential feature of the *Political Agenda of Education* is the complete absence of primary archival sources to support the arguments. For instance, Kumar claims that "colonial rule permitted no possibility of the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and cultural forms in the curricula of ordinary schools . . . The life of the local community found no reflection in the school's curriculum." He asserts that "the rejection of indigenous knowledge was the central issue in the development of colonial education," and "tradition lost its hold when prescribed syllabi and textbooks came into being."[58] However, in reality, the colonial state kept the texts that were used in the indigenous schools to teach modern Indian languages, moral stories, and arithmetic across India, and simply introduced new textbooks for geography and history because they were new disciplines. Additionally, most of the textbook writers were

[53]Rao, *Beyond Macaulay*, 37-40.
[54]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 44, 179.
[55]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 15.
[56]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 167.
[57]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 18.
[58]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 14-15, 68, 73.

Indians.[59] In each province, private publishers and textbook writers submitted a copy of their books to be reviewed by a committee of teachers appointed by the province's director of public instruction. The committees received nearly 1,000 books a year. From 1912 to 1917, one province received 5,050 books, and the committee recommended 1,474 titles.[60] The headmasters and teachers had the autonomy to choose textbooks for first grade to ninth grade. For tenth grade, the year students completed their secondary schooling, culminating with the Matriculation Examination, the universities suggested a set of textbooks. Gandhi's supporters began the process of imposing a single textbook with complete disregard for India's cultural and linguistic diversity, only after India gained independence.[61] It is ahistorical, therefore, to assume that "the curriculum and textbooks introduced by the colonial administration reflected an alien epistemology, and the teacher had no autonomy to organise or represent the 'truth' of the new knowledge."[62]

Contradictions continue throughout the *Political Agenda of Education*. On the one hand, Kumar quotes the claim of William Adam's report, prepared between 1837 and 1839, that in the indigenous schools, "writing of letters inevitably came first; the child was introduced to letters of the alphabet in a formal, ceremonial manner."[63] On the other hand, he also quotes William Arnold, an arrogant director of public instruction in Punjab, who stated, "We found a population, with their own idea of the meaning of education, and to that idea thoroughly attached; and to whom our idea of education, being inconsistent with their own, as thoroughly distasteful; as to an Asiatic everything is distasteful which is new." Kumar argues that "the 'points of inconsistency' Arnold noticed between the Indian and the English concepts of education" owed to "the post-Reformation perception of texts and reading." This overlooks the fact that Arnold imposed Urdu language in Arabic script as a medium of instruction on a population that spoke Punjabi and wrote in Nagari and Gurumukhi scripts. It was not, as Kumar argues, that "written language invites contention"; rather, when a government changes the language of administration and instruction and the script it is written in, there is bound to be opposition. People's resistance cannot be construed as their opposition to the concept of writing itself.[64] Most importantly, in Punjab province, where the text of *Gurugranth Saheb* is virtually worshipped more than God, how can anyone claim that the written language invites contention there?

The *Political Agenda of Education* errs not just in its interpretations, but even on basic facts. It states incorrectly that the teacher training institutions were introduced after 1854, and that there were only 104 such institutions in India.[65] In reality, there were 691

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[59]Lethbridge to Government of India, Oct. 10, 1877. For a complete list of books the schools used, see Report of the Committee Appointed to Examine the Textbooks in Use in Indian Schools, National Archives, New Delhi.

[60]*Progress of Education in India, 1912-1917*, vol. 1, *Seventh Quintennial Review* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1918), 214.

[61]Shaan Kashyap, "Themes in History Textbook Controversy in India, circa 1947-1980" (unpublished dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2021).

[62]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 91.

[63]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 53.

[64]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 52.

[65]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 78.

teacher training institutions with 348,500 trained teachers.[66] The first teacher training institution was established in 1820 at Ratnagiri. Some of the teacher training institutions were huge and supplied trained teachers to the entire province and beyond. For instance, the Native Education Society of Bombay from 1824 onwards supplied trained Marathi and Gujarati teachers to the entire province and neighboring provinces as well.[67]

Kumar's *Political Agenda of Education* erroneously claims, "In the indigenous tradition, the teacher was remunerated by the community he served. Under the new system, he became a paid servant of the colonial government. This switching over of the teacher from the charge of the local population to that of the government triggered a process of estrangement of the school from the local community."[68] However, the indigenous school teacher was not in charge of the local population, nor was he paid by the village community.[69] He was a paid professional who charged a fee forteaching his students.[70] After adopting indigenous schools, by giving salaries and pensions to teachers, the British administration established school boards consisting of important local individuals. In doing so, it was the British who actually brought the community closer to the schools. Kumar also asserts that "Gandhi wanted to free the Indian teacher from the slavery of bureaucracy."[71] However, research has shown that in a regular school, the teacher's administrative responsibilities were solely to maintain an attendance register and prepare annual reports. In contrast, in Nai Talim schools the teacher was burdened with excess work, required not only to record details about students but also the cotton procured and the amount of yarn spun, as well as the revenue from sales of the yarn.[72]

The *Political Agenda of Education* argues that in the Indian tradition, the teacher was revered as a "quasi-divine" figure and "an object of worship" and criticizes the "order of impersonal bonds" imposed by the colonial administration. Kumar evokes a couple of stories in ancient Hindu mythologies to support this theory. In these stories, punishments at the hand of authoritarian teachers caused one student named Upamanyu to lose his eyesight and another, named Ekalavya, to lose his thumb. Kumar claims these two examples demonstrate that in the Indian tradition, there was:

> [T]otal allegiance to authority, unquestioning obedience, capacity for enduring hardship and self-sacrifice. The teacher inculcated these values by providing a figure of authority during the student's training. In his pedagogical role, he acted as a king, controlling every sphere of the pupils' lives. The fact that the teacher was usually a Brahman made him eminently suitable for this

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[66]*Progress of Education in India, 1937-47*, vol.1, *Decennial Review* (New Delhi: Central Bureau of Education 1948), 128-29.

[67]Rao, *Beyond Macaulay*, 100.

[68]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 48.

[69]For the relationship between the local community and the indigenous schools, see R.V. Parulekar, *Survey of Indigenous Education in the Province of Bombay (1820-1830)* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1951), xviii; Adam, *Reports on the State of Education in Bengal 1835 and 1838*, 21.

[70]For school fees in different parts of India in indigenous schools, see Rao, *Beyond Macaulay*, 26-27.

[71]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 173.

[72]For details of working conditions in the Nai Talim schools, see C.J. Verkey, *The Wardha Scheme of Education: Exposition and Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

quasi-monarchical role. His Brahmanhood gave him an authority that in reality, even the king did not possess.[73]

In actuality, the Hindu tradition has given little importance to such stories and has upheld the right of a student to question the teacher.[74] Moreover, such mythological stories cannot be superimposed upon the nineteenth-century indigenous schools, where a majority—65-70 percent—of teachers came from non-Brahmin castes. Bengal also had Dalit teachers teaching upper castes.[75] Given the lack of support for the book's assumptions, it's not surprising that teacher education institutions fail to encourage the history of education research based on archival documents and other primary sources.

Given the various shortcomings of Kumar's book, and its continuing dominance in teacher training institutions and public debates, a serious critique of the educational policies of the colonial era is very much needed. The colonial administration actively diverted funds earmarked for education from 1813 to 1859.It followed the guidance of the feudal interests and not educated reformist Indians and British liberals in the expansion of educational infrastructure. T.B. Macaulay had raised the monthly salaries of Indian teachers from 5-10 rupees to 30-50 rupees in 1836. Macaulay during his short stay (1834-38) established a series of schools in rural hinterland to empower of all sections of the society.[76] However, after his departure in 1838, the colonial administration closed all the schools he had established and reverted back to paying a salary of 5-10 rupees. The salaries did not increase during the next eight decades, a development that many people criticized in 1911 and the Sadler Commission faulted in 1918.[77] The British administration spent only one percent of its revenue on education and was adamant about providing vernacular education throughout the primary school years, which denied the poor and the marginalized segments of the population the opportunity to pursue secondary and higher education, as only English was taught at these levels. It also consistently refused to directly support girls' education throughout the nineteenth century and opposed a common curriculum for boys and girls. Numerous such issues require serious historical investigation. Students of teacher education need to be familiarized with archival research, so that they can begin to write a more accurate and verifiable history of education in India.

Towards a New Beginning?

The New Education Policy adopted by the government of India in 2020 aims to improve teacher education, making it less insular and, potentially, more historically

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[73]Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education*, 87-88.

[74]See examples of students' critical questioning in Robert Earnest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921); Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1953).

[75]For castes of teachers in indigenous schools in different districts, see Rao, *Beyond Macaulay*, 14-25.

[76]For Macaulay's arguments for educating Indians, the details of his school, his forty-two education minutes, and how the colonial state replaced his education minutes and closed down his schools, see Rao, *Beyond Macaulay*, 149-96.

[77]Harcourt Butler, "Imperial Grants for Education," June 22, 1911, File: Education November 1911, no. 64 A, in Improvement and Expansion of Education in India Collection, National Archives, New Delhi.

grounded. By 2030, it aims to streamline the entire system through standardized admission tests, which will also take into account the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country. To expand students' horizons, the insular, two-year bachelor of education program that currently exists will be replaced by "a 4-year integrated B.Ed. dual-major holistic Bachelor's degree, in Education" with a compulsory study of a social science like history or a natural science like physics.[78] The New Education Policy emphatically states that teacher education institutions should be strengthened through multidisciplinary programs and places a high priority on appointing "faculty trained in social sciences."[79] If properly implemented, these measures will likely break down barriers between teacher education on the one hand and social sciences and natural sciences on the other. They might also overturn the tradition of miseducation in India and provide a path forward for the history of education field in the country.

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[78]Butler, "Imperial Grants for Education."

[79]National Education Policy 2020 (New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resources Development, 2020), 42-43.