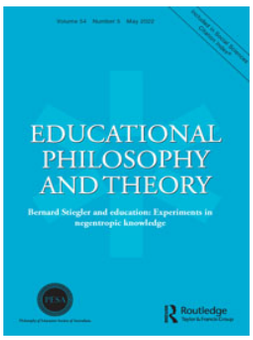

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The dichotomy in India's education system – A macro level analysis

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ABSTRACT

Field of education is associated with herculean task and innate responsibility of escorting societies forward. Across space and time, it has been an unambiguous synthesis that education should precede any progress or change. It helps humans to understand themselves and better their interaction with rest of the society. Hence the field of education and dissemination of knowledge is very much a pivotal entity in the evolution of human civilisation. No country in the globe over centuries could afford to flourish on the paths of growth and development while ignoring the crucial role of education. Country like India where in there has been a perpetual struggle over the decades to overcome perils of colonisation and social stigmatisation reflective in terms of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. In order to overcome these bottlenecks 'knowledge dissemination' must spearhead the change. Apart from other funding inadequacies, infrastructural lacunae, education sector in India has also been grappling with certain innate contradicting and counterproductive structures. Hence in this paper we have made an effort to address and assess the nature and impact of these dichotomies over the field of Education in India.

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The objective and aim of education is to better and ease the functioning of human life around the globe in variety of ways, including social, cultural, economic, scientific, and moral. Only through the formation of human capital can a nation aspire to achieve humane growth rather than one that exacerbates inequities and creates social disorder (Chattopadyay, 2020). Like every healthy body requires a healthy diet to sustain growth, a mind requires quality education that contributes towards mental growth allowing it to become conscious and healthy. Education is regarded as a better safeguard than a standing army. Formal education, learning and dissemination of knowledge have aided the progress of the modern age.

The Indian context

The education sector in India has been observed to be the biggest in the world, with a huge spectrum of institutions, extending to 1.4 million schools (with students enrolment of 200

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millions). There are about 993 universities and 40,000 higher educational institutes. It is on the way to rapid expansion due to increasing domestic demand. Unfortunately, we also have the massive illiterate chunk of population in the world, with a literacy rate of only 76 per cent, far below the world average of 86 per cent (Care Ratings, 2018). Higher education sector in India has extended to standing only second to China with 41.8 million students, across 993 universities with 10,725 stand-alone institutions and 39,931 colleges. India is the largest country in the world in terms of higher educational institutions (AISHE, 2019).

There are numerous bottlenecks in the education system and in the dissemination of knowledge in India. They include gaps in both demand and supply, such as infrastructure, funding, policy paralysis, accountability, equity, staff, technology, employability, regulation, and awareness among people. Here we endeavour to identify and examine some of the subtle and latent structural issues, such as contradicting policies and tendencies that operate in tandem. There appears to be many trends that are undesirable and therefore attract the attention of academia and policy makers.

The dichotomy of the English medium and the vernacular medium

The presence of English in all walks of life across the globe has made it mandatory for people, who aspire to compete for employment and to access global literature in various fields. Yes, we do have to acknowledge studies that claim that a child does understand better in his/her mother tongue. But if they continue to remain so, they may be left behind in the global economy. In today's world, the time is ripe to assert that the mother tongue does not have to be only one language; rather, it could be many.

In India, especially with schooling, education is offered in both English as well as in vernacular medium. However, it is very difficult to find a private school offering education in a vernacular medium; they are predominantly inclined towards education through the English medium. The 23.8 per cent of K-12 (Kindergarten to higher secondary) schools in India are private with the total student enrolment constituting up to 40 per cent. At the same time 76.2 per cent of schools are government run with a student enrolment of 60 per cent (Unified District Information System on Education (U-DISE), 2017). In these schools the medium of instruction is predominantly through local languages. In the recent past, some of the state governments have introduced the English medium into schools on an experimental basis and at a smaller scale. However, they are in no position to compete with private/corporate schools in terms of quantity or quality (Das, 2020). For the students, studying in these public funded schools, one of the primary gaps in their education is learning to communicate in English, apart from the various other infrastructural and financial drawbacks.

However, many of the political and cultural outfits promote the notion that the medium of instruction in schools, especially in government funded schools, must be in the mother tongue or the vernacular medium of that region (Lasania, 2019). They believe that, in order to safeguard and preserve one's mother tongue and culture, schooling in the English medium must be avoided (Reddy, 2019). In a way this implies that the burden of protecting the mother tongue and culture should lie on the shoulders of children studying in public funded schools. The majority of the students who pursue education in government schools hail from socially and economically deprived sections. Therefore when they cannot access education in the English medium, their communication skills, in the context of employment prospects in the future will be jeopardized (Ilaiah, 2019). Therefore, this proposition of schooling conducted in one's mother tongue can only remain a '*hypocritical notion*' and a politically motivated meme so long as this mother tongue is incapable of helping students secure employment at the national and international level. When a child completes the entirety of their school education in the local language it will have telling negative effects over their academic performance. Across India, even in public funded higher educational institutes or universities, higher education is predominantly offered only in the English medium. To our dismay, the majority of people who vehemently try to

promote the idea of 'education in the medium of mother tongue' do not wish to send their children to these vernacular medium schools nor do they insist that private schools teach only in vernacular medium. This only exposes their dual nature and ignorant, hypocritical thinking (Ilaiah, 2019).

The dichotomy of public education and private education

At present, in India, parents are compelled, at times, to sell their assets or to mortgage them or to fall into a debt trap in order to provide their children with access to a corporatized professional, technical or medical education (Care Ratings, 2018). In this process, it is imperative that basic services such as *Education, Health, and Transportation*, stay under the provision of the state. This is only to ensure that the disadvantaged sections of the society are able to access these services free of cost or through a subsidised mechanism. A more active role of the state is very much a pre requisite in an emerging country like India, especially in the fields of education and health, as suggested by Amartya Sen (Misra, 2013). Although the modern economic system of India did begin with the much acclaimed mixed economic market structure, but recently the mode of production has been predominantly capitalist with the emergence of a neoliberal regime. Corporate education is being patronised at a massive scale despite its expensive nature.

A major aspect of corporate education is not just the higher expense, but also that it is not bounded by the provisions on social responsibility like implementing reservation policies (affirmative action), providing scholarships, and implementing schemes like 'Mid-Day Meals Scheme' in schools. Instead of regulating the spread of corporate education, at primary, secondary and higher levels, the people who have crucial roles in the functioning of governments run private schools and engineering or medical colleges themselves. (Daniel, 2010). The Government of India is hardly spending three per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education according to the latest 'Economic Survey of India, 2018–19'. Due to this, public funded institutes continue to suffer from inadequate funds, ill directed policies and insufficient staff and infrastructure.

Unfortunately the trend of corporate education is only growing, while the public funded institutes are starved for funds and attention. Being a country with more than two-thirds of its population struggling with poverty, the state cannot afford to move away from the essential service that education is. If they do move away, millions of people from the down trodden sections of society will be pushed out of the web of education. They will be unable to afford expensive corporate education and will also be unable to afford to send their children to defunct and dilapidated public institutes. On other hand, the formal public schooling system immersed with bottlenecks and scanty attention, has been grappling to bridge the rift between marginalised and affluent classes in respect of access to primary education despite the policies like affirmative action in place. This has been posing great threat to the implementation of 'Right to Education-RTE (2009)' act (Mittal et al., 2020).

The number of government schools in India, including Madrasas & Unrecognised schools, has grown at a 'Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)' of 1.2 per cent, from 10 lakh schools in 2008 to 11.2 lakh schools in 2017. Thus government schools constituted 76.2 per cent of the K-12 schools during the financial year of 2017 in India. On the other hand, private schools (managed by trusts, political, religious or charitable organisations, corporates, and individuals), have

Table 1. Comparison of government and private schools infrastructure.

	Number of schools (lakhs)		Share in total schooling (%)		
Nature	2008	2017	2008	2017	CAGR
Government	10	11.2	80.4	76.2	1.2 %
Private	2.4	3.5	19.6	23.8	4.1%

Source: District Information System on Education (DISE), 2017, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Table 2. Level wise school infrastructure in India.

Classification		Number (%)
Level	Primary	840546 (55.2)
	Upper Primary	429624 (28.2)
	Secondary	139539 (9.1)
	Senior Secondary	112637 (7.4)
	Total	1522346 (100)
Management	Government	1102783 (72.4)
	Government Aided	83787 (5.5)
	Private Unaided	335776 (22)
	Total	1522346 (100)

Source: Education statistics at a Glance, Government of India, Dept. of School education and Literacy, Statistics Division, MHRD – 2018, Government of India.

grown at a CAGR of 4.1 per cent. They have grown from 2.4 lakh schools in 2008 to 3.5 lakh during the financial year 2017. The total share of private schools in schooling as a whole has grown from 19.6 per cent in the year 2008 to 23.8 per cent in 2017. This can be attributed to the increased demand, demonstration effect,[1] and affordability (Unified District Information System on Education (U-DISE), 2017). The massive rise in private education, especially at K-12 level, can only be attributed to the dearth of funding and policy intervention towards public schools and also unregulated facilitation of a private network by governments at various levels (Tables 1 and 2).

The following study by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), shows that the primary source of schooling in India was government schooling (72 per cent), while private and aided schools together only amount to 28 per cent of school education (MHRD 2018). This only emphasises the dire situation that government policies still determine the futures of 3/4th of India's children. 72 per cent of students still do opt for public education. However, this should not mislead us into thinking that they trust public education. Rather, it is only because they have no other choice, being unable to afford corporate education.

When it comes to higher education in India, 'All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE 2018–19)' shows that only 34.9 per cent of all 'Higher Educational Institutes (HEI)' offer post-graduate courses and only 2.5 per cent of HEIs offer doctoral (PhD) programmes. 34.8 per cent of total colleges in India offer only one programme, and *nearly 83 per cent* of these are privately managed. It is also observed that students studying outside India shares 1 per cent of total enrolment in India. It can be vividly inferred from this is that the adequacy of public educational infrastructure has not been to the levels of existing demand. Therefore, 83 per cent of education at college level has been left to the open market. Naturally, the fee structure in these colleges is not affordable to the majority of Indian students and consequently they are compelled to remain outside the purview of education.

Noam Chomsky (2013) points out that, students get educated in corporate institutes, spending lakhs of rupees, and are sponsored by their parents through 'borrowed money' or 'educational loans' or 'mortgaging assets' or 'selling off property'. These students, once they finish education and settle in various professions, are left with no choice but to be partly corrupt, unethical, and illegal at times. This is because they have the heavy burden of repaying their parents' financial liabilities. He also adds that it would be wrong on our part even to find fault with them. Rather, we can only hold governments responsible who have made education a business and encouraged corporate education.

The ultimate repercussion of this corporatized structure is that we produce students who would be busy making money once they get into different professions. Whenever we buy something, we are not expected to have gratitude or ethics towards that object or service. Rather, we only become consumers. On the other hand, if we can have free education or subsidised and qualitative public education in place, students who get educated through this structure can be

expected to have some sense of gratitude and accountability towards society. Students who pay high fee are likely to act like investors, strategic and calculative. Therefore, often they lack concern and empathy, which dilutes their contribution to the society and polity (Chattopadyay, 2020). Therefore, the best investment in society could be the investment on education. States moving out of education may not make much headway towards the objective of achieving a knowledgeable and conscious society.

The dichotomy of the 'arts and humanities' and technical education

The fruits of education systems like the arts and humanities may not be tangible or quantified, or even visible in the short term. On the other hand, we have the 'science and technology' oriented field of education for which, in recent times, there is tremendous market value, in both supply and demand. People who are associated with these fields might possess more market value or more rapid employment prospects. The true purpose of education is not to train or acquire wealth and power, rather, in the time-honoured tradition of humanistic studies, to cultivate wisdom and virtue. To achieve this noble aim our institutions of learning need to provide young people with education in the arts and humanities, including social studies, literature and philosophy.

Table 3 enables us to understand the situation. The enrolment into field of Arts education is at 57 per cent at the 'Under Graduation' and 'Post-Graduation' level across India. Therefore, policy makers should realise this and execute the requisite policies so as to further strengthen both the arts and sciences, enabling students with employability and accessibility.

At this juncture, especially in India, there is a kind of fetishizing of technical, science, or professional education. This is justifiable to an extent in the light of an expanding capitalistic economy and global employment prospects (Bansal, 2017). However, at the same time, there are also certain sections of society and the governing class who portray education in social sciences or humanities as futile, which sounds a bit premature and ignorant. Certainly, the fields of science and technology can produce goods and services that give us a comfortable life and make things simpler, faster, cheaper and easier (SocSci Matters, 2015). However, for better human relations, better governance, better social harmony, reason, 'democratic rights, roles, and responsibilities', for peace and tranquillity, education in social studies would certainly lead the way. Also, for a cohesive, conscious, responsible, rational and informed society we certainly need to be educated in social sciences and humanities. The core element of 'connectivity'[2] is also very much imminent, connecting past to the present – present to future, connecting cultures, languages and also synthesising social, political, economic and historical ideas is also pertinent and essential for a better society. We need to promote and sustain social sciences and humanities. If science and technology can offer us comforts and success, social sciences and humanities can lead us to a peaceful, liberal, egalitarian, tranquil and just society. We do not only want a 'successful nation',

Table 3. Total enrolment in arts and sciences in higher education in India.

Programme	Number of students	Percentage of total enrolment (%)
Bachelor of Arts (B.A)	9349287	25.9
Bachelor of science (B.Sc.)	4680159	12.9
Bachelor of Commerce (B.com)	4030325	11.16
Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech)	2125043	5.89
Bachelor of Engineering (B.E)	1645906	4.56
Bachelor of Arts (B.A Honours)	1639796	4.54
Master of Arts (M.A)	1512814	4.19
Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)	1223858	3.39
Master of Science (M.Sc.)	697217	1.93
Master of Business Administration (M.B.A)	588833	1.63

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2018-19.

but also a just society (Chalam, 2002). 'Scientists, professionals, social scientists, and experts from various specialisations churned out by the institutions of higher learning are crucial for the functioning of the nation's institutions and for the achievement of socio-economic development' (Chattopadyay, 2020). Unfortunately, the policy makers in India, for some inconceivable reasons, have not been paying due attention to the areas of arts, social sciences, and humanities as much as they have given to science and technology. In terms of funds allocation, awareness campaigns and infrastructure, there needs to be due attention given to both the areas simultaneously. Parents too should not be driven by the '*demonstration effect*', despite being affected by globalised influences. They need to genuinely assess the passions and strengths of their children before placing them in either fields of education.

The dichotomy of primary education and higher education

In India, if one pursues their primary education in state government funded schools, it is deemed to be understood that the child comes from a poor family (Chattopadyay, 2020). The child is also not going to yield much in terms of knowledge and intuitive thinking. At the same time, if a student pursues their higher education from central government funded institutes they have a higher probability of employment, than those from private institutes, excepting those private institutes known for their academic excellence. There seems to be a clear demarcation when it comes to education at the elementary and higher levels. If one pursues schooling in government schools, it hardly carries any academic or market value, whereas higher education in government institutes carry significant academic value and employability. This establishes the fact that governments have, over the decades, for reasons unknown, ignored and diluted the education at primary level and concentrated on strengthening higher educational institutes.

There are around 92,275 government schools in India at elementary and secondary stages that possess only one teacher to teach all the disciplines. There are close to 900316 posts of teacher vacancies at elementary level, while there lying 107689 vacant posts for secondary school teachers (Mr.Satya Pal Singh, Minister of State for Human Resource Development, Lok Sabha (Parliament) - January 2019). As per the statistics from the MHRD, elementary schools in India have a shortage of teachers, functioning with only 9.08 lakh teachers which are far beyond the sanctioned recruitment of 51.8 lakh posts (MHRD, 2018). The Right to Education Act 2009 (RTE 2009) stipulates clearly that teacher vacancy rate in schools should not go beyond 10 per cent out of total sanctioned posts. As per these estimates, during 2015–16, 4 lakh teachers were to be recruited at the elementary level. Key elements like enrolment, retention, successful completion of secondary school education will certainly influence the GER in higher education in the country (Mittal et al., 2020). On the other hand, the teacher-student ratio is at 29 for higher education in India in the year 2018–19 (AISHE 2018). The same ratios are 12.5 and 19.4 in U.S.A and Brazil respectively. We can therefore infer that even the infrastructure in India's higher education does not match the prevailing global standards.

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)[3] in 2018–19 was 26.3 per cent in India. However, this was still far from meeting the MHRD target of achieving 32 per cent GER by 2022. India's registration of GER is far lower than the global average i.e. 36.7 per cent. U.S.A – 88.2, Germany – 70.3, France – 65.6, UK – 60, Brazil – 51.3, China – 49.1 and Indonesia with 36.4 per cent respective GER. Previously, the University Education Commission (1949) led by *Radhakrishnan* intended to restrict the number of students in universities to 3000 and in colleges to 1500 students (Ravi et al., 2019). However, recently, due to the mismatch between supply and demand the country has not been able to abide by these suggestions. Education continues to remain a quasi-public good if not a pure public good. This implies that it requires public funding to reap the benefits of the 'positive externalities' that would be generated through the transformation of educated people,

Table 4. Gross enrolment in India over the years in higher education.

Year	Number of universities	Number of colleges	Enrolment (Millions)	Gross enrolment ratio (%)
1951	27	578	0.2	–
1961	49	1819	0.6	1.5
1971	102	3277	2.0	4.2
1981	132	4577	2.8	4.7
1991	185	6627	4.4	5.9
2001	260	11146	8.8	8.1
2011	621	34908	28.5	19.4
2016	864	40026	35.7	25.2
2017	903	39050	36.6	25.8
2018	993	39931	37.4	26.3

Source: Ravi et al. (2019).

who in turn lead to the creation of a better society and polity in various means (Chattopadyay, 2020).

Hence, it is very important that the government instils confidence among the people by taking decisive action regarding the performance of Public schools. There needs to be funding and policy initiatives to ensure sufficient teaching and support staff. We must also facilitate a stringent implementation of schemes, such as the '*Mid-Day Meals Scheme (MDMS)*' for which adequate infrastructural arrangements need to be maintained (Table 4).

The dichotomy of traditional education and scientific education

Teachers working in public schools seem to be associated with three dominant belief systems which in turn are in direct contradiction to the spirit of the constitution. These three major conventional belief systems associated with their convictions are inequality and equality, knowledge transmission and liberty of thought, purpose as individual advancement and fraternity. Teaching fraternity, knowingly or unknowingly, in turn would try to exhibit the prejudiced conventions that they experience in the real world towards the students. These tendencies would not facilitate an opportunity to the young students to nurture their minds based on universal principles that are complimentary to the spirit of the constitution. Exactly these culturally immersed mindsets of teaching community, devoid of scientific temper and democratic values, limit the progressive shift of India's education system (Brinkmann, 2020). The origin and objective of education is to champion change in the society. These changes must be able to transform society into a more democratic, rational, scientific and progressive one. Being educated in science and being a teacher in science is no guarantee that one's scientific temper reflects in their day–to-day lives or in our societal relations. Science must not be confined to academics and career, rather, it should reflect in our lives. The beauty of science is to question everything. It is always dynamic in nature and ready to accept the change. Nothing should be free from scientific scrutiny and examination. Our beliefs should not be driven and motivated by myths and dogmas, rather, only by continual approval through space and time.

'Science and technology' has been taking responsibility and rescuing people from many natural and 'man-made' disasters. Unfortunately, there has been an unwarranted correlation being claimed between science and religion by a few groups. In the year 2015, *R.Venkataraman*, A Nobel Laureate in Chemistry 2009, made serious observations at the 'Indian Science Congress' held at Mysore, 2015. He stated that the Indian science congress was something like 'circus' because there was hardly any intense discussion on science. He said that 'there was unnecessary mixture of politics and religious beliefs with science'. He also stated that he would not attend this congress again in his life (Kanwar, 2016).

The teaching community at all levels must play a vital role in the dissemination of knowledge. Teachers must be able to avoid reflecting their own personal views, affiliations, dogmas and convictions in transforming knowledge and information to the society. Deviating from this may not

produce a neutral and scientific young mind. Rather teachers need to sensitise students without compromising reason, ration, logic, objectivity and social sensitivity.

There seems to be clear deviation of scientific temper from public life in India. Educational institutions must get rid of, *numerology, astrology, and horoscope, good and bad omen, vaastu,* and dogmatic conservative belief systems. There should be a thoughtful and mature approach in dealing with discourses like mythologies, orthodox belief systems, political convictions in the sphere of academics, such that people do not buy into them, rather learn how to read them critically. Young minds should be nurtured in such a way that 'scientific temper should be a fundamental way of life'. The philosophy of science is to protect human life from the violence, dogmas, superstitions, and various orthodox belief systems.

The dichotomy of male education and female education

If we can observe the pass percentages of various exams in India, over the years across regions, there has been a general trend where girls outperform boys (MHRD, 2018). However, female literacy has always been lower than male literacy. As per the 2011 census, for all age groups, the national male literacy rate is 82 per cent. Female literacy stands at just 65 per cent while the national rate is at 75 per cent.

Table 5 is a clear indication that there has been a significant gap between male and female literacy rates in India throughout the last 67 years. It can be attributed to various socio economic cultural factors apart from gap in public policy and funding.

Table 6 shows that only 6.4 per cent of women in India are educated up to graduation. This figure is only 2.2 per cent in the case of Post-graduation and above. There are fewer women than men, more prominently at the 'Under Graduation (UG)' level than in the 'Post-Graduation (PG)' level. In the same way, among females who have pursued education up to graduation and above, it is only a meagre 3.6 per cent and 12.9 per cent from rural and urban areas respectively. Women in technical and professional education constitute only 34.8 per cent, while nearly 65.2 per cent were male students (PLFS, 2018).

Another disturbing trend in education in India is the 'discontinuation of education' at various levels. The table clearly shows that the 34.4 per cent of women in India have three major factors that are barriers, one of them being marriage, to pursue their further studies. For female students, early marriages, child care and even domestic responsibilities, availability of basic infrastructure like wash rooms pose great threat to continuation in schooling apart from common factors like drinking water, distance to the schooling, family labour and disconnect of education to their daily lives (Mittal et al., 2020).

Table 7 portrays a strange and astonishing dichotomy between male and female education in India. If economic status had to be the only factor behind the low literacy levels, then it should impact both females and males in same manner, but this is not the case. The reasons can only

Table 5. Literacy rates in India.

Year of census	Male	Female	Persons
1951	27.2	8.9	18.3
1961	40.4	15.4	28.3
1971	46	22	34.5
1981	56.4	29.8	43.6
1991	64.1	39.3	52.2
201	75.3	53.7	64.8
2011	80.9	64.6	73
2017*	76.9	69.6	76.9

Data Source: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India.
Note: 1951–1971: Age group 5 years and above, 1981–2011: Age group 7 years and above.
*Taken from 'Periodic Labour Force Survey' (June 2017–July 2018), National statistical Office, May 2019, Government of India.

Table 6. Literacy in UG &PG (15 years and above).

	Under graduation (UG)	Post-graduation & above (PG)
Male	9.4%	2.7 %
Female	6.4%	2.2%
Total	7.9 %	2.5 %

Source: Annual Report on 'Periodic Labour Force Survey' (June 2017–July 2018), National Statistical Office, May 2019, Government of India.

Table 7. Major reasons behind discontinuation of education (Age 5–29 years).

Reason	Male	Female
Financial constraints	23.6%	15.6 %
Engaged in economic activities	31%	4.9%
Marriage	00	13.9 %

NSSO 71st Round 2014.

be traced to sociological, cultural, and dogmatic belief systems that have prevailed in our society for a long time.

Our belief systems find roots in or emanate from our respective religious scriptures. Since no religion has treated women on par with men, society has gradually arrived at the pathetic situation where education for women has been ignored and neglected. Women are treated subservient to men. Therefore, many Indian parents are under the impression that any expenditure on a girl's education is always a negative investment. They view them as financial liabilities as they have to be paid dowries if they are to be married. It is premature to blame the parents. Rather, one step that we can take is to hold the scriptures that they hold sacred responsible. We have even our politicians and also those who run governments, making very demeaning statements about women. Henceforth, academia should rise to the occasion and educate and enlighten the orthodox and inhumane dogmas that cause the mistreatment of women.

The dichotomy of the rural and the urban education

We are all well aware of the fact that India lives in villages. As per 2011 census, 68.8 per cent of Indian population still lives in rural areas. These areas are reeling under inadequate infrastructural facilities, such as schools, hospitals, and public services. Majority of them find their livelihood opportunities in 'on-farm and non-farm' sectors that are entirely exposed to the vagaries of informal economy. Their income levels are far below than that of urban income levels. Apart from physical non-access to resources, their awareness towards education, information, and the high levels of social stigma prevent them from taking up education seriously. If we look at latest data, rural literacy of India is only 72.8 per cent; the urban literacy is 86.7 per cent, while the overall literacy rate is 76.9 per cent (PLFS, 2018). As per the National Sample Survey Report (71st Round – 2014), more than 12 per cent of rural households in India did not have a secondary school within 5 kilometres whereas in urban areas such cases are less than one per cent.

Table 8 shows that the total illiteracy in rural areas is 32 per cent while only 15 per cent in urban areas. Only 29.3 per cent of rural has studied 'secondary and above' levels while the same percentage is 51.6 per cent in urban areas. The percentage of population that graduated is 4.9 per cent in rural areas while this is significantly higher, at 12.9 per cent in urban areas. When it comes to the Post Graduation (PG) level and above, it is as low as 1.1 per cent of population in rural areas while the same corresponding figure for urban areas is 5.5 per cent. It is also school education in rural India that is far behind when compared to urban areas. We cannot afford to continue this anymore if at all we are to lead the path of inclusive human development. Hence, governments have the responsibility of adhering strictly to public policies that enable rural areas to access 'educational infrastructure'.

Table 8. Percentage distribution of persons by general education level (15 years and above).

	Rural			Urban					
	M*	F**	M&F	M	F	M&F	Male (R&U)	Female (R&U)	Total
Not Literate	22.5	41.8	32	9.3	20.8	15.0	18.5	35.3	26.8
Literate up to Primary	17.9	17.7	17.8	14	14.5	14.2	16.7	16.7	16.7
Middle	23.8	17.8	20.9	19.9	18.3	19.1	22.6	18.0	20.3
Secondary	15.6	10.3	13.0	16.9	14.2	15.5	16	11.5	13.8
Secondary& above	35.8	22.7	29.3	56.7	46.4	51.6	42.2	30.0	36.1
Higher Secondary	11.4	7.5	9.5	14.8	12.8	13.8	12.5	9.1	10.8
Diploma/Certificate	1.1	0.4	0.8	2.8	1.1	2.0	1.6	0.6	1.1
Graduate	6.2	3.6	4.9	16.7	12.9	14.8	9.4	6.4	7.9
PG & above	1.5	0.8	1.1	5.6	5.4	5.5	2.7	2.2	2.5

Source: Annual Report on 'Periodic Labour Force Survey' (June 2017–July 2018), National Statistical Office, May 2019, Government of India.
*Male.
**Female.

The way forward

Education is expected to transform human life into a more rational, progressive, democratic, logical, scientific, and liberal one. It should break the orthodox, dogmatic superstitions and unjust social structures, thereby leading to an overall transformation of human life. Education is not purely meant for attaining employment or degrees rather it should build up conscious, vigilant, and civilised minds, while instilling the elements of wisdom rather than just knowledge. Human beings are naturally dependent, selfish and fearful. It should be the prime motto of the education system to transform human beings into less fearful, less dependent and less selfish people (Russell, 1977). The field of education must consistently change its nature and role according to the changing needs of society. It should also be dynamic in responding to various needs of mankind and bridge the socio cultural gaps.

In this context, academia assumes a significant role, as it has been a hope for the society in projecting their day to day upheavals. Unfortunately, even academia is not free of the clutches of power structures and cultural hegemony. It also suffers from certain innate structural bottlenecks that need to be addressed on a serious note. The education system in India has become the largest in the world, with total of 51,649 institutions. However, the status and performance of educational institutions as well as their outcomes are yet to achieve global standards. The system is intertwined with some latent and debilitating dichotomies. They need to be addressed as soon as possible so that our education enables our overall growth and development instead of becoming a stumbling block. Education must champion change in society. It is also found that the whole gamut of the functioning of education must be free from ideological affiliations and political influences. Rather it should be allowed to operate on an independent status. It should not be allowed to be utilised as a tool to pour one's convictions into the system. Curricula must be designed in response to the local/national and global dynamics.

Therefore, the government, at the state and central level, must not only make laws towards education but also must ensure that they remain on right track and move towards achieving their objectives within a stipulated period of time. It is the responsibility of the academia to act objectively and productively, so as to reflect the day to day social, structural, political, economic and cultural complications without any distortion, fear or favour. Academia can strive through this path only when the dissemination of knowledge is accompanied with wisdom and justice. Neglect of education is the neglect of country as a whole.

Notes

1. The famous Economist, *James Dusenberry* proposed the concept of the 'demonstration effect', which postulates that an individual or household would not only plan their expenditure and life style based on their income or

their resources. Rather, they are also influenced by the consumption patterns and life styles of people around him. According to him, the prevalence of this effect is more prominent in developing countries.
2. By connectivity we mean that ideological, customs, practices that are transferred from generations to generations and across societies.
3. Ratio of the number of enrolments in higher education aging between 18 to 23 years to the total existing population.

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Notes on contributor

Dr. Trinadh Nookathoti: I obtained my doctorate in Economics from University of Hyderabad. Research interests include Development Economics, Agricultural Economics, and Subaltern Studies. I aspire to engage myself in research pertaining to socio-economic implications of caste and Economics of Discrimination in India. I feel education sans social application, scientific temper, democratic ethos, human rights and free thought would only remain as futile exercise and redundant entity. Through teaching and research I wish to contribute to the 'body of knowledge' that would pave the way for socio, economic and cultural emancipation of the deprived sections of the society.

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