Moving Out of Oppression into Empowerment: An Evaluation of Indian Educational History

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Abstract

Educators seeking to empower young leaders need to understand the worldviews that drive the educational systems around them. This brief overview of the educational history of India explores on the one hand how oppressive educational models have developed and dominated, and on the other hand pursues discovery of empowering models. Ancient Hindu philosophies based on the caste system and fatalistic thinking as well as Buddhist schools of thought emphasizing renunciation contributed to the growth of ancient home-based schooling and universities dedicated to open dialogue. British colonial influence utilized a banking system of education but brought many positive changes to Indian society in breaking through traditional caste and gender barriers. With such extensive history, post-colonial India is torn between either building national and religious identity by returning to Hindu roots or rather taking advantage of India's most profound strength: continuing as an example of how peoples of different religions and languages can live alongside each other in pluralistic community.

Key words: India, education, history, Hindu, Buddhist, British Raj, banking model, Paolo Freire, Jane Vella

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Every year around major examination seasons, the *Pune Times'* front page displays photos of teenagers who committed suicide. Often these dismayed children take this desperate step before seeing their actual examination scores. Failure looms ahead with dead certainty. A few months later, once test scores come out and the sadness of the lost students forgotten (by everyone but their families), billboards around the city celebrate the accomplishment of the highest-scoring students by featuring the faces of the class "toppers."

As a busy young mother with two newly adopted sons, I observed this trend, but barely had time even to read the newspaper articles, let alone ponder this tragedy that happened on a startlingly regular basis in India. With misdirected love, many parents base the value of their children almost solely on their examination scores. When children fail the infamous 10th standard exam, they carry that stigma and shame into adulthood, a heavy burden that haunts.

Instead of educational systems designed to help students master subject material, in the competitive Indian system, parents, teachers, and students consider the passing mark the primary goal. Now after two decades in this fascinating and tragic land, I begin to understand the depth of the education crisis in post-colonial India. Recent interaction with Paulo Freire's concept of the "banking" model of education helped me understand my own anger toward India's own dehumanizing system. According to Freire, the banking model of education narrates for the student content that is to be memorized mechanically. "Worse yet, it turns them into 'containers,' into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are" (Freire 2004, Loc. 983). My mind constantly wrestles with this hegemonic dilemma I face every day: economically disadvantaged families making great personal sacrifices in order to send their children to schools where they very studiously learn to perpetuate the system that oppresses them. Vishal Mangalwadi speaks into this crisis: "…our cultures were shaped by worldviews that taught us that intellect was our problem and

salvation depended not on deliverance from sin, but on deliverance from the intellect" (Mangalwadi 2013, 24).

I do not presume that I have answers for the education crisis India faces, but I grieve for the students of India along with G.N. Devy, an activist for the *Adivasi*[1] communities: "The ruination of their childhood and the torment faced by them is a national tragedy. The number of children who suffer in the process is in the millions" (Devy 2017, 93). This crisis exists within the education system and without. As one of the world leaders in illiteracy, more than half of Mother India's children do not even set foot inside a school.[2] Those privileged enough to attend school often experience physical and verbal abuse from teachers, as well as parental pressure to score well on examinations, a forceful combination that too often proves fatal.

Working to comprehend the depth of the education crisis in India, I spent time in a Directed Study examining the Indian identity. Upon considering the effects of colonization more thoroughly (though definitely not completely), I feel ready to tackle the topic of how oppressive educational systems have destroyed and then inadvertently helped rebuild a nation capable of achieving independence. The British understood the importance of educating Indians with British methods and content in order to achieve their goals. Yet to fully understand the education crisis in India, Devy insists that the British should not be the only ones blamed. Long before the British displaced India's traditional forms of schooling, the Hindu worldview promoted the caste system, which effectively limited education to only a few privileged males (Devy 2017, 9). Educators in India need to understand the roots and influence of an oppressive educational system in order to actively evaluate the institutions of which they are part and initiate movement toward empowering educational models.

Education toward liberation requires renunciation of oppressive models, whether they come from Indian history itself or British colonization. Unfortunately, the first leaders of independent India largely ignored the liberating ideas of two of India's prominent freedom fighters in regards to education. This contributes to the national tragedy of identity and education faced by the land today, where the current pro-Hindu government actively uses a banking style of education, depositing information into students in order to control the masses and subtly reinforce caste-based segregation. To come alongside and empower Indian students, educators should be trained in the use of problem-posing education, which depends on dialogue, questioning, and listening, all of which are activities that re-affirm the humanity of each student.

In this paper, I first examine the connection between education and identity in the Indian context. Next, I look at ancient Indian philosophies of education and the traditional school system before the British arrived on Indian soil. Then I identify the negative and positive contributions of the British, followed by a discussion of the lack of educational reform upon India's achievement of independence.

Education and Identity

The extremely relevant issue of national identity dominates the political scene in India. The current government rewrites and reissues textbooks in a push for India to drop "secular" from government documents, in order to establish India as a Hindu nation. Any adequate discussion of Indian identity must reckon with the vastness of its population. Consider that the entire continent of Africa provides a home for a population smaller than the population of India. Fifty-eight distinct nations host Africa's very diverse 1.29 billion people.[3] Imagine the staggering

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[1] A general term for tribal people. These communities make up 8.6% of the Indian population (Hays 2008).
[2] "Our Children," Smile Foundation, accessed Sept. 17, 2020.
https://www.smilefoundationindia.org/ourchildren.html.
[3] See http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/.

challenges India faces in trying to create a unified identity for 1.39 billion people[4] with approximately 1,600 different mother tongues, in a single democratic nation with no common accepted interpretation of their history or religious codes.

The system of education a country employs is an example of a cultural product, a cultural norm that develops out of the deeper values and the deepest beliefs of the culture. Whether people realize it or not, education serves as one of the primary means of building worldviews or core identities in people or communities. Through education, the predominant worldview is passed on to the next generation. The caste system perpetuated a fatalistic mentality that has discouraged change in learning, thinking, or action throughout Indian history. Though Hindu thinkers would not say that Hinduism fully endorses the belief that Brahma fatalistically writes a person's destiny on their foreheads, a fatalistic core exists in the fact that for millennia Indians have believed that the *karma* accumulated in previous lives determines their current social and economic status (V. 2017). The popular Hindi phrase "*Chalta hai*" is often heard on college campuses among young people who might think they are breaking free ideologically but still hold onto ideas that express disbelief that change is possible. The very common *Chalta hai* attitude expresses acceptance of what is, not because it is good, but because "it works." Nothing can be done that will bring change, so acceptance provides the easiest solution. Transformative educational endeavours, where learning is viewed as change-creating, hit the concrete wall of fatalism in this country that has resisted change, or not believed it possible, for thousands of years. This lack of belief in *the possibility of* change enabled Indians throughout the ages to accept their social status as defined by Brahmin priests, and the ambiguity of their own religious history.

In many ways, throughout their history, Indian people had very little control over their identity, their education, or their future and even less room to choose a different individuality, education, or future should they have desired it. Now politically independent, India is faced with challenging its fatalistic past in the building of its national identity. However, rather than deal with limitations in past educational or societal structures, many Indians politically and nostalgically cling to the idea of the past Golden Age in hopes of "reinstating" a strong Hindu identity. From 320-600 BC, the Gupta dynasty ruled in India and solidified Brahminical Hinduism, which upheld the strong hierarchy and maintained the strict boundaries between social groups. With self-declared divine authority, the Brahmins "played the dominant role in the definition and dissemination of the Hindu ethos and worldview" (Ramachandra 1999, 66).

In a land as ancient and religiously diverse as India, finding a unified core of identity proves impossible. The notorious tension between Hindus and Muslims even represents false understandings of what it means to be Hindu or Muslim. For example, Persian explorers called the land east of the Indus River "Hindu," and only later did this geographic term become an inaccurate religious label.[5] No single religious community existed in the Indian subcontinent, but rather a grouping of different religious beliefs with a very fluid structure (Thapar 2014, 138). In fact, pre-colonial Hindus and Muslims from the same social strata existed alongside each other with remarkably little tension (Ramachandra 1999, 59). Later, and purely for pragmatic reasons, the British extended this false religious understanding by conveniently dividing Indian people into two communities, Hindu and Muslim, when taking a census (Thapar 2014, 120). By creating such a strong distinction between these two religious systems, India ended up divided into two separate countries (Pakistan and India) and the foundation for post-colonial confusion and political tension were set firmly in place.

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[4] Approximately four times the population of the United States. See http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/india-population/.

[5] Additionally, the word "Hindu" does not appear in any religious text native to India (Ramachandra 1999, 56).

India faces the same difficulties as other post-colonial nations around the world in their struggle to understand their identity as independent lands. For a land that boasts over 5,000 years of history, it becomes extremely political to decide the points and the languages that one identifies as its source of identity. To compound this identity problem, not many Indians undertook the task of compiling their own histories due to the tendency of dominant Indian philosophies to undervalue the concepts of reality, morality, personality and history. It was the British, with their own purposes and perceptions, who were the first to attempt to record comprehensive histories and timelines for this mammoth land (Thapar 2014, 17).

Most post-colonial countries build national pride by reconnecting with the time periods before colonists suppressed their national identity. Reconnecting India with its pre-colonial past proves far more complicated. Hindus would claim that the Golden Age of India came to an end when Muslims took over parts of the land in the 700s A.D. and dominated the land for 1,000 years.[6] For political reasons, some Hindus broadcast this as "the most severe persecution that any religion in the world has ever undergone" (Thapar 2014, 147). Yet more than a millennium before Muslims exerted their influence, Buddhism and Jainism emerged as religions distinct from Hinduism in the 6th century B.C. with Buddhism reigning as the dominant religion for about 1,000 years and Jainism maintaining a presence in India for over 2500 years (Sen, 2006, 17).

This brief historical reflection on national identity underscores the complexity of India's present-day attempt to decide upon the worldview on which it wishes to base its education system. Educational boards wishing to create curriculums need to determine what point in time represents the *real* India based on beliefs regarding when "pre-colonial" India actually began. Given the fact that no single Indian identity exists, Amartya Sen, a professor at Harvard University, argues that India's identity as a multi-religious country forms the strongest claim to truth over any single religious identity (Sen 2006, 353). India's identity and pride should be in its diversity, therefore founded on religious neutrality. Education needs to reflect this for India to remain the world's largest democratic nation.

What follows is a closer look at how education in India has largely failed to reflect this diversity by not valuing the rational minds of a large percentage of its population.

Education in India Before the British Came

Demystifying Hindu Philosophy

Initial Western reactions to the blatant "idolatry" of India assume Hinduism to be a religion that solely revolves around worship of fearful gods. Living within this system, I have seen that Hinduism bases its ideology on ideas that sound more Western than Indians might care to admit: primarily humanism and materialism. Due to their value of knowledge as subjective, Indians have developed their own spiritual versions of humanist and materialist ideologies, ideologies that Westerners view as "secular" or devoid of God or gods.[7] More than most religions of the world, followers of Hinduism seek "god realization"—such a deep connection with god that they become god themselves, or understand the god within them. The common Indian greeting of *namaste* literally means "I greet the god within you."[8] In the West this is

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[6] A close analysis of history reveals that though Muslims controlled parts of India, they never dominated the whole land at once. Indian historians such as Romila Thapar and Amartya Sen continue to challenge distortion of historical facts as those misrepresent who Indians have historically been, and promotes various forms of discrimination.

[7] Interestingly, a spiritual version of communism grows in strength in South India. People regard Marx as a hero, and I personally know two different Christian men who were named after Stalin.

[8] Christians seek a connection with God fully understanding they never "become" gods or part of God.

called humanism; but, in effect, Westerners make their "self-seeking selves" equivalent to God just the same (Palmer 2008, 71).

The acquisition of material wealth and possession drives most Indian worship of their various gods. While Indians like to portray themselves as otherworldly or beyond primal materialism, Pavan K. Varma affirms that "Hinduism provides explicit philosophical sanction for the pursuit of material gain" (Varma 2004, 64). Materialism also serves the innate, sinful drive of humans to keep themselves and their comfort on the throne. Eastern spirituality and Western materialism agree: Self is god, material wealth the goal. From a Western perspective, Eugene Peterson explains, "The ways and means promoted and practiced in the world are a systematic attempt to substitute human sovereignty for God's rule" (Peterson 2007, Loc. 127). This cry for human supremacy rings true in the exotic supernatural religions of the East just as much as in the scientifically and apologetically established non-religions of the West. The quest for material wealth, through religion or reliance on self, equates to a desire for power.

Ancient Indian Philosophy of Education; 1700 BC – 600 BC

Though based on different philosophies, education throughout the world has consolidated power and money in the hands of the educated at the expense of the uneducated. Whether for religious purposes or governmental control of society (or both), civilizations throughout history and across the globe have stratified their population (patrician and plebeian, landowners and peasants, aristocratic and bourgeois). Education and control of wealth tend to be the most obvious dividing lines between the rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots. Education teaches people their place in this hierarchical scheme.

Notorious for its religious devotion to rigorously dividing their people into a social ladder of significance and value, Indians of the past considered breaking one's caste as equivalent to breaking faith with their religion. While the idea of *karma* instructed people to fatalistically accept their status, it also provided guidelines on obeying caste requirements as the only way out of the cycle of birth and rebirth. Education solidified the identity of Indians within their *varna* ("caste"). Education did not merely serve the purpose of teaching people new ways of thinking, but also often reinforced the confinement of people within their caste (Tomar 2016, 60). Though officially outlawed, caste still holds influence. According to Devy, "The why, the where from, the how of *varna* and *jati*[9] in Indian civilization need to be opened again and again like festering and mortal wounds that need to be cured and healed or surgically removed" (Devy 2017, 50). To fully comprehend the seriousness of this wound, a close look at the Hindu creation story is required.

The *Rig Veda*, dated around 1700 BC, one of India's many sacred scriptures and one of the most ancient religious texts in the world, recounts the creation story and the genesis of the caste system. Before time, the gods divided *Purusha,* or the universe. *Brahmin* (priests) came out of *Purusha's* mouth, *Rajanya* or *Kshatriya* (warriors) from the arms, *Vaishya* (merchants) from the thighs, and *Shudra* (servants of the upper castes) from the feet. The 5th *varna* composed of *Dalits*, or untouchables, is not even featured in the story. A powerful negative consequence evolved from the creation story in the form of a law that governed social relationships (Devy 2017, 54). Historians credit the Laws of Manu, written around 1500 BC,[10] with the application of the caste system to daily life (carrying out one's *dharma*). Other ancient religious texts repeat and expand the thoughts dictated by the 2,685 verses of the Laws of Manu

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[9] Varna and jati both mean "caste" or "subcaste."
[10] The exact dates are not known and some sources date the Laws at around 200 AD (Devy 2017, 51).

(Devy 2017, 51).[11] Uncertainty remains as to whether the Laws of Manu described social practices already in effect, or prescribed a new set of ideals by which society should run (Devy 2017, 54). The rules laid out by Manu insisted that only the three higher castes, the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriya*, and *Vaishya* were allowed to study the *Vedas*, but *Brahmins* alone were permitted to teach the *Vedas*. Not only were the *Shudras* (the lowest caste) not allowed to study the sacred scriptures, but if they happened to hear the words of these *Vedas* read, they faced horrific penalties (Tomar 2016, 61). It barely needs mentioning that women and *Dalits* were not considered worthy to participate in any form of education. These laws inexorably relate to how Indian education proceeded for millennia, and according to Dr. Ambedkar, are the root of India's modern-day illiteracy and poverty (Tomar 2016, 62).

According to Devy, the definition of knowledge, or *jnana*, as understood by the ancient schools of thought also contributes to the crisis Indians face today. Multiple streams of Indian thought on the subject of knowledge exist, but, in many ways, popular views of knowledge affect modern Indians most. The *Bhagavad Gita* spends three chapters discussing *jnana*, or the dissolution of dualities and attainment of unity (Devy 2017, 29). Hindu followers ultimately seek to know *Brahman*: the supreme existence or absolute reality, the ultimate purpose or form of knowledge. Any perception outside of Brahman should be considered false. In Brahman no individuality exists, no self—only cosmic self. Hindus view knowledge as subjective, not as objective (Devy 2017, 30).

The accepted hierarchy of humans leaves *dharma,* or morality, relative to the social group to which one belongs. For example, the purification rites to which a Brahmin is expected to adhere depends entirely on a lower caste person carrying out "impure" activities on behalf of the Brahmin. This viewpoint has implications for social responsibility. One is only responsible for one's family, or at most, members of one's caste. According to Prabhu Guptara, "Other 'outsiders' had no relationship to you, so their welfare was not your responsibility" (Guptara 2021).

The moral relativism of India differs from that of the West. In today's post-modern West, one individually chooses what one considers right or good, while in India, one's caste determines what is right for that person. The subjective view of knowledge, or *jnana*, combined with the fact that Hinduism has no concept of original or ultimate sin,[12] has left India with no universally applicable moral foundation on which to base an educational system and build society (Varma 2004, 8).

Ancient Buddhist Schools of Thought: 600-800 B.C.

Breaking free from the fatalism of *karma* required renunciation. Within the ancient Hindu Vedic traditions, one could escape caste society and status only by abandoning everything. Without homes, family, or income, renouncers, sometimes referred to as wandering ascetics, could don ochre-coloured robes and become *sannyasins*, "individuals-outside-the-world" (Ramachandra 1999, 75). People superstitiously revered *sannyasins* and believed they had magical powers. A few poor *sannyasins* here or there posed little problem for Brahmin priests, but when communities of renouncers, such as Buddhist and Jain communities, started to separate themselves during the 6th and 5th centuries BC and create alternative societies where

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[11] For example, in the third *Adhyaya*, vs. 35, the Bhagavad Gita says, "One's own (caste) duty, even when less attractive, is better than another even if it is more attractive. Death in one's own (caste) duty is preferable over finding sustenance in another's duty, for the latter is horrible" (The Bhagavad-Gita 1929).

[12] Interestingly, many Indian thinkers consider ignorance as the source of all evil (Pani and Pattnaik 2006, 219). One would think that this kind of philosophy would lead to a strong focus on education, but because of knowledge being limited to only higher caste people, the religion itself has caused ignorance to increase.

caste did not play a prominent controlling role, questions were raised, hope was birthed, trouble brewed (Ramachandra 1999, 76).

According to Sen, both Buddhism and Jainism contained features that served to level or undermine the superior position of the priestly caste (Sen 2006, 11). Around 600 BC, Siddhartha Gautama, more commonly known as the Buddha, the Enlightened or Awakened One, sought to reform Brahmanical Hinduism, which determined identities and caste regulations. The Buddha also reacted against the compassionless and unjust caste system (Devy 2017, 58). Through interactions with Gosala, of the *Ajivaka* sect of Hinduism, the Buddha confronted fatalism. According to Gosala, life was to be accepted as it was; *Chalta hai*. Though the Buddha and Gosala spent time in each other's company, they parted ways realizing they would never agree on the topic of free will (V. 2017).

In the Buddha's theory of knowledge, *jnana* does not equal knowledge. One must undertake a lifelong journey, a process, from *pranja* (intense intellect), through *karuna* (utmost compassion) in order to reach *jnana* (Devy 2017, 30). With love, equality, tolerance, liberty, and sympathy as high values, the Buddha fought against social injustice and made progress in opening up education to men from various castes and religions. Buddhist educational centres focused on moral teachings, which served to propagate Buddhism. Teachers developed the art of discussion and logic in the students from all over ancient India, as well as China, Myanmar, and Thailand. Unfortunately, since the Buddha viewed women as the source of all evil, this time period also resulted in an all-time low for the education of women. Despite this, the rise of Buddhism brought the education of men to a pre-colonial high point in Indian history (Maheshwari 2012). However according to Tomar, these improvements in education were short lived due to the ongoing opposition from Brahmanism and Islam (Tomar 2016, 2).

Lost Traditions, Lost Knowledge

Despite profound restrictions on who had permission to teach or receive an education, classical and spiritual learning thrived in ancient India. At the primary level, male children were taught the vocation of their fathers according to their caste. Male students often lived in a *gurukul*, the homes of their *Brahmin* teacher, where a close personal relationship with their teacher served to guide the learning atmosphere. The well-developed Buddhist and Vedic schools of thought developed codes of law, philosophies, scientific works, sacred books, mathematics, and astronomy in Sanskrit and Pali languages, respectively (Srinivas 2013). Arab and Chinese traveling historians documented experiences at famous Buddhist universities of the East, particularly Nalanda, which hosted students from China and SE Asia (Thapar 2002, 306) for hundreds of years before universities such as Oxford or Cambridge came into existence (Sen 2006, 354). An underrecognized fact, according to Sen, is that during the reign of Ashoka (268-232 BC), India contributed to the global roots of democracy when Ashoka hosted public discussions designed to settle disputes complete with "good rules for productive debating to be followed by all" (Sen 2006, 182). In addition, Brahmin teachers preserved the vast amount of Hindu religious texts and passed their learning on from generation to generation (Pani and Pattnaik 2006, 5). In 1600 AD, the East India Company entered a land devoted to knowledge and learning (at least for the elite and religious), a land as civilized (or more civilized) than most of Europe at the time.

Perceptions of Knowledge

Jane Vella, an educator who has empowered and inspired many poor communities around the world, challenges learners: "You evoke the world you perceive" (Vella 2002, 16). By teaching a privileged portion of the population to pursue god realization, while effectively teaching the majority of people to accept their lack of education, ancient India evoked a divided land with

little strength to fend off any kind of invaders, Islamic or British. Devy summarizes grimly, "Given the rise of this kind of metaphysics translated into social and legal practices, there was no possibility of creating a humane society. The argument was closed in India forever" (Devy 2017, 58).

Because of India's great diversity and various schools of thought, a weakness in its theory of knowledge emerged. Devy admits that ancient Indians had no ambitions to pursue any kind of "universal knowledge" that could unify Indians or carry them into the modern world (Devy 2017, 37). In contrast, evidence of this drive for universal answers was at work in Europe in the 1600s as scientists and mathematicians (believing in objective knowledge) took the West down the path toward modernity. The Christian understanding that God created the world in a rational way, implied that the world could be rationally comprehended.[13] To many in the West, comprehending the world meant exploring and conquering. India's wealth of natural resources, not its vague ideas about knowledge, supplied economic answers for the British upon their arrival to India.

British Influence: Negative and Positive

According to Devy, all traditions of education before colonization were destroyed by the British (Devy 2017, 8). Much debate has taken place over the years among the people of India about whether the British intentionally dismantled the cultural and educational identity of the Indians, or did so inadvertently, and whether the domination of the East India Company (1600-1858) and the rule of the British Raj (1858-1947) were completely negative. Interestingly, British views and treatment of India depended largely on what was happening at home religiously and politically. Initially, British and other Europeans came for the purpose of economic gain. These materialistic goals justified trading and looting the land. However, from 1757-1857, as the empire grew in power in India, Europe itself was influenced by the Evangelical revival (beginning in the 1730s). Moral purposes and a burden to civilize the natives across their empire influenced decisions. Britain began to see the need to educate, and bring Christian morals into India. Meanwhile in an overlapping time frame (1715-1789), Enlightenment thinking countered Christian humanism by building an "overconfidence in human abilities and intrinsic goodness" (Mangalwadi 1997, 57). Once the influence of Darwin became popularized (mid-late 1800s), moral purposes were further undercut. In light of the confusing mix of religious and political influences, British influence on education in India is extremely complex to analyse.

In the early years of the Raj, the British presented themselves to Hindus as liberators in order to maintain control. Though Hindus and Muslims had co-existed for around 1,000 years with relatively few instances of direct religious intolerance,[14] the British justified their domination in India from the beginning of the Raj until Independence in 1947, by making everyone (including themselves) believe they were keeping the peace between two volatile communities (Ramachandra 1999, 58).

The Banking Model of Education

As a teacher of adults myself, my first reading of Jane Vella's *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach* in 2012 left me stunned. Though she writes about adult education, her book helped me understand the educational context our adult students at the University of the Nations had experienced as children. Much of the teaching method in Indian schools revolves around the

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[13] Isaac Newton (1642-1727) with his strong belief in God as a mathematician serves as a primary example of this. See *The Clockwork Universe* by Edward Dolnick.

[14] Apart from the Mogul emperor Aurangzeb, Muslim rulers did not destroy many Hindu temples. Some Muslim rulers actually gave donations to Hindu temples and sects (Thapar 2014, 149).

exact opposite of what Vella shows to contribute to empowering education. Most of our UofN students had never been encouraged in their studies, let alone empowered. Vella's primary influence, Paulo Freire, explained in detail how the banking model of childhood education was used by colonizers to subdue nations and limit future critical thinking or leadership abilities. That said, it is important to understand that the banking model of education formed the most traditional model of education around the world and was also used by the British to educate their own children on the home soil of Britain. In this model, teachers are seen as the knowledgeable ones who paternalistically and generously deposit their knowledge into the students, who are viewed as mere receptors. Students are not asked to comprehend what they receive or use the information to understand reality, but rather accept it and simply store it away as disembodied fact with little relevance (Freire 2004, Loc. 982).

In modern India this banking model begins from preschool (age 2 or 3) when students begin taking oral and written examinations. Teachers generally hand out answer sheets, which the children need to memorize and copy onto test papers. To pass 12th standard examinations through the National Institute of Open Schooling, students are often required to complete projects comprised of copying pre-written answers given by teachers into separate notebooks. This dehumanizing process decreases the creative powers of students, increasing their tendency to believe anything deposited in their minds (Freire 2004, Loc. 1018). Now it is not colonizers imposing this form of education on Indian citizens, but their own government.

Unfortunately, the education system the British introduced often served to disconnect India from its rich, historical, multi-religious identity. The primary ways this happened were by making education highly competitive and basically irrelevant to the normal, daily life of Indians, but apropos to the purposes of the British. The banking model of education continues to thrive in the soil of India and still contributes to its national insecurity 74 years after independence. Sen argues, "The colonial experience of India not only had the effect of undermining the intellectual self-confidence of Indians, it has also been especially hard on the type of recognition that Indians may standardly have given to the country's scientific and critical traditions" (Sen 2006, 77).

A sampling of the educational policies and endeavours the British undertook provides enough background material to understand the origins of issues that still affect modern day India in a negative way.

Disconnection from Daily Life

If what one learns at school, whether in elementary school or higher education, has little connection with the reality experienced, the idea of education as irrelevant to daily life grows. Again, we hear Vella's words about perceptions influencing or evoking reality. People care little about completing their education when it does not appear to improve their home life. Even worse, this disconnection from reality simply forces students to adapt to and accept the oppressive reality as defined by the British, silencing them further as a colonized people (Freire 2004, Loc. 1018). When a student learns material that can immediately make a difference in their life, students naturally desire to learn more.[15] Under the British, Indians did not always have a choice in what content they studied. Additionally, the much-debated issue of language divided Indians by increasing the status of those who spoke the "higher" languages of Sanskrit or English, while devaluing education in (and use of) the mother tongue. The harm in this lies in the fact that a young student's mind holds the ability to grasp complex and abstract thoughts in their mother tongue that they cannot comprehend in foreign languages. Instead of school

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[15] Interestingly, traditional Indian education could also be judged by the same standards as it did not necessarily help with daily life, but only promoted the dominant religious views of the location.

systems enlarging students' minds, the ability to "think originally is systematically curtailed at an early age" (Devy 2017, 15). The pre-existing fatalistic mindset failed to provide the Indians with intellectual ammunition to reject the material presented as irrelevant to their lives. Rather, it was accepted for what it was and incorporated into their mental memory banks. *Chalta hai.* It works. Accept it.

Dehumanizing Disrespect

With great disregard, the humanist, James Mills, further undermined any respect for Indian culture and languages that Europeans might have had when he published his extensive and influential *History of British India* in 1806, with no evident care to respect his audience, without setting foot in India, and without reading any Indian texts in Sanskrit or Persian[16] (Sen 2006). Sen tells us that according to Mills, India had nothing worth noting in regard to culture or intellectual achievements; Mills' conclusion was that India was "totally primitive and rude" (Sen 2006, 147). Mills' viewpoint depicts the British Empire as a beneficial blessing to India and advocates for any remaining states of India to be brought under British control, by force if necessary. Unfortunately, because the sun never set on the British empire, this text influenced the mindset of the British throughout the British Raj and influenced the perception of Indian culture around the world.

In the face of the dazzling array of religious options India offered, the British took a utilitarian step and labelled as "Hindu" everyone but the Muslims. In defence of the British, the varying religious sects, that each worshiped their own gods and goddesses in unique ways in different languages, must have bewildered the best of historians. With their own British identity, view of history much defined by Enlightenment rationality, and limited expertise the British took it upon themselves to examine India's past, particularly the time period from about 1000 BC to 1300 AD, based on what they considered the important aspects of history: the chronology of previous rulers and what religions they represented (Thapar 2014, 9). This information was used to write the history of India, know the land they governed, and proved helpful in justifying their rule.

Thapar explains the way in which this Magisterial viewpoint used by Mills distorted the way Westerners and Indians still view Indian history. The faulty ideas were effectively exported across the Empire through his extremely influential book. Mills cut Indian history neatly into three periods based upon the religion of the ruling dynasties. Since any variety among the Indian religions had already been conveniently lumped together as Hindu, Mills simply labelled the first epoch the Hindu period, the Golden Age. A 1,000-year-long Muslim period followed and was considered the Dark Ages. The third period was the colonial period. Mills and many other colonial historians agreed that the distinct Hindu and Muslim communities experienced constant conflict. Continual aggravation between these two communities helped the British gain political control and eventually led to the tragic division of India into two separate countries (Thapar 2002, 21). By ignoring the religious complexity of India, this inaccurate history blurs Indian identity and currently gives powers to political systems and education boards wishing to make enemies of religious minorities.

As the British gained more control and the empire expanded, the British ignored the classical learning that lifted Indian culture and instead imported a Western system of education to suit their political purposes (Ghosh 2016, 371).The Charter Act of 1813, basically a renewal of the East India Company's dominance in India (Ghosh 2016, 18), included Clause 43 giving the Governor-General of India a modest allotment of money designated for the purpose of "revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India,"

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[16] The official language of India while under the Muslim and Mughal Empires, respectively.

as well as the introduction of the sciences. The importance of this clause is that it designated the task of education as a responsibility of the British Raj (Ghosh 2016, 18). Clause 43 marked the beginning of India's middle class, a class of English speakers able to get employment or engage in business with the British. Upon receiving a Western education, socio-religious reformers such as Rammohun Roy (1774-1833), understood the potential benefits for India if Indians could be free from dependence on debasing superstitions (Ghosh 2016, 26). The fact that throughout the years of British control many Indians wanted Western education and had a strong desire to learn English make it a challenge to declare the British Empire as completely nefarious for giving to the Indians what they wanted. It could be argued that India did not have a comprehensive enough indigenous education system to cause people (other than high caste or religious leaders) to remain loyal to their own traditions.

Language of Power

As early as 1790, Evangelical Christian leaders such as Charles Grant understood the need to address the social evils of Indian society through education and the introduction of Christian morals. Atrocious customs such as *sati* (widow burning) and infanticide rightly drew British attention. Even so, with great presumption, these men believed that they knew their audience and, in a paternalistic way, knew the best for them in other matters of life and culture. Indeed, the "white man's burden"[17] motivated them to "civilize" the poor in other countries through industrialization and education. While I, too, believe that Christian values can make any society a better place, unfortunately "Christian" morals (largely delivered through the English language) became mixed into the ambitions of the British Raj, which was actively supressing the people of India. Though Indians were not necessarily asking for Christianity to replace their traditional beliefs, throughout their colonial history, Indians expressed a pragmatic desire to learn English (Ghosh 2016, 14). With the British as their colonizers, the English language became inexorably connected to Christianity,[18] while also becoming the language of power.

Enter Thomas Babington Macaulay, the man who enlarged the power of the English language in India. Macaulay served on the Supreme Council of India from 1834-1838 and was influenced by Mill's notorious history. Full of his white man's burden, and devoid of respect for Indians, Macaulay emphatically discouraged any kind of Orientalist learning in classical languages of Persian or Sanskrit. His famous *Minute* delivered in 1835 established the futility in translating good literature into the "poor and rude" languages of India and that, "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (Macaulay 1835). According to Macaulay, the only education helpful to Indians would be a Western education delivered in English.

Yet the debate over the use of English language continued. Missionaries held out as long as they could in support of primary education in the many mother tongues of India, while Orientalist scholars promoted classical learning in Sanskrit and Persian of India to build appreciation for Indian culture (Ghosh 2016, 11). This Orientalist learning consciously or unconsciously served the upper castes of India by promoting the languages of the sacred Hindu scripture and promoting the courtly culture as defined by Brahmins.

By the mid-1800s the British leaders finally had to admit that the missionaries had a point, as the British realized the impossibility of educating the masses in the English language. They

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[17] A term popularized by Rudyard Kipling's poem "A White Man's Burden" written in 1899. This poem captures the paternalistic attitude of world powers at that time and encourages them to move forward and subjugate lands for the betterment of those lands.

[18] I cite my own experience for the veracity of this statement. One day right outside my home, a small neighborhood child informed me that he spoke the Christian language. When I asked him what that language was, he immediately said, "English."

then set forth to provide primary education with Western content in the vernacular of the regions (Ghosh 2016, 49). In 1846 statistics regarding education in the north-western provinces revealed that less than 5 percent of school age children were actually attending school (Ghosh 2016, 57). In light of this need, Lord Dalhousie, Governor General of India from 1848-1856, laid the foundation for the modern system of education and actually encouraged the use of vernacular languages by improving the quality of literature in these languages (Ghosh 2016, 66). Until this time, only brave missionaries had taken on the challenge of education of females, but in 1851, Lady Dalhousie further opened the doors for female education by taking charge of a small school for girls herself (Ghosh 2016, 71). Despite these seemingly positive contributions, in the Education Despatch of 1854, which declared education a "sacred" duty of the British, the objectives clearly stated the goal of raising public servants who would help to increase the material resources of Britain (Ghosh 2016, 77).

In the early 1900s, educational institutions delivered higher studies in English, which were "too literary in character," such that students read books but did not comprehend them (Ghosh 2016, 123). Rabindranath Tagore, the great philosopher-poet of Bengal, bitterly mourned the fact that so many wasted their childhood poring over boring English grammars, and that "our ordinary daily life has no use for the education we acquire (Maitra 2014, 35). The result was that they neglected their mother tongue, yet could not know enough English to read or comprehend quality, English literature. Students were so busy "memorising lessons breathlessly and blindly" that they had no time to read the few stories that did exist (Maitra 2014, 27). Tagore believed the education "we spend a lifetime acquiring makes us fit only for a clerkship or a trade" (Maitra 2014, 35). Not only did the introduction of English language separate people from each other, it caused divisions in the personal lives of educated people. In light of the fact that learning Western history and English language did not connect with their daily life, Tagore said, "Since our life continually militates against our education and learning, a sense of distrust and revulsion against this education and its entirety gradually fills our mind" (Maitra 2014, 35).

Despite the positive contributions by the British, the fact remains that they designed a form of education to control a colonized people, not a program to build analytical thinkers and community leaders. Though many Indians throughout this period of colonization willingly went to great lengths to learn English, the fact that English remains the language of the middle and higher classes still causes deep fissures in Indian society. Mangalwadi bluntly expresses that "English in the hands of the upper castes and regional-language education among Dalit-Bahujan castes made the latter's backwardness even more pronounced" (Mangalwadi 2013, xi). Unfortunately, the British inadvertently promoted the continuation of the caste system by creating an obvious separation between the educated and non-educated.

Liberating Influence of Missionaries

It appears politically incorrect to suggest that colonizers could do anything positive for a country. With the unfortunate backdrop of Mills' *History of British India* guiding international opinions on India, it seems unlikely that Christian values coming from Britain could counter the negative perceptions and leave a lasting impression that restored dignity to the natives of the subcontinent. However, in the area of education, the British made contributions that few Indians dismiss as completely negative. Most Indians acknowledge, with the power of hindsight, that India benefitted from the Western education system and the extensive promotion of the English language. As a Christian, neutrality is hard to maintain in assessing this situation due to the fact that underlying motives behind the educational policies of the British were ones many Christians would approve, i.e., bringing Christian morals and values into a society that seemed to lack them. Though the values that motivated Christian missionary initiatives were

not necessarily related to the interests of colonial powers, the fact that missionaries and colonizers shared the same social space could not help but create some confusion regarding the nature and purpose of Christianity, for the people on the receiving end of these endeavours. According to Glenn Martin, while the Empire might have provided the means and protection needed for the missionaries to remain in the land, "the missionaries often had to work in the shadow of the empire—always at risk of being painted with the same brush as that with which the other passengers stepping off the boat were painted" (Martin 2019, 152).

That said, British colonial leaders and missionaries, together with those of other western nations, contributed meaningfully to the welfare of Indians through their insistence on compulsory education for all, no matter what caste or gender (Ghosh 2016, 71). One wonders how long a total democratization of Indian education will take to achieve considering that India still struggles to provide education for all in rural and urban communities. Not only are educational opportunities for Dalits extremely limited, but gender discrepancy in India also remains an issue. According to the most recent census in 2011, the literacy rate for men and women is 82.14% and 65.46% respectively (Ghosh 2016, 296).

Christianity holds the written word in high esteem due to its dependence on the Bible as the Word of God. Jesuit priests lugged a printing press from Portugal to Goa (West India) as early as 1556 (Verghese 2014, 136). Later, upon arrival in India in 1793, William Carey immediately started studying the Bengali language, documenting its rules of grammar in order to translate the Bible into Bengali. By 1800, Carey and his team established the Serampore Press and printed the Bible or portions of it in the languages of Assamese (1822), Khasi (1824), Bengali (1824), and Manipuri (1827). Carey and his team of selfless and intelligent British and Indian co-workers boosted the use of the Devanagari script by creating a type font and using it as early as 1806. This script is currently used for 120 languages of India and is the basis for many languages of the nation. Language historian Babu K. Verghese states that the "19th century was the era of awakening of Indian languages, literature and literacy, primarily triggered by Bible translators and Christian missionaries" (Verghese 2014, 119). Indeed, the work of Bible translators, from the time of William Carey until today, has preserved Indian languages by developing written scripts as well as producing literature in the mother tongues of India (Verghese 2014, 133). Currently the whole Bible has been translated into 225 Indian languages, while 100 more translation projects are underway (Verghese 2014, 63). Christians in India are still as committed to the Word of God, translation, literacy and the empowerment that these activities bring to the people of India.

Ramachandra provokes thought when he challenges readers to view Christian missionaries in India as renouncers (Ramachandra 1999, 76). Casting off the comforts of life that came for British serving the Raj, many of the early missionaries to India also rejected the colonial worldview and values by choosing lives of great poverty and hardship. Though living during British Raj, and unfortunately connected to it, the missionaries created their own parallel society, which, like salt, helped preserve the humanity and dignity of the Indian people. Scholars consider the period of 1830-1857 the "age of the mission school," and Christian schools (Protestant and Catholic) taught more students than government schools run by the British (Ghosh 2016, 61).[19] Renouncing limitations placed on women, Christian missionaries were the first to train female doctors and nurses.[20] Alexander Duff provides us a perfect example of a missionary with a mindset much different from that of the British Raj. He arrived

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[19] By 1853, official government schools numbered 1,474 institutions educating 67,569 students (Ghosh 2016, 61).

[20] It is estimated that at the time of World War II, 90% of male and female nurses in India were Christians (Ramachandra 1999, 79).

in Calcutta in 1830 and set up an educational institution to train intellectually grounded Indian Christian leaders. Duff "desired to influence Hindu society as a whole by producing a core of thinking people who would have changed thought patterns and value systems" (Walls 1998, 187). As competitors against British colonial politicians for the hearts of the Indians (for different purposes), the missionaries diluted the negative effects of the Western education system implemented by the British in India.

The Lack of Educational Reform Upon Independence

Ironically, it could be said that the British created the independent nation of India. Before the British, petty rulers divided India into a number of small kingdoms continually fighting and defending their territories, speaking their own languages, and holding their own views of knowledge. As noted before, Hindus and Muslims influenced and exerted control over the land of India far longer than the British. Through introducing Western education and training their own collection of Western thinkers in brown skin, the British opened the minds of educated Indians to revolutionary ideas that had sprouted in countries like America and France. In the early half of the 1800s, due to the influence of Mills' history and Macaulayism, all forms of education above middle school were run in English. Higher education in the vernaculars could simply not be obtained. By the 1880s the British realized their mistake. The few government posts given by the British to educated Indians were snatched up quickly, leaving the remainder of these academic men (and a few women) with plenty of time to sit around unhappy with their plight, and understandably dissatisfied with English domination (Ghosh 2016, 107). In fact, every prominent Indian who fought for independence had received a high-quality education at a university in Europe or America.

India's freedom fighters and early leaders failed to transform the educational system, and this failure prohibited modern India from developing into a strong democratic country they hoped for. Though they had profound insights into education, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar, in particular, had different agendas from each other. As a result, they spent most of their energy fighting against untouchability (Gandhi) and against the injustice of the entire caste system (Ambedkar), not wanting these very negative influences to poison their newly independent country. These two men also had definite ideas of how education could be the vehicle to bring equality and justice to India. Sadly, the leaders of newly independent India did not give these policies enough attention. Ghosh laments that at the Wardha Conference of 1937, the educated Indians leading the freedom movement "soon found that the inherited colonial system of education was not only best suited to govern a vast country like India but to further their own dominance in the country" (Ghosh 2016, 372). As has happened throughout history, "yesterday's oppressed have become today's oppressors" (Freire 2004, Loc. 729).

The educational ideals of other freedom fighters such as Aurobindo, Vivekananda and Tagore, were typified by deeply Hindu, deeply religious ideas impractical in addressing the profound need for education for the masses of India. For example, Vivekananda (1863-1902), of the traditional Vedantic (Hindu) school of thought, viewed the whole purpose of education as revolving around knowing Brahman and knowing oneself (Pani and Pattnaik 2006, 84). Aurobindo (1872-1950), another nationalist-minded philosopher trained in the West, rightly understood it foolhardy to copy a British model of education and just be imitators, and so he became a type of *guru* assisting followers along the path of god-realization through yoga (Pani and Pattnaik 2006, 118). Tagore contributed to the education field by creating Santiniketan, a utopian school that allowed children to run freely through the woods, celebrated art and literature from around the world, and honoured Indian society at the same time (Devy 2017, 102). All of these reformers had altruistic ideals, yet none addressed the developmental needs of India: the tremendous lack of schools equipped to teach the basics and reach the poor.

Out of all the revolutionaries, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar stand out as men who understood the need for education for the masses of India in order for India to become a land of greatness. The following sections, survey their lives and work to identify educational practices which would serve to empower Indian students if revived in India today.

Mahatma Gandhi

Not all Indians admire Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). His assassination occurred because Hindu radicals disagreed with his universal toleration of religions, especially his toleration of Islam. Gandhi, by renouncing Brahminical Hinduism, stepped out of society into the role of a *sannyasin*. Instead of solely striving for esoteric ideas such as god-realization, Gandhi challenged society to ask questions about basic truth and universal morality (Pani and Pattnaik 2006, 161). His life reveals itself as a search for truth through experimentation, which led him to acceptance and practice of aspects of all religions.

Though some could not handle his toleration of other religions, others rejected his ideas because he accepted the caste system as legitimate. Though he vehemently fought to ban untouchability, he upheld the four basic *varnas* of Hinduism. In a letter responding to Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, Gandhi defended the practice of *varna* by calling it a social institution that "teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling." Gandhi went on to claim each vocation as absolutely equal in status (Gandhi 2017, 51-55).

Highly influenced by the Sermon on the Mount, Gandhi developed his famous doctrine of *ahimsa* ("non-violence") and sought to apply this principle in education. Under the British, corporeal punishment formed an integral part of the British educational system. Gandhi rejected physical punishment due to the fact that it dramatically affected the teacher-student relationship (Pani and Pattnaik 2006, 187). Gandhi encouraged a "motherly" love and heart connections between teachers and students (Pani and Pattnaik 2006, 186). Gandhi practiced what he preached by homeschooling his own children and teaching in experimental schools, such as the Phoenix Settlement, the Tolstoy Farm, and the Satyagraha Ashrama and the Sabarmati Ashram, where he promoted his ideas of equality and non-violence (Pani and Pattnaik 2006, 196).

Due to Gandhi's influence on the Wardha Scheme on Basic National Education (1937), laws were passed to provide seven years of free and compulsory education in the mother tongue across the nation. Keeping in mind the needs of the poor, Gandhi strongly advocated vocational training that would help students find employment (Pani and Pattnaik 2006, 199). Gandhi understood that students from poor backgrounds needed occupations, which would be useful in supporting their families as well as paying school tuition. In light of this, he proposed that the normally approved school subjects be taught alongside vocational occupations.

B.R. Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar, a less famous figure than the godlike Gandhi, used his provocative views to challenge India to face the realistic implications of its own worldview. With his roots as an "untouchable" from the *Mahar* caste, Ambedkar spent his life overcoming the limitations imposed on him by the caste system and went on to become the most educated of the freedom fighters. As part of the team that drafted the Indian Constitution in 1947, Ambedkar ensured that Article XVII clearly banned the practice of untouchability (Indian Const. art XII).

Ambedkar challenged Gandhi's vocationally-based education plans. As in ancient India, basic education tended to teach people how to carry out their life according to their caste limitation. Extensive reading and the practice of rational thinking liberated Ambedkar's mind. While studying economics in the United States at Columbia University in 1913, Ambedkar

"had the ability to move, think and act freely without the stigma of untouchability and with a status of equality. At last he found the proper atmosphere for mental growth and development" (Tomar 2016, 8). In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar boldly renounced Hinduism (particularly Brahminism) as the source of darkness and illiteracy in India. Embittered that as a low caste person, he was, according to Hindu religion, not allowed to teach, Ambedkar constantly challenged Hindus to think through the implications of the religious myths they held so close. When a Hindu organization called on him to advocate their program against untouchability, he pointed out that they would need to break their caste rule to listen to him. Eliminating untouchability did not equate to abolishing caste, the root of the problem. For India to actually be free, dependence on Hindu mythology must be broken. Ambedkar bluntly stated that, "I have, therefore, no hesitation in saying that such a religion must be destroyed and I say, there is nothing irreligious in working for the destruction of such a religion" (Ambedkar 1936). True to his beliefs, Ambedkar renounced Hinduism by converting to Buddhism with 500,000 of his followers shortly before his death in 1956.

In light of his own experiences, Ambedkar strongly promoted reading and writing as a path out of darkness for the masses of India. The Laws of Manu made these two activities the right of only a small percentage of India's people, and these same laws fated millions to illiteracy. Ambedkar called Hinduism a "gospel of darkness" (Tomar 2016, 62). Had he obeyed his caste rules, he would have remained illiterate and India would have been all the more obfuscated. Ambedkar understood clearly that for India to be a successful democracy, all people need at least a minimal education, which included reading and writing, in order to think rationally (Tomar 2016, 63). Though Gandhi did not prohibit reading and writing in any way, Ambedkar emphasized that to create a modern, humanistic society education should be delivered in a more secular way, not just as a means to promote religion. He had no qualms about using education in a nationalist sense and endorsed the motto: "Educate, Organize, Agitate" in his freedom fighting endeavors (Devy 2017, 104).

Conclusion: Non-Traditional Hope

When I read Jane Vella for the first time, I highlighted the words, "Ancient hierarchical relationships do not lend themselves to dialogue" and noted in the margin that this revealed the main problem in India (Vella 2002, 26). At that time, I actually had very little clue about the "problem in India," but Vella motivated me to begin investigating and learning how to bring dialogue education to our U of N campuses. This brief look at Indian philosophy and history reveals the fact that throughout their long history, most Indians have not had a voice. They have been given no opportunity to expand their mental horizons or voice their opinion. For the lower castes of India and for Indian women, forces outside their control (Brahmins, Muslims, British, men) have forced definitions of reality upon them with little regard for their well-being.

The force of thousands of years of history feels like a dam ready to burst. With no solid, universal moral code, parents as well as school systems have been disabled in their ability to disciple or empower the children of the land. Confusion resulting from receiving education in languages not fully understood means that students have not developed strong reasoning skills. Yet, evidence that Indians consider English the language of knowledge and power remains strongly rooted. Knowledge of English reveals the level of one's education as well as making one viable in the job market. The Western education system established by the British promoted competition, which further pitted Indians against each other. Government propaganda has always depended on drilling ideas into the minds of people, without leaving them much room to think or form opinions regarding the content. The examination system in India set up this exact scenario. According to Ghosh, the examinations "exercised the intelligence of the students too little, and taxed their memory too much" (Ghosh 2016, 123). Mechanical repetition

resulted and still persists today. In this education system rooted in fatalism, teachers do not expect students to master material, but usually aim to earn a score just high enough to pass. *Chalta hai.* This demeaning banking method of education has churned out millions of children who barely passed, rather than competent students who feel confident to tackle new challenges.

Many people prefer the established system. *Hindutva*, a communal ideology birthed during the fight for independence and currently a dominant political force, seeks to revive Hindu-ness and restore the Golden Age (Thapar 2014, 138). Accepting the lines fed by the British, Hindutva demonizes the Muslim rulers of the Mogul Empire, rather than the British themselves (Ramachandra 1999, 50). By re-writing history textbooks, they bend history to suit their own purposes. High on their political and educational agenda is the establishment of the idea of the Aryans as the original inhabitants of India with Hinduism (as defined by Hindutva) the original religion of the land, thus reinforcing their claim of India as a Hindu country.

But for education in India, the reality is that "*Nahi chalta hai.*" It does not work. In the face of *karma* and fatalism, slowly and surely Indian parents and students are renouncing the banking methods of education. For far too long Indians have been the passive recipients of education (propaganda). Freire insists that the only form of education which will assist post-colonial nations in their "struggle to regain their humanity" is a "pedagogy of the oppressed, a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed" (Freire 2004, Loc. 599). Mangalwadi expresses a similar thought: "If a community wants great education for its children then it has to organize itself to meet that need" (Mangalwadi 2013, 35). The size and scope of the educational crisis in India is too big for any one person to impact, yet each person has their own role to play. Courageous Indian thinkers, writers, and historians persistently present history accurately and promote India as a religiously diverse country integrated at the grassroots level.

As fellow travellers, we can learn together about our world, as neighbours, as friends, as co-workers. In the spirit of the Buddha, educators can acknowledge that the journey toward knowledge, or *jnana*, is a life-long one requiring intense intellect and utmost compassion. In the spirit of the courageous missionaries, we can offer educational opportunities across caste and gender barriers. In the spirit of Indian renouncers such as Mahatma Gandhi, courageous educators can step out of traditional school systems in order to build safe atmospheres for learning by applying principles of non-violence in classrooms across the country. Every culture has their "untouchables," who represent those in society hardest to help or understand. They also need mothers and fathers willing to accept them and help them believe that they can learn, they can change. In the spirit of Dr. Ambedkar, students and educators need to push back on superstitious or traditional caste-imposed limitations and use rational thinking to understand and even to challenge our modern world, for surely the modern world does not have all the answers. People may not be convinced to come out of a system so strongly embedded in Indian culture, but individuals can renounce it and allow others to observe. Ramachandra observes astutely that "It is those individuals and communities which have self-consciously stood 'outside' Hindu society (and its dominant social values) which have been the agents of renewal and vitality in Indian society. India, perhaps more than any other nation, owes a special debt to the people who have constituted its 'periphery'" (Ramachandra 1999, 84).

Though the educational situation in India has historically been grim, and the body of students needing education keeps expanding, emerging positive trends provide hope. Somini Sengupta, a journalist for the *New York Times*, believes that Indian young people are rejecting the idea of *karma,* because they are beginning to believe they can shape their own future (Sengupta 2016). Parents are also rising to the challenge. Within the extremely large middle-class, students and parents now connect to the outside world through the English language in

ways which their grandparents could not have imagined. They travel to other countries for work, and they experience different educational systems. Upon returning home, they feel unsatisfied with the traditional school systems of the past. While newspapers such as the *Pune Times* report student suicides and class toppers, countless students who graduated successfully remain unmentioned. As more people become aware of the detrimental effects of examination stress, parents and students are becoming allies against the system. Non-traditional educational movements, such as homeschooling, unschooling, and learning "farms" mushroom in urban centres around India. Meanwhile, on a small University of the Nations campus tucked in between the two massive cities of Mumbai and Pune, courageous learner-leaders participate in turning the educational tides, one student at a time.

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