

CONTEMPORARY ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN GREECE AND INDIA INESSANTLY CHALLENGED EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

Sanghacheta Ghosh¹ & Debjani Guha²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kalyani, West Bengal, India

²Professor, Department of Education, University of Kalyani, West Bengal, India

Received: 12 Aug 2018

Accepted: 06 Aug 2018

Published: 22 Aug 2018

ABSTRACT

Greece and India have been the two pioneers of western and eastern cultures individually from the dawn of human civilization. Greek and Indian cultures are like cousins and western and eastern cultures are vastly considered as only the syntheses of these two nations' cultures respectively. Although a significant negative correlation between education and equity has been claimed by some empirical sociological studies, still education, on the one hand, is largely regarded as the key to strong democratic scenario and socio-economic upliftment and on the other, as a weapon to tackle exploitation, unemployment, poverty and ignorance (U. S. Department of Education, 2013). And it is evident that elementary education poses just as a basic foundation of a learning society and attaining a universal elementary education is yet far from reality in all the continents. But, in reality, there are disparities in educational equity or opportunities which give rise to a gap in educational excellence or achievement (Ministry of Human Resource Development, India, 2014). Thus, if education is not catered to each and every child, it in turn, leads to monetary loss and ultimately grave economic crisis (UNESCO, 2017). The chief objectives of this paper are to examine the existing factors hindering equity and excellence in Greek and Indian elementary education systems with a special reference of historical backdrops to compare these two and to improvise some creative and prospective way-outs to establish elementary educational opportunities and achievements for these two nations.

KEYWORDS: *Elementary Education, Educational Equity, Educational Excellence, Ancient Backdrop, Contemporary Greek and Indian Elementary Education Systems*

INTRODUCTION

In the core circuit of the discipline Education, it is now and again heard that the Finnish education system has set a benchmark that is being tried to be adapted by the superpowers like USA and others. And it is claimed that the prime reason behind Finland's success is that they have met equilibrium between equity and excellence in their education system. So, it can be safely implied that both equity and excellence are the necessities of a good quality education system. In this respect, this research paper attempts to search the present constrictive circumstances of Greek and Indian elementary education systems.

Equity and excellence in education were majorly challenged during the ancient era and later in both Greece and India. And even in the ongoing post-modern period, as well, there are multifaceted circumstances that play their roles as

obstacles in the path of equity and excellence in Greek and Indian elementary education. These difficulties experienced by Greece and India actually delegate the contemporary global situation. By means of this paper, the humble intention is to fashion some meaningful corrective measures which can be adapted to nullify those aforementioned problems and to reconstruct accurate equilibrium in between equity and excellence in education on this planet.

OBJECTIVES

- To examine the existing factors hindering equity and excellence in Greek and Indian elementary education systems with a special mention of historical backdrops and to carry on a comparative analysis between these two.
- To suggest some prospective way-outs to establish equity and excellence in the elementary education of these two nations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Nowadays, intense educational researches are being attempted in the field of education in which comparative study is one of the new trends which serves as a clearinghouse of novel, worthy ideas. This paper is comparative in nature. It is largely a qualitative research and the present study follows document-based logical analysis. Qualitative data (primary, secondary and tertiary) for this paper have been collected from various sources, such as different documents, research papers, historical scriptures, government reports, education commissions' reports, authentic internet sources etc. Historical and sociological approaches have been adopted for this comparative analysis.

Discourse of “Equity” and “Excellence”

“Equity” can be regarded as a legal and abstract term which according to the Oxford English Dictionary means “the quality of being fair and impartial”. All policy-making procedures of any nation should go through equity check before enactment.

Whereas, the Oxford English Dictionary defines “excellence” as “the quality of being outstanding or extremely good”.

It is relative and at the same time debatable that to a certain level equity and excellence may work in co-existence but beyond that equity should be sacrificed in favor of excellence.

Moreover, excellence maybe subjective as it signifies different denotations to a below poverty line person and to a multimillionaire.

But from the humanistic ground, it can be concluded that whenever true equity or opportunity prevails, individualistic excellence or achievement perpetually comes along. And excellence cannot originate without equal opportunity. Dialectically, equity seems as centripetal force and excellence as centrifugal. As per to get optimum outcomes these two apparently opposite forces must act in equilibrium or in perfect balance.

Delimitation of the Study

This paper delimits “contemporary” period to the current, ongoing twenty-first century (2001 to 2018) and the compulsory, free-of-cost phase of education of these two systems is denoted as “elementary education”.

“Elementary, My Dear, Watson!”

However symbolic this subheading, borrowed from the fictional character Sherlock Holmes’ famous dialogues, maybe but it is significant in the course of elementary education. The Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud opines that childhood and adolescence are the building phases of a man-making process which perfectly tallies with the apportioned span for elementary education, to be exercised, middle and late childhood and early adolescence periods.

Therefore, a sound elementary education system can serve as the foundational cornerstones for any generation.

The Two “Cousins” Greece and India

Some classicists like Thomas MacEvilley advocates for that Greece and India are two cultural cousins and pathfinders or rather synthesizers of western and eastern cultures respectively. In this twenty-first century, Greece, a so-called first world country and India, a developing, third world member – both are twined by the same fate of striving against prevailing economic hardship and non-education. A question arises – if the reasons lie on the ground of their elementary education systems, then what are those and what should be the recommended remedies which they can utilize as a lifesaving ladder to come out of that tumultuous adversity? This paper solely aims to seek the answer to this question.

Ancient Backdrop

Just as a plant holds itself upon the anchoring strength of its own roots, any system whether education or other can partially or better to say majorly be interpreted through its own history.

Although Greek and Indian ancient era timelines (13th-9th century BC to 600 AD for Greece and 1750 BC to 1200 AD for India) roughly overlap, they had sub-layers. For ancient Greece, there were no civil rights and of course educational rights for women, slaves, and foreigners. Sub-graduations were also prominent among the “Poleis” or the “city-states”. Exceptions, such as Sappho the poet of Lesbos, Hypatia the philosopher, Gorgo the leader of Sparta, Agnodice the physician of Athens, Epictetus the philosopher (born as a slave and a freeman in later life) and some more emerged through individual bravery and effort. Classism differentiated education purchasing potential among classes. So, there were clear class distinctions about opportunity and achievement among fellow Greeks, though Greece cradled democracy.

Almost the same picture has been discovered in the case of ancient India particularly for women. There was a faded provision of education for higher caste women as casteism was the leading factor in India but eminent, as for example, Moitrayee, Lopamudra, and others were few in number. Contrary to the early-Vedic period, in later-Vedic period casteism became illustrious and restricted the Shudras from accessing to any education at all. Moreover, there were constant conflicts between the in-comers or Aryans and the aboriginals or Aryans and the latter were compelled to get congested in Southern India. Obviously, there were demarcations about equity and excellence in the whole population within the same mainland.

Contemporary Greek and Indian Elementary Educational Counterparts: A Comparison

The two elementary education systems of the contemporary era are compared side by side in a juxtaposed manner:

Table 1: Main Features of Contemporary Greek and Indian Elementary Education

Dimensions	Greece	India
Temporal Span	9 years (6-12 years of age in primary school + 12-15 years of age in lower secondary school or Gymnasium).	8 years (6-10 years of age in primary school + 10-14 years of age in lower secondary school).
Financing Agency	Mainly state revenue through regular public budget investments and partially by private sources.	Revenues by central and state governments.
Philosophy of Education	All-round development of individuals, irrespective of sex and social background.	Promoting national progress, the essence of common citizenship and culture and strengthening national integration (National Policy on Education, 1968).
Curricular Subjects	Primary School (2009-2010) – Religion, Modern Greek Language, mathematics, history, EVS, Geography, Natural Sciences, Social Studies and Civics, Art Education, Physical Education, Foreign Language (English), Second Foreign Language (French or German), Flexible (Interdisciplinary and Creative Activities). Gymnasium (2009-2010) – Religion, Ancient Greek Language and Literature, Modern Greek Language and Literature, History, Civics and Social Studies, Foreign Language (English), Second Foreign Language, Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Computer Science, Geography, Biology, Technology, School Vocational Guidance, Physical Education, Music, Arts, Home Economics.	Language (three language formula), Maths, Computer, Sciences, Social Sciences, Art Education, Study of Peace, Work and Education (National Curriculum Framework, 2005).
Administrative Style	Highly centralized (7.3% private schools in primary department and 5.2% private schools in the lower secondary department).	Two-way traffic of central and state control.
Governing Body	Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning, and Religious Affairs.	Ministry of Human Resource Development.
Parental Participation	Parents' Associations.	No such government approved arrangement.
Implication of ICT	From Grade 1.	From Grade 1.
Constitutional Provisions	Art, Science, Research and Teaching are free and their development and promotion shall be an obligation of the state (Article 16 of the Constitution of 1975; revised in 2008).	India to provide free and compulsory education for all children in age group of 6 to 14 years as a fundamental right (Article 21-A of 2002). The right of children to free and compulsory education (RTE) Act, 2009, consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A.

COMPARATIVE DISCUSSIONS

Now, we shall proceed to compare the two parallels. There have already been so many governmental and non-governmental (both national and international) agencies' educational reports out there pointing out separately these two systems drawbacks and feed backing some corrective measures. This research paper humbly aspires to bring forth some other points of view regarding this matter in a comparative way followed by some meaningful remedies one by one.

FINDINGS

Let us begin to go through the comparative observations.

Is Religion Acceptable as an Elementary Level School Subject?

Still now, in Greek elementary school classrooms, religion is being taught as a distinct subject.

In India, as per her constitution, government and government-aided schools cannot include religion as a subject in the curricula but the textbooks hint that there have been lessons of religious topics conducted in a secular manner.

Now, if we take Karl Marx's remark taken as granted, then religion is equivalent to opium addiction. If someone is high with some addictive drug, then it's nearly impossible for that one to think rationally.

A Solution to Be Suggested Here

School textbooks can be spiritual to guide learners towards universal humanistic values and ethics but any specific religious indoctrination must be carefully discarded from syllabi.

Overlooked Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Greece has not included ECCE into the area of free and compulsory elementary education yet now.

Its Indian equivalent follows the same norm for ECCE.

But borrowing a phrase from Delor's report (1996) we can say that for formatting a learning society, education is inevitable from "cradle to grave

A Solution to be Suggested Here

Thus it can be prescribed to include ECCE in state-provided elementary education to address the very important early childhood of human's life.

Weighty Upper Secondary Education

Greece does not include upper secondary education to the state-aided arena of elementary education.

India also excludes upper secondary department from the free and compulsory section. Here, the problem is as the French psychologist Jean Piaget suggests that formal operational stage of cognitive development (12 years onwards) to construct inductor-deductive, logical analysis, abstract thinking powers in learners if opportunity and excellence in upper secondary education (late adolescence) is not ensured then there must remain a gap.

A Solution to be Suggested Here

A nation should invest more of its GDP (gross domestic product) to make upper secondary education free and compulsory too.

Lucrative Language

It can be asserted that Greece has never experienced any colonization and foreign language superimposition through years. Nowadays, Greek and two foreign languages (English and French or German) are compulsory in elementary level.

Whereas, India went through the compulsions of Sanskrit, Arabic, Urdu, English and many more and consecutive protests against those time to time. Presently, a three-language formula is being tried upon. India homes numerous different regional languages and dialects also.

As according to the American linguist Noam Chomsky, every individual and society have their own language acquisition device (LAD), a master magic potion cannot work for every individual.

A Solution to be Suggested Here

Language is inevitable as the medium of instruction. That is why both the governments should plan more individualistic instructional approach catering the individual language needs, though it is much time, money and effort consuming.

Administrative Environment

Greek elementary education is highly centralized. Syllabus, textbooks, school hours, exam schedule, assessment techniques and all are the same in all schools throughout the country. There is also some private contribution.

In India, it is three-way traffic of central, state and local authorities. Privatisation is also having its share.

On the one hand, some strict fixation is needed for a system to play effectively and on the other, instantaneous, local improvisation is also required to be efficient.

A Solution to be Suggested Here

The two countries must attain a golden balance between national and regional administrations in elementary education.

Financial Folly

The Greek elementary education is mainly stated revenues with partial private sources. Before, during and after 2011 reform, they have been struggling with monetary recession.

And the Indian one is financed by central and state governments joining hand in hand. But still, there is an insufficiency of educational budget relocation.

Therefore, enough finance extraction for elementary education is a tough challenge to counter for both the nations.

A Solution to Be Suggested Here

It is to be made confirmed by both the countries that the education plant is sufficiently watered by resources by reducing the burden from less important sectors, say defense purposes etc. which are practically harmful to humanity.

Parental Participation

There is a formal and authorized structure of parental participation through legal Parents' Associations at Greece in school level.

But in India, there is no such government-approved arrangements.

School and society are two sides of the educational coin. Parental participation can make society more aware and benefited which is actually good for education's future.

A Solution to Be Suggested Here

To serve contemporary positive clientelism, social and parental involvements are necessary. By this, society can have a track of ongoing educational practices which is possibly sanctioned by the society itself. Greece has already initiated which India still lacks and has to address immediately.

Implementation of ICT (Information and Communication Technology)

Greek elementary school students have access to computers from grade 1 (6 years of age) as a portion of school ICT curricula.

The similar thing happens in India too.

But a question arises – whether the students can afford the personal computer and practice their lessons out of the classroom or not in the given economic situation in both the countries.

A solution to be Suggested Here

In this period of globalization and information eruption, ICT is useful machinery for teaching-learning processes. Both the governments should step forward to at least make sure that each and every student gets an accession to a computer and internet.

Constitutional Provisions

Greece made elementary education free and compulsory in 1975 (Article 16 of 1975, revised in 2008).

In the case of India, this aspect is quite newer (Article 21-A of 2002 and RTE or Right to Education Act of 2009) than Greece.

It is crystal clear that Greece and especially India have a long way to travel in this direction.

A Solution to Be Suggested Here

Nation men are regarded as the assets of a nation. That is why human resource development should be an urge for the nation herself.

Ideological Disposition towards Education

Greece stresses on all-round development of individuals irrespective of sex and social background.

As per National Policy on Education (NPE, 1968), the aim of education in India is “to promote national progress, the essence of common citizenship and culture and to strengthen national integration”.

Clearly, unlike the individualistic all-round developmental approach of Greece, India is more bothered about “unity in diversity”

A Solution to Be Suggested Here

It is to be remembered that the Indian creative educationist Rabindranath Tagore believed that uniformity is not similar to unity. Each subunit, however small it is, should flourish itself to the fullest within the greater unit. This, now absent individualistic spirit, is to be captured by a government by means of campaign, policy, law, advertisement and of course education for its own sake. People should become understanding that education is not a mere full-proof investment for future productivity only but for enlightenment which ultimately gives birth to economic and other achievements automatically.

CONCLUSIONS

Both Greece and India were tremendously enriched in the long-forgotten ancient past with no proper equity and excellence though.

Through continuous, successive invasions by foreign forces and other things, India’s cerebral heritage has been demolished. And now we are living in a void of blind imitation of developed first world countries and are unaware of our own historical potential. For Greece, there have been no such external disturbances. But they failingly tried to keep a hold on their rich heritage that got evaporated eventually and could not cope up with other European countries in consumerism. Lisbon Strategy (2000) and subsequent Bologna Process were adopted by all European Union (EU) countries immediately other than Greece. As a result of that, they neither could evolve their heritage nor could go with other EU nations with respect to so-called modernism.

It has been found that throughout the human history and even in the contemporary period, there have been multifarious elements acting as hurdles against founding equity and excellence in education in the true sense around the globe besides Greece and India. To undertake meaningful innovative measures to reconstruct education, quality of human lives, human relationships, mutual trust and sustainable development is the very need of the hour.

In this circumstance, a balanced equilibrium between equity and excellence in elementary education can act as a fruitful recipe to cook a delicious dish of the competitive and knowledge-based economy that is capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. And it is truly applicable to any nation.

REFERENCES

1. Bhattacharya, S. (2006). *Prachin Bharote Nari O Samaj*. Kolkata, India: National Book Agency Private Limited.
2. Chomsky, Noam. (2006). *Language and Mind*. Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press.
3. Doniger, W. (1999). *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India*. Chicago, U.S.A.: University of Chicago Press.
4. Freud, S. (2012). *An Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Hertfordshire, U. K.: Wordsworth Editions Limited.
5. Government of India. (1968). *National Policy on Education*. New Delhi, India: Government of India. Retrieved from <https://www.mhrd.gov.in> on 12.5.2018.
6. IBEF. (2018). *Education and Training*. New Delhi, India: IBEF. Retrieved from <https://www.ibef.org> on 11.5.2018.
7. Kitto, H. D. F. (1991). *The Greeks*. New York, U.S.A.: Penguin Books.
8. Marx, K. & Engels, F. (2008). *On Religion*. New York, U. S. A.: Dover Publications.
9. McEvilley, T. (2001). *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*. New York, U.S.A.: Allworth Press.
10. MHRD, Government of India. (2014). *Education for All: Towards Quality and Equity*, New Delhi, India: MHRD, Government of India. Retrieved from <https://www.mhrd.gov.in> on 12.5.2018.
11. NCERT. (2005). *National Curriculum Framework*. New Delhi, India: NCERT. Retrieved from <https://www.ncert.nic.in> on 12.5.2018.
12. O'Connell, K. M. (2012). *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*. Kolkata, India: Visva-Bharati Publishing Department.
13. Anand, S. H. R. U. T. I. (2014). *The Contemporary Issues and Significance of Peace Education in India*. *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature*, 2(10), 47-54.
14. OECD. (2017). *Education Policy in Greece: A Preliminary Assessment*. Paris, France: OECD. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org> on 12.5.2018.
15. OECD. (2011). *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Education Policy Advice for Greece*. Paris, France: OECD. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org> on 20.6.2018.
16. Piaget, J. (2001). *The Psychology of Intelligence*. Abingdon, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
17. Russell, B. (1967). *A History of Western Philosophy and Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. New York, U.S.A.: Simon & Schuster.
18. Tagore, R. (2011). *Sikkha*. Kolkata, India: Visva-Bharati Granthan Bibhag.

19. UGC. (2018). *Higher Education in India: Issues Related to Expansion, Inclusiveness, Quality and Finance*. New Delhi, India: UGC. Retrieved from <https://www.ugc.ac.in> on 11.5.2018.
20. UNESCO. (2017). *Accountability in Greek Education*. Paris, France: UNESCO. Retrieved from <https://www.unesdoc.unesco.org> on 11.5.2018.
21. UNESCO. (1996). *Learning: The Treasure Within*. Paris, France: UNESCO. Retrieved from <https://www.unesdoc.unesco.org> on 11.5.2018.
22. UNESCO. (2012). *World Data on Education*. Paris, France: UNESCO. Retrieved from <https://www.ibe.unesco.org> on 20.6.2018.
23. U.S. Department of Education. (2013). *For Each and Every Child: A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence*. Washington, D. C., U.S.A.: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov> on 9.5.2018.