The Indian Education System: Does the Legal and Political Representation of Education Challenge Western Pathways Towards Social Development?

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**Abstract:**

*India gained independent sovereignty from colonial rule in 1947 and has undergone significant transformations bringing political stability and economic prosperity. While modern day scholars have focused on India’s need to undergo social transformation and increase educational accessibility, this paper finds that since independence education has continuously been represented as the anchor and driver of state progression. Through a discourse analysis, I compare legal statutes and political speeches from three distinct periods of Indian independence in order to uncover the meanings and concepts used to represent Indian education. I identify three discourses of education as a pathway towards social development comprising of a discourse of higher education, a discourse of social equality, and a discourse that emphasises the importance of pre-school education. This paper finds that a careful exploration of discourses on education provide us with insights with important implications on India’s stance towards improving social development. This paper finds similarities between India’s modern day representation of education and the representation of education at the beginning of independence. This is important to recognise the correlation that exists between education and state development, when India’s investment into education over their seventy year independence has helped establish their journey towards becoming a global power.*

Key Words: education, social development, legal statutes, constitutional principles, shifts, nation building

**Introduction**

The last seventy years has seen India drastically develop within the international community after being under British colonial rule for eighty nine years. Through economic and political reforms, the country is now in place to become a future world power if it continues on its current developmental trajectory. Scholars of modern day India have often focused on internal political problems such as nepotism and corruption to explain what has hindered social progression, yet at the same time 85% of the country’s growth has been due to education.[[1]](#footnote-1) Additionally, Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has taken steps to reduce internal corruption through financially related projects to enable a greater distribution of social equality within the country, including new projects towards greater educational accessibility.[[2]](#footnote-2) These projects line with the trajectory path outlined by the foundational leaders of independent India. Global society should take note of the government’s adherence to the foundational principles from which independent India was established to understand how India has is on a pathway towards global hegemony by 2050 only 70 years after being subject to colonial rule.[[3]](#footnote-3)

India has undergone significant transformation since British colonialism in 1947, prioritising education as the catalyst towards social development. As the country has witnessed greater levels of economic and political growth, there has been an evolving portrayal of education in both political and legal texts from a fundamental right in the 1949 Constitution to a means towards full scale social development. But, as scholars we need to understand whether there has been a shift or continuity in India’s representation of Education to explain whether India’s successful trajectory path challenges the approaches Western countries have taken for social development. Consequently, this study asks: How has India’s representation of education as a fundamental civil liberty evolved through their seventy year independence?

So why is this research question important within the grand scheme of world politics? India, with the second largest population in the world only behind China,[[4]](#footnote-4) has established itself as the largest practicing state of democracy in international society,[[5]](#footnote-5) and with education being one of the most important aspects of democratic societies, the country’s investment into education gives an insight into the country’s political stability. As I explain India’s consistency of policies towards education that mould in line with the representation of the Constitution, I provide an alternative trajectory towards nation-building. Western scholars have often focused on external notices and reactions such as international influences, missing the fact that education as a path towards social development and key state priority has been represented by the country since gaining independence in 1947. In addition, Society should care about this research topic to understand whether there is set of rules in order to successfully develop as India’s investment into education has aided their democratic stability as opposed to surrounding neighbours such as Pakistan, whose different approaches towards social development has produced less successful results than India.

The methodology I propose to use in this research topic is interpretivist research, specifically discourse analysis. This form of analysis is defined as the practice of connecting texts to discourses, and locating discourses in a specific historical or social context “under study.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Through a discourse analysis, I engage in a close reading of legal statutes and political speeches from three separate time periods in India’s history to understand how education has been represented throughout India’s seventy year independence. To do this I identify three separate discourses for how education has been represented as a: discourse of a path to national development, a discourse of social equality, and a discourse of pre-school education. Specially, through legal texts, I identify similar constructions and meanings associated with education and analyse political speeches to see how education has become recognised as a greater government commitment and priority. This form of analysis helps provide a basic insight into how there has been no major shift into how education has been represented over the last seventy years but naturally evolved as the country has experienced great amounts of growth to provide these necessary educational accessibilities. I have also found that the way education has been represented was the only option for a country that inherited all the disarray of British colonial rule in 1947. Finally, I conclude my paper by explaining that what important takeaways are taken from continuity in how education has been represented over the last seventy years before I include a discussion of the limitations of my project and future avenues for research in this topic.

When discussing the social phenomena of education, it is important to acknowledge the underlying assumptions of political institutions that support how well education is prioritised and distributed within the country itself. In the following literature review, I provide a summary of scholarly literature, which provides underlying explanations for shifts in governmental structures and practices in modern day society. Furthermore, I identify schools of thought that explain why some countries are able to successfully implement policy agendas that seek to tackle the issue of education and why some countries hold internal obstacles within the state foundation that make it difficult to implement changing government attitudes towards such social phenomena’s such as education. Such shifts in government attitudes can be separated into two schools of thought, which comprise of; Democracy and International Influences.

**Literature Review**

It is generally assumed that developing countries must modify political policies in order to socially develop and grow. In the literature I have consulted, I identify two schools of thought to explain why representations of social policy change over time and both recognise that change is a necessity in state building. The first school of thought encompasses the idea democratic institutions provide the necessary stability to incorporate new ideologies on educational polices and maintain educational norms prioritised by the state. The second school of thought to explain modification to political policies is explained through the influence of international institutions.

Scholars of democracy emphasise that democratic institutions provide the framework for political stability and greater government commitment to social policies such as education. Nigeria’s democratic transformation created institutions establishing “laws, accountability and transparency,” which protect civil rights, and in India these institutions, (a constitution and rule of law) have provided a freedom to access education. [[7]](#footnote-7) Moreover, democratic institutions are advanced by scholars to serve the basis for communication between individuals and “elites with political power,” which allows education policies to evolve over time to meet the needs of civilians.[[8]](#footnote-8) Democracy has enabled greater political activism among the Indian public in regard to social policies such as educational accessibility throughout seventy years of independence, which explains the government’s commitment to view education as a fundamental right since 1949.

Meanwhile, Becker advances non-democratic states have high levels of nepotism, corruption, and lack direct communication with citizens.[[9]](#footnote-9) India’s commitment to democracy might explain the continuing representation of education as a fundamental right throughout the three time periods I subsequently analyse, and simultaneously explain why representations of greater educational accessibility are less likely in non-democratic states. However, in my research, I show that the essence of democracy for India has centred on education as opposed to western concepts of equality.

Additionally, some scholars propose democracy creates political, socio-economic, and cultural transitions that provide scope for evolving representations of governmental policies such as education.[[10]](#footnote-10) Furthermore, Kepur and Mehta advance governmental policies such as education are often driven by political interests, and the investment into Indian education derives from the democratic ideology the country has had since independence.[[11]](#footnote-11) However, some scholars have argued that internal democratic transitions have alternatively harmed state foreign policies, as state decisions become exposed to “horizontal” and international pressures.[[12]](#footnote-12) In addition, Caroline Beer has advanced it is harder for democracies as opposed to authoritarian regimes to produce policies that create greater progressive social polices such as gender equality and educational accessibility.[[13]](#footnote-13) Nonetheless, as I argue later in this paper, India has politically and constitutionally invested in education policies that have brought greater accessibility to all Indian civilians and continues to do so in 2017.

Some scholars have advanced that high rates of gender inequality can be explained by a state’s desire to foster economic growth and development, and developing countries like India have neglected social equality in order to economically grow. Specifically, Tavits argues political parties modify their party platform in order to generate greater electoral support, and would argue that politicians such as Indira Gandhi emphasised greater female education rights for her own political gain.[[14]](#footnote-14) In the contemporary era, further evidence of Tavits’ argument can be seen through the political platform of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), whohave taken a great stance on providing greater female empowerment and education.[[15]](#footnote-15) However, in this paper I show that the way in which the constitution was constructed represented education as a right for all citizens and there has no neglecting of social equality but emphasis at different points in the history of the country.

Other explanations have proposed changing government priorities reflect changing political agendas. Lee and Ho advance China’s political transition to include “education for democracy,” opened up the Chinese economy to the global market and deterred communist economic policies.[[16]](#footnote-16) Additionally, Vora and Palshikar argue India’s change in political leadership, (that currently encompass a more conservative political ideology) explains the increased focus on tackling educational inequality under the incumbent BJP, and explains recent attempts to implement mandatory educational attendance at the primary stages.[[17]](#footnote-17) The authors specifically argue the government’s policies towards education focuses more on distributive accessibility as opposed to the minimal based “quality,” found under the previously ruling Indian National congress political party.[[18]](#footnote-18) Thus, the shift in political ideology through shifting political powers is used by scholars to explain how political representations of education change over time. Nevertheless, I argue that India’s commitment to fundamental education has been present since 1949 and the evolving nature of representations comes from a commitment to democracy.

Some scholars have researched the role corruption has had on how education is represented. These scholars advance arguments that corruption hinders state civic engagement and culminates in a “waste of financial resources.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Corruption within the education sector is therefore a hindrance to the government, and instead scholars have argued governments are vested in increasing universal educational accessibility in the hope of fostering a more productive national workforce.[[20]](#footnote-20) The idea of a more productive workforce fits with the educational vision India’s foundational leaders believed education could bring. Moreover, India’s representation of education has evolved to encompass greater representations of social equality, in the hopes of maintaining a successful destiny of the youth of society.[[21]](#footnote-21) This might explain why Indian government’s representation of education through new polices can be accounted by India’s simultaneous governmental policies to reduce corruption at not only the political but societal level.

Corruption, defined by Transparency international as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain,” may also divert from foundational principles found in the Constitution.[[22]](#footnote-22) Corruption denies what education is taught into the system and under Modi’s government policies taken to reduce corruption have been able to bring about implementations of changes in education systems. Thus, the removal of corruption allows state policies towards education to shift over time and within new governmental structures. Some scholars have argued that political corruption can prevent shifts in power dynamics, specifically seeing more women in public office, and therefore India’s recent political moves to reduce corruption has been advanced by some as signs of female empowerment.[[23]](#footnote-23) However, other scholars advance corruption also engenders “a substantial decrease in the resources allocated to education,”[[24]](#footnote-24) and leads to a lower standard of quality of public services, which demonstrates how corruption hinders shifts in improving social infrastructure.[[25]](#footnote-25)

International Influences

Changes in how education is represented can also be explained by international influences. The “internationalization of higher education”[[26]](#footnote-26) has become a global norm embedded through the interests of international institutions such as UNESCO, who emphasise “the theme of inclusive education” improves global development.[[27]](#footnote-27) Additionally, theorists argue globalisation improves social welfare through accessible education, and through statistical testing have proved correlations between higher globalisation and reduced absolute poverty.[[28]](#footnote-28) Hence, western scholars such as Razeen Sally have argued India’s greater global integration to explain what has influenced India’s investment into different discourses on education, but I argue these discourses were always present in the 1949 Constitution and have evolved to become more explicit as the country continues to socially develop.

Other scholars argue international agencies have influenced shifting representations of gender equality and accessibility to education. As women’s empowerment has become “identified” as an essential goal for international agencies, countries have used the representation of women as “political cleaners” to bring more women into public office.[[29]](#footnote-29) It is also argued that women have become “instruments” in “broader development” goals as women have taken greater roles within domestic and international politics[[30]](#footnote-30) Moreover, Nye argues that feminism has catalysed a movement for greater gender and social progress by gaining international strength as a political approach in the 1990s by focusing on transnational structures.[[31]](#footnote-31) Additionally, Sanjukta Chaudhuri advances that the status of women has shifted in the 21st century due to the recognition of their value towards state development presented by United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) Gender related Development Index.[[32]](#footnote-32) Hence, international institutions have been argued to influence India’s representational shift in the 1980s to include new legal statutes, (1986 New Education Policy). However, in my research I show that women’s equality to access equal forms of education was always envisioned by India’s foundational leadership, but policies have evolved to address gender equality more specific over the last seventy years.

Other scholars advance under democratic institutions, international and domestic discourses on social policies become compatible.[[33]](#footnote-33) For example, Rwanda’s focus on gender equality in policy and legislation stemmed from the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) government’s commitment to gender equality and “from the proliferation and influence of women’s organisations in the country” after the United Nations established gender equality as a global development goal.[[34]](#footnote-34) This shows how global discourses on education might explain how discourses on education in India have evolved to represent education as a means solving social and gender inequality.

However, other scholars have argued international norms reduce the domestic government’s role to make decisions on social development. Barnett writes how Zambia and Bolivia were coerced into implementing policies due to the material of resources at the hands of institutions such as the World Bank.[[35]](#footnote-35) Consequently, there is a debate as to whether international representations of education aid or hinder state approaches to tackle education, with some scholars believing international decisions influence “local discourses” in regard to social policies,[[36]](#footnote-36) and provide impractical solutions to smaller and local communities. [[37]](#footnote-37) Meyer argues “dominant actors directly shape world culture,” and western democracy influences how other global states shape their political structure.[[38]](#footnote-38) Additionally, Oren argues government shifts can occur due to the influence of foreign affairs.[[39]](#footnote-39) This explains how government attitudes towards domestic policies can shift due to “changing international circumstances,” [[40]](#footnote-40) that seek an inclusive and accessible quality of education.[[41]](#footnote-41) However, although recognising the influence international norms may have on domestic policies, I argue these norms had no effect on India’s educational policies as these modifications evolved from the country’s 1949 Constitution.

**Methodology**

In my research I use an interpretivist approach to explore the different representations of education throughout the country independent’s history. In discourse analysis, it is important to draw on “extant knowledge,” establishing “cultural competence,” which Neumann argues is a “prerequisite.”[[42]](#footnote-42) I draw on extensive scholarly literature collected throughout my two years of undergraduate study, which covers the foundational culture of Indian society since 1947, and I believe like Neumann acknowledged, when researching “Soviet Discourse,” I have an understanding of India’s “social” environment.[[43]](#footnote-43) My cultural competence allows me to identify different hidden nuances and meanings constructed in the primary sources, which I use to locate different discourses on education, and essential to producing “meanings and effects in the real world.”[[44]](#footnote-44) These meanings and effects are part of the bigger puzzle in identifying whether there have been major shifts or continuity in India’s representation of education over the last seventy years. Additionally, I decided to use a discourse analysis, because this form of research allowed myself to see how the different representations of education found in India’s history build upon one another and add something new to India’s pathway towards social development.

In my research, I separate my discussion into two analyses throughout three different time periods. The first analysis consists of a legal discourse, where education is continually represented and defined as a fundamental civil liberty through three separate legal statutes. However, within these statutes comprise two legal discourses on India’s evolving representation of education. To begin, I analyse the Indian Constitution, where education is listed under the “Right to freedom” as a set up for my argument that there educational importance has remained a continual representation through India’s seventy year independence.[[45]](#footnote-45) The first discourse I identify is social equality found in the National Policy on Education 1986, where the text calls for greater adherence to gender equality towards education.[[46]](#footnote-46) The second legal discourse I identify is the importance of education at the pre-school, where evidence of the discourse can be found in the 2016 New Education Policy.[[47]](#footnote-47) These two texts provide a concrete manifestation into the second part of my analysis, comprising of the deeper motives to construct new representations of education are analysed through political speeches. For the discourse on social equality, I analyse speeches by Indira Gandhi on the difficulties of education for Indian Women,[[48]](#footnote-48) to help inform how policies towards promoting female education were implemented two years after her death.[[49]](#footnote-49) For the discourse on pre-school education I analyse speeches by contemporary Indian political actors, such as Narenda Modi that emphasize a need for universal pre-school education,[[50]](#footnote-50) and by Union Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, who calls for necessary state commitment to early childhood education promotion.[[51]](#footnote-51) Through these different discourses I define and establish what was the “truth” surrounding the motives into revamping policies surrounding education.[[52]](#footnote-52) Additionally, I show how changes in the language reflect subtle changes in policies and attitudes towards education, and unlike scholarly suggests that advances India has recently taken an approach to tackle educational inequality, I show the continuity of education as a national priority.

The Indian government and Indian political actors are the producers of the discourses that I have identified. The discourses that I analyse are found in legal statutes as a consequence of the desires of political actors whose speeches I simultaneously analyse. Through both legal statutes and political speeches, I show education’s representation as a fundamental right found in the constitution being built on through the meanings in the respective texts.[[53]](#footnote-53) I believe discourse analysis is the best approach to do this because discourses often “transform existing knowledge” to produce new knowledge and representations of education in this instance.[[54]](#footnote-54) However, I recognize that my analysis holds an inherent personal bias to identify certain language and constructions of the text in a manner that may differ from the intentions of the political actors at the time.[[55]](#footnote-55)

I anticipate a power hierarchy within the different ministries of the Indian government regarding the different representations of education in modern day primary sources. Specifically, I have found speeches in the last few days of evidence that education is now being represented as an environment for free speech in the midst of recent student protests at University campuses, which demonstrates contrasting opinions on the meaning of education within the state.[[56]](#footnote-56) Additionally, there is a growing emphasis as to what should be taught within the Indian education system to reflect ideologies of Hindu nationalism.[[57]](#footnote-57) Therefore, other scholars might identify words found in modern day political speeches that have deeper hidden connotations of nationalism, and use such meanings as example of a shift in educational discourses.[[58]](#footnote-58) An example of the conflict between these discourses and my identified discourses has been the failure of the new education policy to pass within the Indian government, yet there has been an upsurge of religious nationalism.[[59]](#footnote-59) Thus, a discourse of religious nationalism as a representation of education challenges the discourses on education as a driver to state development.

To understand the meaning-making that governmental discourses in education in India have, I have considered the growth of international institutions. Since the establishment of international institutions that focus on education, like UNESCO, there has been a shift in global policy to tackle educational inequality on the path to increasing global social development.[[60]](#footnote-60) Furthermore, I pursue intertextuality through political speeches, such as the Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi to explore representations other than the legal representation of education in the modern day era.[[61]](#footnote-61)

As someone of Indian ancestry, I am drawn towards texts that highlight or praise India’s approach to education policies. As Yanow and Schwartz-Shea advance, my identity shapes and generates the evidence for this discourse analysis, which is likely to benefit my project as I use my Indian heritage to challenge the work by western scholars on India’s education system.[[62]](#footnote-62) Moreover, my research addresses critical reflexivity as I recognize Indian attitudes to education have potentially changed due to “socio-political” contexts,[[63]](#footnote-63) such as individuals calling for a greater accessibility of education.[[64]](#footnote-64)

I would single out the consistency of the evidence I obtain from different sources is the most important feature of trustworthiness in my research. I consistently use legal statues in my first analysis and political speeches in my second analysis as opposed to weaving in different forms of texts to suit the direction of my argument. This consistency constructs maps that enable “exposure and intertextuality,”[[65]](#footnote-65) which build on the idea of fundamental education derived from legal and political discourses. Furthermore, as Yanow and Schwartz- Shea argue, I have enhanced the trustworthiness of my research topic by taking a bottom-up approach, and allowing myself to be exposed to new representations of education.[[66]](#footnote-66) Initially, I viewed the Indian education system to have shifted over time as the country has invested more into democratic practices, but after a deeper analysis into the construction and wording of the legal statutes I analyse, I recognize that the representation of education has continued throughout Indian history but embedded more specific visions through the motives of political state actors so consequently education is now held by the state as a key factor in increasing pathways towards full scale social development.

**Analysis**

In this section I engage in a close reading of the legal statutes and political speeches throughout India’s independence to identify the guiding concepts representing Indian education. I begin with India’s 1949 Constitution and Nehru’s accompanying speech to at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, (MIT), to establish a baseline understanding of whether there has been a shift or continuity in India’s representation of education. Using foundational concepts in the Constitution and , I proceed onto two legal statutes in 1986 and 2016, where two separate discourses on education are found, but build upon one another. Simultaneously, I analyse the same discourses in political speeches from these two time periods to further refine my understanding of India’s representation of education since gaining independence. My findings can be summarized in figure 1.

 Figure 1.

The Constitution

Engraved in the 1949 Indian Constitution, education is listed as a fundamental right to Indian citizens.[[67]](#footnote-67) Education is found in “Part III” of the Constitution, categorised as a “Right to Freedom,” amongst other basic human needs such as free speech and personal liberty.[[68]](#footnote-68) In Article 30 of this bill, education is represented as a pre-requisite for social equality, conferring on all minorities the right to access educational institutions of his or her choice.[[69]](#footnote-69) Article 30 of the Constitution forms the building block for how the country should regard education in the future, and provides an insight into the educational direction the country must take. Evidence of this educational direction is found when the Constitution highlights the importance of science and technological institutions as a place of “national importance,” constructing a pathway for how Indian education should be represented in the future.[[70]](#footnote-70) Hence, I found the Indian Constitution constructed a foundational basis representation of education that has been reproduced throughout the country’s seventy year independence.

1st Discourse - Education as a pathway for national growth

Nehru’s 1949 speech to MIT represents education as the driver for Indian growth and covers the importance of technology for India’s educational future.[[71]](#footnote-71) India’s educational representation is driven by the political interests of India’s first Prime Minister, intertwining with the literature of Kepur and Mehta, who advance education in developing countries to be driven by political interests.[[72]](#footnote-72) This concept of innovation builds upon the importance of technological institutions in the 1949 Constitution, as Nehru advances India’s history to be considered from a “technological viewpoint,” and education as the basis for a “first class nation.”[[73]](#footnote-73) Hence, this speech represents the importance of democracy’s role in prioritising education to aid India’s rise towards global hegemony.[[74]](#footnote-74) The speech also emphasises the importance of hard science as Nehru ironically claims “India has too many lawyers” and science is what students should seek in order to contribute towards the growth of the country. Therefore, India’s technological success over the last seventy years shaped the trajectory of educational polices, and India’s continuity of this set pathway has led to 85% of the country’s growth being accounted for by education.[[75]](#footnote-75)

2nd Discourse- Social development.

The 1986 National Policy on Education advances education’s role to promote individual freedom and develop social capacity. My findings begin with the chronological construction of this document, where “Part IV” of the legal statute is titled “Education for Equality.”[[76]](#footnote-76) Within “Education for Equality,” education is simultaneously presented as playing the “agent [for] basic change in the status of women,” and playing an interventionist role “in the empowerment of women,” which I interpret as a representation of female and more generally social equality.[[77]](#footnote-77) This ties into the literature that discusses how political representations of education shift due to the recognition of gender imbalances.[[78]](#footnote-78) Specifically, Goetz advances women have become “instruments” towards broader development goals such as social equality, and in the case of the Indian government, education has been represented as the catalyst for social development policies.[[79]](#footnote-79) However, I believe these findings of female empowerment build upon the constitutional representation of education as a fundamental right to a more specific area of society. Thus, there is an evolving representation from a generalized fundamental representation of education in the Constitution to a representation of education for societies that need greater access such as women in the case of this 1986 legal statute.

The 1986 National Policy on Education shows a shift in government priorities to provide not only a greater access to education, but higher education too.[[80]](#footnote-80) Evidently, this legal statute calls for “equal opportunity” not only in terms of access but in “conditions of success.”[[81]](#footnote-81) Additionally, education is represented as a mechanism to provide “peace and understanding” on a global level,[[82]](#footnote-82) aligning with scholarly literature advancing international institutions as an explanation for shifts in India’s representation of education since 1949.[[83]](#footnote-83) While there is evidence for shifting government priorities, these culminate from the embedding and assimilation of new approaches to build on the Constitution’s categorisation of education as fundamental right.[[84]](#footnote-84) I believe the evolving nature of India’s educational representation shows the country has experienced success and wishes to build from this success, and this dispels the “western notion” that change is a sign of progression, presenting an alternative path towards successful nation-building.[[85]](#footnote-85)

I now analyse two speeches from Indira Gandhi that builds on India’s educational role in social change. To begin Gandhi calls for “a thorough overhauling” to the education system to address existing social inequality.[[86]](#footnote-86) Some scholars would interpret this “overhauling” as evidence of shifting political agendas due to changes in political leadership.[[87]](#footnote-87) However, I interpret this “overhauling” necessary from Gandhi’s perspective so India’s representation as a Constitutional “right to freedom” is maintained as Indian women at this time became socially oppressed to roles in society.[[88]](#footnote-88) Additionally, Gandhi defines education as an “interpreted path” towards economic development and growth, which shows continuity from Nehru’s speech of education and the Kerala education bill.[[89]](#footnote-89) Additionally, the social equality discourse extends beyond the realms of domestic polices as Gandhi calls for the role of educated women to bring about a different development perception to how India is viewed on the global stage.[[90]](#footnote-90) This ties into the literature that international factors such as organisations and norms can influence changing social policies.[[91]](#footnote-91)

A discourse on the importance of education at the pre-school level.

In the contemporary era, education polices have defined pre-school education level as the main objective of education policies as part of the country’s broader vision provide “equal opportunity to all children” in India.[[92]](#footnote-92) Similar to the 1986 National Policy on Education, I found the organization of this statute indicative of the government’s priorities in terms of education, where Pre-school education is the first item of policy agenda.[[93]](#footnote-93) This is evidence of the evolving representation of education as a Constitutional “right to freedom” being extended to the pre-school level.[[94]](#footnote-94) The main objective of the New Education Policy is “expanding early childhood education services,” showing a change in how education is now represented to be the key factor in the development of young children.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Moreover, education is presented in Section 4.1 to aid the development of the physical and mental health of children.[[96]](#footnote-96) Specifically, the statute states it is “universally accepted” that early childhood is the most important stage for learning.[[97]](#footnote-97) Thus, this presentation of education contrasts with the explicit intentions for education as a means of growth found in previous discourses but still builds upon the overarching aim for education to catalyse social development in India. Thus, this contrast have been a part of the larger evolving representation taken by India over the last seventy years to ensure education as a right to freedom is extended to all of society. This progressive evolution of policy that is continuous with the aims and goals set out originally in the Constitution is evidence of the stability the founding leaders of the country envisioned after inheriting the disarray associated with colonial rule. Consistency in how education has been represented is a small picture of India’s commitment to democratic principles and I believe this consistency explains why India have successfully developed in contrast to neighbouring countries, whom have failed to develop at similar rates as India.

 I have found that the Constitution’s categorisation of education as a fundamental right has evolved to take on different forms of representation at different times in India’s history. However, there is no evidence of a major shift from 1958 or 1986. The 2016 New Education Policy recognises the achievement and importance of science and technology sector, and calls for an acceleration in the use of science to improve the quality of Indian education.[[98]](#footnote-98) This continuity of technology is not surprising, when other scholars have credited the country’s growth performance due to investments in science and technology.[[99]](#footnote-99) In addition, the 2016 New Education Policy recognises success in bringing effective social changes addressed in the 1986 legal statute,[[100]](#footnote-100) and represents education as an effective solution to ensure “educational opportunities are available to all segments” of Indian society.[[101]](#footnote-101) Hence, there is no clear shift in how education has been represented through legal statutes, but a shift in the prioritisations of government to continue the country’s investment in education as driver for further social development. Accrediting the success of technology in Indian society and calling for the maintenance of such success shows the success India has had in using technology as a means towards social development.

It is interesting that the legal statues preceding the 1949 Constitution have alluded to promotions of the areas of education they represent respectively. For example, Figure 2 shows, in the 1958 Kerala Education Bill, a legal statute associated with the first discourse of higher education, education is represented to promote dignity and unity,”[[102]](#footnote-102) the 1986 National Policy on

Figure 2.

Education “promotes women’s participation”[[103]](#footnote-103) in society through education, and the 2016 New Education Policy seeks to “promote” human potential through accessible education as early as pre-school.[[104]](#footnote-104) There is no mention in these texts of an ‘introduction’ of education changes in state directions, which strengthens my argument of continuity in India’s representation of education from 1947-2017. I believe the continuity found in the representation of Indian education is significant in explaining the political stability of the country, and by looking into one aspect of Indian policy I can recognise importance stability will have towards India’s growth as a global power.

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| Source | Discourse | Evidence for What Education Promotes  |
| 1958 Kerala Education Bill  | Education as a means to growth | “Promote among them all FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nation”[[105]](#footnote-105) |
| 1986 National Policy on Education | Social Development | “Promote Women’s Participation”[[106]](#footnote-106) |
| 2016 New Education Policy | Pre-School  | “promote human potential”[[107]](#footnote-107) |

Significantly, politicians now prioritise the importance of pre-school education in the contemporary era. I found Union Minister, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi’s speech on modern day Indian education to promote education as a prerequisite for “early childhood care,” and represent education as a driver for youth development.[[108]](#footnote-108) I also found educational provisions for children under the age of six defined as an example of the government’s “commitment” towards individual freedom in this speech, which implies greater practicality in the role the government has in providing fundamental education compared to 1958.[[109]](#footnote-109) Further evidence of the importance of pre-school education in the contemporary era is witnessed in Education Minister, Manish Sisodia’s speech, where pre-school education “is necessary to build a strong foundation for overall human development,” which is evidence of contemporary representations of education building upon Nehru’s vision for education to be the path towards state development.[[110]](#footnote-110) Hence, the 1949 Constitution’s categorisation of education as a fundamental right has evolved to become a necessary provision of the Indian government, and shows how this constitutional adherence and stability to education has helped the country’s successful path to social development. This representational continuity can be explained by India’s political stability as an asset for institutional building such as fair elections and ties into scholarly literature that investment into democracy explains India’s educational success.[[111]](#footnote-111) Finally, this compatibility of continuity and democracy is unique to the Indian political system, and may provide a model to other newly independent countries such as the Middle East who have failed to see the levels of development India has experienced.

**Reflection and Conclusion**

To obtain a true understanding of the evolving nature of the Indian education system, I believe further research is necessary. Although my ancestors and ethnicity is Indian, I was raised in a Western society and believe greater insight into the representation of education through research could be provided conducted by an individual raised educated in the Indian system. Future work might include interviews with Indian students studying in the United States to gain an understanding for why Indians have chosen Western education over Indian education.[[112]](#footnote-112) I believe this remains a lingering question since India has produced countless numbers of successful doctors and engineers who have been driven to expand their skills in the global north. As Indira Gandhi states in the speech I analysed, many Indian youths in the 1970-1980s sought to emigrate for work opportunities.[[113]](#footnote-113) Hence, it would be interesting to see what has changed in the mind-set of those Indians who study in the United States today compared to those in the 1980s.

However, certain limitations remain in this research study. I explored the representation of Indian education at the national level, and in a country with over one billion people this provides scope for future and more specific regional research. On the other hand, there remains room for a deeper exploration into how different countries representations of educations through speeches, legal statutes, and financial allocations has helped countries socially development over the country’s history. I believe through a comparison of different approaches, one can then begin to understand which areas of education should be prioritised on the greater path towards social development.

In addition, there are alternative interpretations to the texts that I have analysed. Throughout the course of my analysis, I demonstrate continuity in how education has been represented, but critics may allude to the rise of Hindu nationalist parties, (particularly the BJP), who have sought reforms in the education system. These scholars would seek to provide examples of shifts in the representation of education from a “right to freedom” to religious nationalism.[[114]](#footnote-114) However, I would meet their challenge with contemporary evidence of the current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, a former Hindu nationalist, who has refrained from measures to reform the education system.[[115]](#footnote-115) Instead, Modi has sought to evolve the representations of the India’s education to bring greater educational equality to children in rural areas of the country.[[116]](#footnote-116)

**Conclusion**

This study has explored the representation of Indian education throughout the country’s seventy year independence and found continuity in promoting education as the driver for social development. I have attempted to understand how a discourse on education as a fundamental right and means to growth has continually been represented through political speeches and legal statutes of three different stages of the country’s history. The successful rates of country the country has experienced explains why shifts in the representation of education has not been necessary. I have argued this continuity disposes the western scholarly notion that there has been a major shift in the representation of education since 1947 India. I believe that my findings have left room for future research into why major shifts have been fantasized by western scholars as a necessary stage in the pathway to state development.

 So what does this study add to global politics? With India’s middle class to be the only country in the world to have experienced growth in the middle class sector of society, this is indicative of the necessary trajectory path countries must plan when seeking to socially develop over a period of time. In addition, while there remains to be a focus on the inequality that remains in India specifically in regard to social accessibility, we must remember that every society that has successfully developed has had high levels of inequality including the United States. So perhaps inequality is an inevitable by-product of pathways towards social development, but due to the strong adherence to the country’s constitution since 1949, there remains hope of resolving social inequality in India’s future.

The continuity of India’s educational representation raises an array of questions surrounding social development. I believe continuity found in the country’s representation is indicative of the political stability found in the country’s history. Additionally, rather than western approaches to focus on democratic ideologies as a means of development through measures of equality, India chose to focus on a specific policy found under conventional democracies (this being education), which has brought sustained economic success political stability. I found that the founding leaders of the country such as Jawaharlal Nehru chose this trajectory path to focus on education, which consequently led to India being one of the few countries in the world to see the middle class grown from 1947 to 2017. I believe shifting educational representations that may be observed in other countries were not even an option to the Indian state in a country that had to inherit all the disarray associated with colonial rule. Instead India’s vision of education has been present since independence and this commitment to foundational visions is something that has made the country’s path stand out from other developing countries. Some scholars may argue that major shifts in the future could help the country reduce inequality, but with 85% of the country’s growth being attributed to education, I believe the country’s approach to education has aided their journey towards becoming a global hegemonic power.[[117]](#footnote-117)

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