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# UNIT 1 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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On completing this unit, you should be able to:

- form a compendious account of the evolution of distance education and describe with examples how social factors influence educational systems;
- discuss the frequent changes in Indian society that brought about different educational changes in the past few thousands of years; and
- appreciate the relevance and efficacy of distance education, particularly in developing countries, and delineate how the changing attitudes towards education make distance education a socio-political imperative.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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If an educational system has to be relevant to the society in which it operates, it needs to effectively respond to the demands of that society. Put differently, socio-political changes which colour and shape social needs greatly influence educational systems. It is otherwise called paradigm shift. Paradigm shift is an inevitable process in all walks of life. Education is not exception. We have seen transformation from gurukula system of education to face-to-face education, from face-to-face education to distance education. Similarly, from distance education to online education and from online education to blended form of education. All these changes are considered as paradigm shift in education. As a result, new systems emerge. Obviously, this is a continuous and inevitable process in the changing context.

In this unit, we have presented the social factors that led to the emergence of distance education. The discussion offered here primarily relates to the inherent inadequacy of the conventional educational system to accommodate the ever-widening frontiers of knowledge and the tremendous increase in the number of aspirants for higher education. To explain the influence of socio-political changes on education, we have taken up the Indian scenario as a case study. Here, we have touched upon how India, which having gone through diverse phases of educational systems for various historical compulsions, has begun to accept the distance mode as a viable and complementary system of education. This unit also presents a brief account of what distance education is. In block 2 of this course we have already discussed the concept and philosophy of distance education in detail.

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## 1.2 SOCIAL HISTORY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

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In this section, we shall look into the socio-historical scenario that warranted distance education in some countries. We have given you mainly information about developing countries because of its immediate relevance to our contexts.

### Indonesia

Let us begin our discussion with Indonesia. The problem of access to schools and colleges was the decisive factor in leading Indonesia to distance education. In the early 1940s the number of schools and colleges in Indonesia was very insignificant. Most of them were managed by the Dutch, and not many natives could afford to go to school. Further, the school system was built according to the social status imposed by the colonial masters: schools for the native population; schools for overseas Asian immigrants, and schools for the Dutch and other Europeans. After independence, however, the demand for education became intense. The expansion of secondary and tertiary education did pose the problem of a shortage of teachers, despite the fact that various crash programmes were developed for training and also for increasing, at a faster rate, the number of teachers.

For obvious reasons, primary and secondary schools grew very fast. But tertiary level institutions increased only at a marginal rate. This led to a limited access to tertiary education. By the early 1980s, access to tertiary education became an important problem for the Government. The number of new places at the tertiary level fell far short of the demand for such places. Hundreds of thousands of applicants could not enter government or private higher education institutions. It is under these circumstances that the Indonesian government started two distance education projects which later formed part of the Universitas Terbuka, more of which we shall see in unit 3 of this block.

### Republic of Korea

The situation in the Republic of Korea was no better. Student explosion was, and still is, the most critical problem in Korean education. The Korean educational system is based on the six-three-three-four year pattern: six years of elementary school; three years of middle school; three years of high school and four years of university or college. The system expanded significantly at all levels because of an intense public

demand for education. A sharp increase in the number of students in secondary education brought in severe competition for entry into higher education.

It is no surprise, therefore, that distance education in Korea is being viewed as a new educational avenue for the growing population of secondary school graduates and as part of the concept of life-long education. As the standard of living improves, the adult population has increasingly sought further education as one of the means of learning to cope with rapid growth in new concerns. New and developing educational needs have amplified the demand for part-time higher education at the least possible cost. At the same time, it constitutes a new, cost effective alternative for the increasing numbers of secondary school graduates who are denied access to conventional universities because of latter's inability to expand to accommodate more students.

### **Thailand**

Thailand experienced many of the situations and shared many of the factors, influencing the development of national educational systems that prevail in other countries of the region. Its population in 1986 was estimated at 52 million, growing at the rate of 1.5% clustered mainly in Bangkok. The majority of the labour force is engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing. About 45% of the labour force consists of women. Corresponding to the growth in population, there has been an increasing demand for educational opportunities. Population explosion and greater demand for education have put a severe strain on Thailand's educational system in the last few decades, resulting in a hurried increase in the number of new colleges and universities and the expansion and upgrading of existing ones. As in most other developing countries, the facility of education is unevenly distributed with the most prestigious institutions of higher education being concentrated in the capital and a few other urban centers at the expense of the rural areas. This makes it difficult for the people in remote areas to have access to higher education facilities. Determined to come to grips with the problem of inadequate access to higher education and lack of appropriate in-service professional environment, the Thai Government gave its earnest support to distance education. Distance education in Thailand is, thus, a response to the increasing demand for higher education. It is cost-effective for the Government, and also affordable for the students.

### **Australia**

Distance education in Australia has grown out of the region's geographic and demographic peculiarities. The Australian land-mass has a total surface area of almost 8 million square kilometers. It is approximately the same size as the United States of America, but by contrast has a population of less than 25 million compared with that of the USA which is over 250 million. Further, Australia is a highly urbanised country, with almost 70% of its population living in cities along the coastal region. The result is that large parts of Australia are very sparsely populated. Distance education is the only way in which education can be taken to a significant segment of the population living in remote areas.

### **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh, with a population is more than 120 million in an area of about 144,000 sq. km., has a low per capita income rate (about \$140), low literacy (about 24%), a high dropout rate at the primary level (about 70%)

and inadequate educational facilities (ADB, 1996). Clearly, distance education provides the solution to the colossal problem of educating a vast number of the adult population within a short period.

### *Profile*

The need for an Open University in Bangladesh was felt long ago. The history of distance education in Bangladesh dates back to 1956, when the education Directorate was assigned with the responsibility for distribution of 200 radio receivers to educational institutions. This led to the creation of an Audio-Visual Cell and later the Audio-Visual Education Centre (AVEC in 1962). No further progress in distance education was made till 1971.

After Independence Bangladesh faced the challenge of meeting the educational needs of mass people. To meet this challenge the necessity for a new mode of education was widely felt. As a sequel to that feeling, the School Broadcasting Pilot Project (SBP) was launched in 1978. Later in 1983, the project was transformed into National Institute of Educational Media and Technology (NIEMT).

NIEMT was later replaced by the Bangladesh Institute of Distance Education (BIDE) in 1985. Apart from producing audio-visual materials, BIDE offered the Bachelor of Education (B Ed) program in distance mode. The success of BIDE encouraged policy makers to take up a major plan for establishing an open university. The plan became a reality in October 1992 when the Bangladesh Open University Act 1992 was passed in the Parliament.

### *Objectives*

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is the only public institution in the country that imparts education in distance mode. In place of campus based teaching, this university uses technology including electronic devices to reach people in different corners of the country. The learner in this system is not restricted by time, space or age. A learner can think and learn at his own will, at his own place and at any time whenever he/she feels free to learn.

The main objective of the university is to expand all levels of education in different dimensions in science, agriculture, humanities, social science etc. and all other that come under the purview of human knowledge and understanding by diversity of means including the use of digital technology. It intends to provide opportunities of education to all classes of people and create efficient and skilled manpower by improving the quality of education.

As it is obvious from the objectives, BOU has opened a new horizon for the vast majority of eager learners of Bangladesh who for various reasons drop out of the conventional system of education. BOU serves another target group who wishes to continue to update their knowledge by becoming a life long learner. By imparting knowledge and skill to them, BOU is contributing to human resource development in the country.

In the national education arena this university therefore carries enormous responsibilities and possibilities. BOU is the only Institution in the country which can contribute a lot in fulfilling the objective of the Government regarding eradication of illiteracy from the country.

<b>Area</b>	<b>35 acres</b>
Established	October 1992
No. of Schools	6
No. of Divisions	9
No. of Regional Resource Centre (RRC)	12
No. of Coordinating office (CO)	80
No. of Study Centre	1106
Formal Program	23
Non Formal Program	19
Student admitted in 2008	2,71,630

### **Bhutan**

In the case of Bhutan, the education introduced centuries ago was purely monastic. Modern education was introduced in the fifties and several schools were opened in the early sixties. In spite of the impressive achievements the Government has made in the field of education, the school enrolment ratio is about 20% in 1986. The dropout rate is high in the primary and lower secondary schools. In other words, 80% of the children of school going age do not have access to education. This can be attributed to numerous constraints, one of which is the acute shortage of teachers. A majority of teachers are either under-trained or untrained. Out of the 20% of school goers, hardly 5% pursue tertiary education. Because of ample job opportunities, most of the school dropouts get absorbed in Government service. While many countries in the world encounter the problem of unemployment, Bhutan faces an acute shortage of workforce, particularly skilled labour. Distance education helps train many in a shorter period of time.

In the 60s and early 70s, most students left school to join Government service which they found financially attractive. Further, many working people who could not have the opportunity to continue their higher studies, became interested in any form of study that would help them to improve their qualifications without leave or absence. Distance education not only provided opportunities for further studies, but also helped in improving the competence and performance of the working people.

### **Myanmar**

In Myanmar (former Burma), the Government developed policies and plans regarding distance education, with the following objectives: to provide basic education to all citizens,

- to provide a base for the uplift of socialist moral values,
- to promote and extend sciences and technology both of which are essential for building up a socialist system,
- to nurture professionals, technicians, skilled and semi-skilled workers who definitely accept the socialist system and who would help in building up a socialist society,
- to nurture working people with all-round development,
- to educate students in such a way that those of high calibre and diligence will be able to pursue higher learning, and

- to provide opportunities for workers to continue higher education while still in service.

Through the process of distance education a vast majority of teachers, still in active service, were able to fulfil their requirements, both academic and professional.

### **Hong Kong**

The demand for a trained workforce in Hong Kong is certainly no less than in other developing and newly developed countries and the rapid growth planned for education at the university degree level reflect this demand. The factors which make distance education, in general, important in Hong Kong include the large reservoir of persons whose educational standards do not, for historical reasons, match either their potential or their social and financial position. The increasing prosperity of the territory, with the consequent demand for more opportunities to obtain personal fulfilment through additional education and the strong emphasis traditionally placed on educational attainment by the local society are other factors which warranted a change in educational patterns in Hong Kong.

At present less than 4% of the 17-20 age groups in Hong Kong can obtain a first year first degree place. Plans were drawn up to increase by more than two-fold the provision of such places by the end of 1995. Besides the individual's demand for education, there is also the need of society for a workforce in specific areas, which changes from time to time. The pace of change in a developed society and economy is such that initial training at the sub-degree level quickly becomes out of date in many fields. Updating and retraining workforce are the important tasks being managed by distance education.

### **Japan**

In Japan, distance education was developed with a view to providing access to education for those who could not afford it in terms of the traditional mode of schooling. After the end of World War II, democratization was the key for the reconstruction of the nation. Equal access to education was strongly promoted as the primary theme of post-war educational reform.

Hardship in maintaining a livelihood, shortage of campus facilities in the defeated nation and a wide spread desire to learn among aspiring yet poverty stricken youth gave a great impetus to providing non-traditional opportunities for education. Accompanied by advances in economic development in Japan, the 1960s saw an unusual increase in the number of people wanting to enter institutions of higher education. With the development of a technological society, an average person in such a society needs to obtain more and more of the specialized knowledge of the new age. It was difficult for adults who must fulfil both social and professional obligations, to receive a college education because of problems caused by time limitations. Obviously, distance education came in as an answer to this situation.

### **New Zealand**

New Zealand, a mountainous country with an area about the same as that of Japan and Malaysia, is made up of two main islands and many smaller ones. The population is dispersed through provinces, separated

by barriers comprising mountain, sea, valley and forest. Travel is difficult and expensive. Regular schooling has been difficult for some and impossible for others, whereas distance education has been provided, in some form, to most of its population of nearly 5 million, about 84% are urban and the rest are mostly located on intensively formed coastal lowlands. Much of the country is sparsely populated or uninhabited. The geographic features are as peculiar as that of Australia. Naturally, to cater to the population which is isolated in many cases, the government had to adopt distance education.

**Philippines**

Educators in the Philippines today are faced with challenges that in no historical period have demanded so much of their concern. One of these challenges is the increasing number of school dropouts, which suggests a need for reviewing the existing system of delivering educational services to the masses.

Yet another reason besides the one delineated is the growth in technology. While initial education for many professions will remain a basic part of the university teaching commitment, there is a persistent demand for recurrent and post-experience education which cannot be ignored. The rapidity of technological change places an increasing pressure on universities to provide further education consisting of learning experiences which are significantly different from those at the core of university teaching.

Almost for similar reasons about 103 countries have set up 1117 institutions of distance teaching in different forms which at present offer about 34000 courses in various disciplines to a student population of about 30 million. Some of the significant developments in distance education at the global level have been discussed in Units 2 and 3 of this block.

Before we proceed further, let us look at the following exercise.

**Check Your Progress 1**

*Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.*

*b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.*

List the socio-academic compulsions that led to the spread of distance education both in the developing and the developed countries.

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## 1.3 SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGES VIS-A-VIS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS: A CASE STUDY

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In this section, we shall touch upon a case to show how socio-political changes impact the educational provision in a country.

The educational system(s) in India over the past few thousand years changed from time to time, as a result of socio-political changes. Although the contribution to various branches of knowledge and culture by the Indian educational systems are rich, the fact remains that education as such was made available to a comparatively limited number of people. But the education accessible to a few in the past had never been free from changes, effected by historical necessity. Let us briefly survey here the different educational patterns in India at the various stages of its history. For ease of presentation and for purposes of discussion, we have broadly divided the political history of India into four stages.

### 1.3.1 Pastoral India

Vedic literature including the *Aranyakas*, the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads* was the produce of a pastoral society. The scholastic enthusiasm and its social purpose as evidenced by these works reflect intense and purposeful academic exercises. The practice of 'education' thus was certainly a well established social phenomenon. There were those who taught and those who learned and yet there is no evidence of the existence of universities and schools in those days. The system of education, it appears, was essentially based on the relationship between the guru (teacher) and the shishya (student). The latter had to go in search of a preceptor, who usually lived in an *ashram* (hermitage) at some distance from the other habitations. It was for the guru to reject or accept the newcomer, i.e., the seeker of knowledge or skills. Once the seeker was accepted, a simple ceremony tied the guru and the shishya by the bond of the academic relationship. Very often, the shishya was expected to live with the guru, be a part of his household and learn as much from his way of life as through actual instruction and practice. We should note that in India this system has defied complete extinction and survives even today in the way, for example, Indian classical music and Sanskrit are taught by great masters. The essential characteristic of this system and the one in which we are interested, is learner-motivation. The starting point in the process of education, in this system, was the learner's urge to learn, which impelled him to look for a guru. Once the guru accepted an aspirant into his fold, learning could be taken for granted. The major mode of instruction was through word-of-mouth. It is called 'gurukula' system of education. i.e., face-to-face residential system of instruction, in which individual attention to the needs of the learner was assured at all costs.

### 1.3.2 Feudal India

With the passage of time the pastoral society became what came to be known as a feudal society. And with the feudal system, we may associate the ancient institutes of India such as Nalanda and Takshsila. These educational institutions were considered seats of higher learning. That is, having completed the lower levels of education, mostly with local masters, the aspirants to higher education travelled long distances for



admission to these institutions, which was regulated, with entrance tests given by *dwarpals* (literally, a *dwarpal* is a gatekeeper). Obviously, the essential characteristic of this system too was learner-motivation.

By this time, the number of learners aspiring to higher education had increased and as a result, education got institutionalised, though the kind of education prevalent in the pastoral period must have also remained in vogue. It is during this period that learner-motivation appears more clearly to have its basis in a desire for upward social mobility on the part of the learner, for learned people were in demand at royal courts and in the growing bureaucracy. What is more, those who sought higher education usually got financial support. This support might have come through the institutions themselves in certain cases and in certain others from parental or community support. The need for financial support in one or the other form appeared to have emerged as the second important characteristic of the education system of this era.

The arrival of Muslims on the scene did not change the politico-economic structures of society. It continued to be a feudal society as in the past, but the appearance of a new ruling class led to the emergence of two parallel streams of education – the *Pathshala* and the *Madrassa*. Under the former system, Sanskrit played a vital role, and under the latter a Perso-Arabic combine played a similar role. Some of the disciplines, for example, ethics, philosophy, astronomy, astrology, linguistics, languages, etc., being common to both streams, the major difference between the two were those of the medium of instruction and differing religious orientations. The desire for social mobility appeared now as a more recognizable factor in learner-motivation.

### 1.3.3 Colonial India

With the arrival of the British, the Indian educational system underwent a major change. The rulers introduced the Western type of education. English, being their language, became the language of the dominant culture, the medium of instruction and the recognised language of thought. The traditional disciplines were replaced by subjects like economics, physics, chemistry, etc. The schools were housed in separate buildings meant exclusively for educational purposes, the teacher was now a paid agent of the government, a private agency or a voluntary organisation (unlike the tutors in a *Pathshala* or a *Madrassa* who were independent agencies by themselves). The learner's objective now was to obtain a 'certificate' by completing a prescribed course of studies successfully. The prospect of social mobility became so strong that it was possible to run schools without any help from the government, as the learners were ready to pay high fees willingly. Before long education came to be seen as a commodity that would pay dividends in the future, and those who saw this point were ready to pay for this commodity. The rigorous standards of education in the past gradually gave way to a stress on the mastery of certain 'skills' necessary to perform certain functions at this stage.

Having briefly touched upon the educational situation of pre-independent India, we shall now look into the educational scene in independent India. The overall system considered that the education was restricted to few, created a sense of mystification; colonialism and paved a way for elitism through education.

### 1.3.4 Independent India

The first expression of the educational aspirations of independent India is discernible in the Dr. Radhakrishnan Commission Report (1948-49). As a democratic welfare state, India announced 'Universalisation of education' and 'equal opportunities for all' as basic principles of the educational policy of independent India. This was a significant policy decision, as it marks a definite change in the age-old system of education— now it was the State that took over the responsibility of educating each and every citizen, irrespective of his/her caste or creed, social or economic status, motivation or aptitude. The real spirit of Indian national movement and idealism reflected in commission. This decision obviously proposed a major change in the educational system of India.

Let us stop here for a minute and work on the following exercise.

#### Check Your Progress 2

*Notes:* a) A chart is given below with some blank columns for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

Fill in the blanks with relevant details.

Sl. No.	Socio-political Structure (India)	Teacher-Student relationship	Dominant feature	Mode of teaching	Accessibility	Standards of education
1	Pastoral					
2	Feudal					
3	Colonial					
4	Independent					

#### Implications of the changes

The foregoing details present a few contrasts, brought into being by repeatedly changing socio-political situations. They are as follows:

- i) In pastoral India the learner had to go in search of a guru, the source of education; and getting accepted by a guru was the first step in the process of education, which depended mainly on learner-motivation. During the phases of feudalism, the desire for upward social mobility began to colour learner-motivation increasingly, though gradually. And during the colonial period, student-motivation was subordinated almost completely to the desire for social mobility. Eventually, 'certification' rather than a quest for knowledge became more important in the eyes of the learners, and by implication, for the society. Independent India further strengthened this trend, since irrespective of the nature and degree of learner-motivation, the State made a public promise to educate the masses. It is the State and the agencies employed or recognised by the State that have to go around looking for the learners.
- ii) The second significant contrast is seen in the gradual growth of 'commercialism' in the field of education. During the earliest days of Indian society, education was effected through a close relationship between the teacher and the taught. Of late, it has turned into a 'commercial' enterprise in more than one respect. The school, by and

large, is like a commercial house which employs wage earners (the teachers in this case) who work with their tools and tricks of trade - the prescribed texts, etc. - on the human raw material (the learners) to produce the finished items or end products (the certified students) who are then available in the employment market for a certain price. The laws of supply and demand govern the quality and the value of these certified students as well as they apply to other marketable commodities. With the gradual growth in the supply of certified job seekers, the market value of the various levels of certified attainment begins to fall, and this fall triggers a blind rush for certificates of higher levels. Here, we should point to the fact that this rush is not in essence for higher education, but for the certificates thereof. The gradual deterioration in learner-motivation for education in relation to the growth of concern for social mobility can be graphically represented as follows:

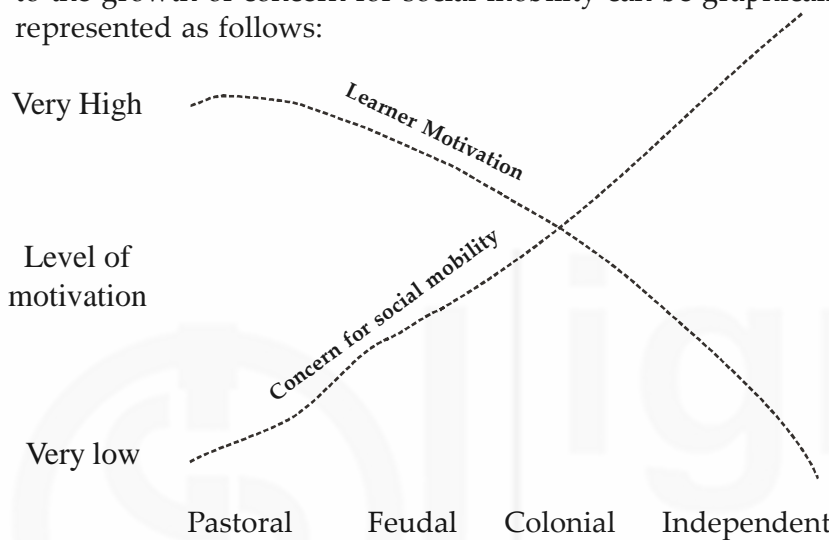


Fig. 1.1: Concern for Social Mobility and Learner-motivation: Relative Rise and Fall

Thus, whereas the earliest system of education aimed at 'mastery-learning', today it is 'certification' and not 'learning' that matters. This attitudinal change and the related problems - the falling standards, the crowded institutions of higher learning, and the teachers' growing indifference verging to professional dishonesty - erode Indian society in more than one way. On the one hand, the genuinely motivated learner gets disillusioned very early on in the educational process, which results in him/her being either thrown out of gear or attracted by more promising places and on the other, society multiplies mediocrity at geometric rates. This change over to commercialism in education may be expressed as follows:

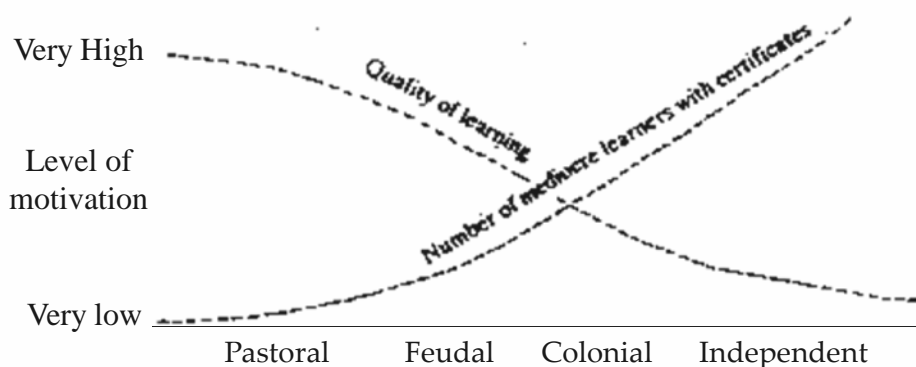


Fig. 1.2: Rise and Fall in the Quality of Learning and of the Learner

The phenomena described under items (i) and (ii) above pose a number of theoretical as well as practical questions. These questions, in turn, pose a number of challenges to the educational reformer in India and in other developing countries as well.

- i) How does the reformer help the State look for and then reach the average learner? This is to keep the promises made by a democratic country to her people.
- ii) How does s/he meet the aspirations of the thousands who seek admission to higher education whether they deserve it or not?

This is a crucial question as the economic resources to meet this demand by expanding the means of education are not available.

- iii) How does s/he safeguard the interests and the nerves of a highly motivated learner, and consequently save the country from intellectual bankruptcy?
- iv) How does s/he check the fall in standards and yet provide the minimum required education to one and all?
- v) How does s/he build human resources to solve the problems (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) mentioned above without creating irrevocable time lags?

These issues defy solution, as what may be seen as a solution to one problem is in effect a factor that worsens another. This confusing mesh of contradictions may be summed up as follows:

- i) A vast population of unmotivated learners aspire for higher education lack of motivation contradicts aspiration for higher education (see item (ii) above).
- ii) The desirable goal of maintaining high standards in education conflicts with the increasing population of mediocre students (see item (iv) above) and teachers.
- iii) Limited and inadequate resource allocation for education conflicts with the goal of providing education to all those who need it – education of various types at various levels of instruction at various locations/ situations (see items (i), (iii) and (v) above).

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## 1.4 COMMERCIALISED VS. INDUSTRIALISED TYPE OF EDUCATION

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This case study of India should be of great interest to countries which have (a) liberated themselves from colonial rule, (b) a strong hangover of the feudal past (c) adopted English as the medium of instruction upto the highest level, (d) limited resources and weak political will to improve the educational scenario and (e) a strong bias against any educational innovation, including distance education.

The implication of the discussion, we have had so far is that education still remains skills oriented and specialization in specific branches of knowledge also is essentially retained. But the overall operation has to be of much larger dimensions, of a size that was never visualised before.

Such a change, though an evolutionary imperative, will have its strong advocates and also its severe critics.

For example, if the gurus of the pastoral era were asked to comment on the kind of education that was available in Pathshalas and the institutions of the feudal era, they would, in all probability, scoff at them. Similarly, the teachers of these ancient institutions would look at the education of the colonial period with disdain. The educator and the educated of a particular era, having been brought up in a particular educational culture are bound to be biased against a different educational culture, and this is understandable. However, every change in the educational system need not be justified for its own sake. The colonial system of education, for example, may be good for the coloniser but it is detrimental to the colonised. We should, therefore, judge the merit of any change on the basis of its relevance to society and the people in it.

It is always easier and socially more convenient to discard and condemn an unfamiliar culture than to appreciate its compulsions and diversities. However, it is essential to place it in the right perspective of the socio-evolutionary process that makes it as much a social imperative as an evolutionary reality. We should not, therefore, be surprised if those who were brought up in the culture of face-to-face education scoff at educational patterns that resemble 'industrial operations' which include planning, rationalising procedures, division of labour, mechanising, automation, controlling and checking. Since such operations have to be on a mass scale, and also because education, of whatever type, is gained and imparted through communication, the techniques of 'mass communication' have to be employed to effect these industrial operations successfully.

A word about mass communication is appropriate here. Mass communication is bound to be impersonal in nature. It cannot be as personal as that which obtains between the teacher and the taught in the best of face-to-face teaching situations. Thus, while it provides to all the aspirants access to education, it is only the adequately motivated ones who will derive the best benefits from such communication without facing any interference from other types of learners or teachers.

These techniques, which appear to be pressing on us so inexorably and eminently, have other promises as well. They provide positive answers to the problems identified as contradictions/conflicts. To put it briefly, what we are trying to say is that it is for the first time in history that governments or states have taken it as their responsibility to educate each and every citizen as a matter of welfare policy. To fulfil this enormous responsibility of democratising of education with the available financial resources, the traditional means and modes of education, without creating an irrevocable time lag, is just not possible. It is time we shifted the emphasis from the 'commercialised' kind of education that we are familiar with to the 'industrialised' form of education with an egalitarian goal.

Some academics and some of the social elite are apprehensive about the effects of democratising education. They think that there will be a further fall in standards. How tenable is this assumption? Let us touch upon this issue in 1.4.1 and 1.4.2.

### 1.4.1 Democratisation of Education

The intentions of modern states in the field of education are welcome. The Constitution ensures rights to its citizens from the will of a democratic people, with a constitution stating democratic secular socialist republic and to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic and political: Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship: Equality of status and of opportunity: and promote among them all Fraternity: assuring the dignity of the individual and unity and integrity of the Nation the present democratic system assure right to education to its citizens, right to Information to its citizens to ensure transparency in administrative system to facilitate rule by the people of the state. The system of distance education has the potential to fulfil this will as it can change the impossible into a foreseeable possibility, and also holds the promise of checking, at reasonable costs, the fall in standards.

On the advent of Technology into education, i.e. ICT Interactive Communication Technologies, now the teacher has social responsibility to retain the culture from one generation to another generation, besides, the imparted skilled through educational process should enable the productive process for the market and finally they should evolve a system of techno-managerial society with the silicon revolution. One obvious reason is that teachers are involved in the production of knowledgeable material in both soft and hard copies for the knowledge society. By manipulating the technologies for education, the education has become seamless and borderless in the era of globalisation process.

Further, as in the ancient Indian system in which only a motivated learner went in search of a guru, in distance education we have learners who are by and large highly motivated. This was otherwise expressed that Aristotle is going to his disciples rather than the disciples going to him. For example, the new learner is always going for a particular course/programme not by chance but by choice. He has always has a basket of programmes available for him to choose according to his choice and interest. This is otherwise explained in terms of flexibility of the open and distance education. From this point of view, distance education clearly is a socio-historical imperative.

It may be a fact that the puritanical among educationists and those who are little informed or misinformed about distance education may have reservations in accepting this mode of education for quite some time to come. Open and Distance Education/Learning is always uncompromisingly striving to borrow the best talent available from all the sources to provide seamless education. It is a democratic promise made by the state to its people to provide education for all. But the very dynamics of social change will carry it through like a piece of wood is carried ashore by rising surge that brooks no opposition. The earlier we prepare ourselves for this change the better. Let us remember that the developed world has already travelled far in this direction and we in the developing countries have just begun our journey more seriously in the globalisation process.

### 1.4.2 Fall in Educational Standards

The twentieth century is century of quality. Quality is the determining element in the twentieth and future centuries. The quality is determine

by both quality of the service/education and also to meet the demands of quantity of the people who aspire education and services.

Democratisation of education without adequate facilities, however, implies a fall in standards. The process enables to sharing of resources both human and physical (infra-structural) for the purpose of education. This is how we provide education through distance mode and create a non-elitist society. Effecting democratisation of education with the help of traditionally known means such as the school, the college and the university together with the classroom teacher and the texts will lead to mediocrity, which is concomitant with a fall in standards. One way of controlling this fall is to duplicate the efforts and performance of the best teachers and make them available to the learners through techniques of mass-communication, teaching units, video programmes, radio broadcasts, face-to-face teaching, etc.

Moreover, to maintain high standards of education is not exclusively a function of the individual or the institution which imparts education. Education standards can be looked at only in relative terms as they depend on the socio-educational norms of particular societies. This, however, does not absolve educators from their responsibilities for the maintenance of standards. In a particular social situation well-meaning educators may not be able to improve the situation in spite of their best efforts. They need a favourable socio-academic climate to realise their well-intended goals.

To reiterate, the maintenance of standards depends on the expectations of the society in general and the aspirations of the individual learner. It is independent of the mode of education. The state rightly promises equal opportunity of education to all, but not equal standards thereof, for such a promise would amount to a denial of the variety in human abilities, capacities and intentions. The traditional face-to-face mode of education mostly does not promise to maintain standards. Standards are maintained individually and also collectively by highly motivated learners, professionally honest educators and societies that accept only the best among the educated. It is obvious then that till our societies learn to make the right kinds of demand from the educated, the onus of maintaining standards is squarely on the motivated learners and professionally honest educators. And the distance mode of education promises full flowering to both these parties. The realisation of this promise, however, depends on the manner in which distance education projects are conceived and implemented in different, and specific situation.

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## **1.5 DISTANCE EDUCATION: AN APPRECIATION**

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In block 2, we discussed at length the underlying philosophy of distance education. Further, we have seen in this unit the impact of socio-political changes on education, warranting a change in the educational pattern of today. In other words, we have reached a stage in our discussion when we need to make an attempt to appreciate the phenomenon of distance education more clearly.

We shall attempt this appreciation by:

- i) briefly analysing the process of education in the context of face-to-face and distance-teaching modes, and

- ii) placing the distance-teaching mode in the general educational patterns of today and the expected ones of tomorrow.

The process of educating an individual or a group of individuals consists of the following processes individually or any combinations thereof, depending on the demands made by the subject/discipline concerned:

- i) imparting information,
- ii) giving practice/exercise/skills of various kinds in actual and simulated situations,
- iii) giving demonstrations by the teachers and making the learners do what is demonstrated in the area of sciences, fine arts, and performing disciplines (like music), etc.,
- iv) taking learners on educational tours for exploration, for gaining first hand information of historical sites, etc.,
- v) developing the critical faculty through seminars, tutorials and discussion sessions, and
- vi) researching (fostering interest in research and innovation).

**Word-of-mouth: Is it the sole medium for didactic communication?**

The basis of all the processes mentioned above is communication – the teacher communicates with the learners in a face-to-face situation using the word-of-mouth as the medium of communication. Texts of various types, the equipment in a laboratory, the historical sites, etc., are the aids which help learning through the visibly active mediation of the teacher, and this mediation is effected invariably through the word-of-mouth which so dominates our traditional system of education that not only are the other curricular components namely, evaluation, materials and objectives pushed into the background but their relative positions (i.e., super ordinate versus subordinate and vice versa) also get distorted.

It should be realised that the super ordinate among the curricular components are the 'objectives'. An educational programme is launched in order to achieve the objectives set out for it. Materials, methods and evaluation schemes are the subordinates – the materials should be of such a nature that they become effective means to achieve the set objectives, and the evaluation schemes should guarantee success in achieving the set objectives with the help of the materials designed and the methods employed for the purpose. A particular way of using the other three curricular components may help in achieving the 'objectives' more effectively, whatever the means of communication – the printed or the spoken word.

If this argument is accepted, it should not be difficult to concede that *there is nothing sacrosanct about using the word-of-mouth as the sole means of communication in educational processes*. There may indeed be situations in which the word-of-mouth is the most suitable means of communication, and by the same argument there are indeed many situations in which communication can be effected by means other than the spoken word. In such situations we need not, rather should not insist on its use, just because we have been using it for centuries now.

Indeed the processes/activities listed under items (i), (ii) and (iii) can very successfully be effected through means other than the word-of-mouth, be it the written or the printed word, a radio broadcast, a TV or a video demonstration. It is only the activities listed under item (v) above,



which may seem to depend exclusively on the word-of-mouth but in this case also we should not lose sight of the potential of tele-conferencing or discussions/ meetings conducted with the help of satellites. The point that is being made is that having been brought up academically in, (and grown through) a system of education dominated by the teacher's spoken word, we are likely to be biased in favor of such a medium, and be (quite understandably) blind to the strengths of other means, say the printed or the written word. One may point to disadvantages in the use of written or printed words for purposes of teaching/learning, but one can as well point to the advantages therein. Without going into those details at this stage, we would like to suggest that in order to appreciate the potential of distance education, one need to be free from the bias which we have referred to above. The open and distance learning materials are always open for praise and criticism by its learners, peer groups and also from public.

This is not possible in face-to-face educational situation. It is well described that in the face-to-face situation the teacher teaches whereas in open and distance education, the institution teaches with a group by making educational package.

It needs to be emphasized, however, that distance education does not once for all exclude the use of the spoken word as a means of communication between the teacher and the taught. Instead, it will be used only when required and for purposes which cannot be achieved through other means easily or successfully. Let us pause here to work on the following exercise.

**Check Your Progress 3**

*Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.*

*b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.*

Identify at least two principles on which distance education operates.

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At this stage, a revisit to the concept of 'distance education' is necessary. We have said in block 2 that there is a difference between correspondence education and distance education. The distinction is quite overwhelming as distance education encompasses the entire gamut of educational strategies. The term itself is broad enough to accommodate the traditional meaning of correspondence education, the new dimensions added to this meaning in the recent past and also the possible changes in these meanings that may take place in the future. We shall try to make this point clear with the help of the following illustration:

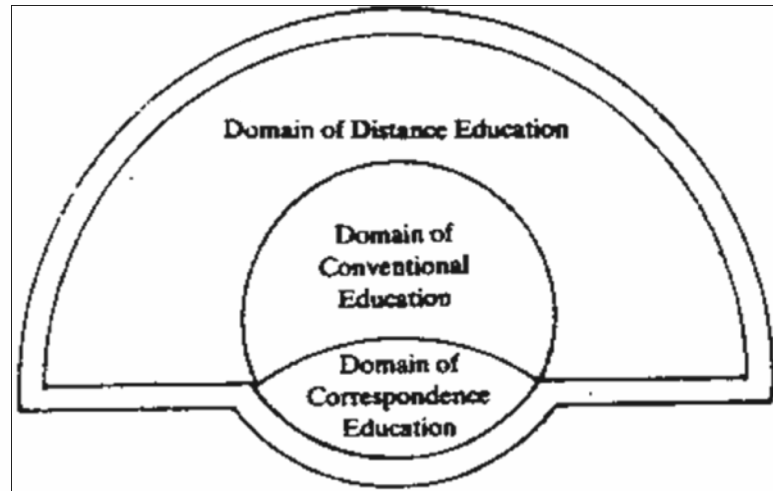


Fig. 1.3: A Futuristic View of Distance Education

In figure 3 above, the single line contour represents the traditional system of education, which, as said above, is dominated by the word of mouth as the major means of communication for effecting various pedagogic activities. About 150 years ago, when the postal system was used for education (see the circle in figure 3), it may be said to have incorporated the system of correspondence education as one of its sub-domains. To all intents and purposes this new addition remained unnoticed for years, though the proliferation of courses taught through Correspondence went on unabated. It is only during the last 30 years, with the beginning of the British Open University in England, that distance education emerged as a concept different from correspondence education. Distance educators themselves took some time to finally realise that they were more than correspondence educators it was during the Twelfth World Conference of the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE), that it was renamed as the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE).

Though seen as a wanton offspring of the traditional system of education, distance education envelopes the traditional system (see the double-line contour in figure 3 above) unequivocally and promises much more by way of educational opportunities by extending its reach to one and all, undoing all the traditionally known constraints – non-availability of seats in educational institutions, non-availability of such institutions in geographically difficult regions, poverty of the aspirants, failure to obtain the required qualifications for entering a particular university course, etc. Looked at from this point of view, distance education is, in essence, first and foremost education and in no way different from education as known traditionally.

However, it is oriented to the current and possible future changes in human societies. To maintain this orientation, it accepts the use of all the possible media as legitimate components of its operational strategy on the one hand, and on the other, it aims at rationalising their uses for optimal results, depending on the student population that is to be catered to and also the subjects/disciplines which are to be taught.

We notice, therefore, that distance education is not opposed to traditional education in its ultimate goals, but the difference is that the former is better equipped to meet the challenge of democratising education, which it should be stressed once again here, has traditionally been an elitist pursuit of the various questions that may be raised, the two most prominent are:

- i) *Is distance education as effective as face-to-face education is supposed to be?*
- ii) *What is distance education, after all if not education as people have traditionally understood it?*

Our answers to these questions are implied in the foregoing discussion. However, to get a comprehensive view you need to refer to blocks 1 and 2 once again.

Suffice it to say here that rapidly changing social aspirations demand an educational system which is as potent in effect as it is extensive in its reach, and this educational system by itself has to be one that both fosters and satisfies those aspirations. It certainly cannot be the traditional system which restricts itself to the four walls of the classroom. It has to be a system that, having jumped those four walls, is capable of reaching everywhere and to the satisfaction of all concerned, wherein lies the relevance of distance education, not only for developing countries, but also for the advanced ones. For growing social awareness leading to differing social aspirations is a phenomenon common to both the developing and the developed societies.

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## 1.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we studied that:

- i) information growth, greater awareness about education, the problem of access and technological developments are the factors that led to the emergence of distance education,
- ii) any changes in the educational pattern of India can be attributed to societal changes, which are evolutionary in character,
- iii) the conventional face-to-face educational system is inadequate to cater to the diverse needs of the people, and distance education (an industrialised form of educational system) is likely to be a more effective complementary system of education, and
- iv) distance education subsumes what is conventionally referred to as education and encompasses the entire gamut of educational strategies.

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## 1.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

Some of the reasons for the spread of distance education are:

- i) Population explosion
- ii) Appalling illiteracy rate
- iii) Ever increasing number of aspirants for higher education
- iv) Technological growth that heralded new knowledge and immense possibilities for educational communication
- v) The need for updating the workforce, etc.

## Check Your Progress 2

Sl. No.	Socio-political structure (India)	Teacher-student relationship	Dominant feature	Mode of teaching	Accessibility	Standards of education
1)	Pastoral	Shishya going in search of guru	Mastery of learning	Word-of-mouth	Education to a selected group	High
2)	Feudal	Pathshala and Madrassa	Social mobility	Word-of-mouth	Education to a selected group	High
3)	Colonial	School/institutions (The students paid fees)	Certification for livelihood	Word-of-mouth	Education to a selected few who could pay (commercialisation) group	High
4)	Independent	States looking for aspirants	Social mobility and certification	Word-of-mouth	Education for all, democratisation	Low

## Check Your Progress 3

The main principles with which distance education operates are:

- i) education for all, and
- ii) the idea that the word-of-mouth is not indispensable for academic communication.