

INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY: RURAL VERSUS URBAN

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Abstract

India has active initiatives to transition toward a knowledge society. There are many parts to a knowledge society and potential difficulties in its implementation. There current initiatives in India are quite effective at forming a “new middle class” in urban locations, yet this success is yet to reach the more rural population. The urban and rural divide is examined within one of the four pillars of a knowledge society: education and training. Finally, reviewing the policies and lessons learned from implementation of a knowledge society in another country with similar urban and rural barriers provides further insight. This critical analysis illuminates the potential next steps for India in its transition toward a knowledge society that works for the rural populations as well as it has in urban areas.

Keywords : Urban ,rural, Knowledge society

INTRODUCTION

There is a national initiative underway that looks to transform India into a knowledge society (SinghaRoy, 2014). A knowledge society is grounded by four main pillars: education and training, informational infrastructure, economic incentive, and innovation systems (Radhakrishnan, 2007). The Indian government has established a National Knowledge Commission under the office of the Prime Minister. The commission has the duty of developing strategic policies for education and e-government, focusing on these critical areas; access, creation, concepts, application, and services. The commission is structured into nine functional groups to oversee undergraduates in management, medicine, legal education, languages, libraries, health information systems, traditional knowledge, open and distance learning. The commission's main aim is to transform Indian into a knowledge society through the incorporation of a technology-induced system into the academic and administrative sectors (SinghaRoy, 2014). The commission understands that not only members of the community can be able to cope up with revolutions in technology and education.

THE NEW “PRIVILEGEDELITE” MIDDLE CLASS

The current perspective is that India has a “new middle class” that is budding because of the knowledge society and the growth of information technology jobs and services in India, which account for 23% of exports and 4% of overall GDP (NASSCOM, 2005). Yet, this new middle class represents a very small percentage of the population (less than 1%) and is housed primarily in urban settings that have access to the necessary education, well paying technology, employment opportunities, the necessary infrastructure, and are often housed in new and innovative locations within those cities (Radhakrishnan, 2007). The mix of urban settings and technology based jobs that

require a lot of interaction and adaptation to the global economy have led to a belief system that is significantly different from the rest of India. Radhakrishnan (2007) identifies the different belief system as individualistic meritocracy, which measures a person's professional value on what they know and what they can do over any other reason (e.g. quotas for caste, class, gender, etc).

Over time, this "new middle class" has grown into what is now often referred to as a "Privileged Elite" in India (Radhakrishnan, 2007). The reason they are classified as a "Privileged Elite" within a knowledge society is intriguing, especially when the Indian government and most of the world calls this a "new middle class." The "new middle class" can be easily understood because these individuals have income levels that are on par with the middle class in first world countries and are often not categorized as "high wealth households" (\$1 million or more) by international standards (Capgemini, 2018). Therefore, they are a "new middle class" for worldwide classification and are what the Indian government has sought the middle class in India to be, even though they are only 0.2% of the Indian population (NASSCOM, 2005). This is very clear and easy to understand, but why would these same individuals be referred to as a "Privileged Elite" within India's knowledge society?

An examination of access to the four pillars of a knowledge society provides the answer to how this "new middle class" in India can also be a "Privileged Elite." There are many barriers to access for the four pillars in India, one of which is the stark difference between rural and urban India (Radhakrishnan, 2007). The education and training in that was necessary for the technology jobs require both the basic education and ongoing training and learning that often requires attending universities and training institutes housed in the urban areas of India (Pillar I). The infrastructure for the transfer of information (Pillar II) is very strong in many areas of India, particularly with regards to high-speed internet access. However, the rural areas have not reached their full potential and the costs are sometimes prohibitive for the incomes of the common people living in these areas.

The economic incentive for knowledge (Pillar III) is more desolate in the rural areas as the difficulties with obtaining work that utilizes these skills and comes with the high pay expected for those skills is very limited (Radhakrishnan, 2007). While improving the infrastructure could increase remote working situations, it is still not fully resolved as discussed in the previous point. Finally, the innovation systems (Pillar IV) are far less developed in rural than urban India, and have garnered much less attention and government intervention. For example, much of the investment into research by the government has been targeted within specified knowledge areas to specific institutions that are all in major urban areas. The rest of the innovation systems have been left up to the private markets (Parasarathy & Ranganathan, 2010). The long-term effects of the private markets on establishing innovative systems suggests they are more effective, however the short-term effectiveness is very reliant on government intervention. Moreover, the most successful private innovation systems often sprouted out of initial short-term government intervention (Cooke, 2001).

The next section will delve deeper into Pillar I (Education and Training) to understand what has been tried to close the access divide between rural and urban India. The historical governmental policies of India served to restrict access to education in a way that helped limit the flow of ideas and resources, particularly to the rural and economically disadvantaged. New policies have been put into place to shift toward increased access, more in-line with the tenets of the knowledge society (Radhakrishnan, 2007). These policies have been challenging to implement as the cloud of the past policies still hangs over this attempted transition. Therefore, the next section will also discuss the successes of in Indonesia in increasing access to education within a knowledge society model. The

type of analysis applied to Pillar I (Education and Training) could also be applied to understanding India's rural and urban divide for the other three pillars of a knowledge society.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

India is among the largest countries in the world with the fastest growing population. Currently, the country hosts over 1.3 billion people, a value that is over one-seventh of the total world population. As a third world nation, India is challenged with several socio-economic disparities among them access to quality education. Apart from the limited access to quality education, the system is inequitably distributed with rural areas being the most underprivileged. Unfortunately, a majority of the population in India resides in the rural/ underdeveloped areas. Therefore, education is a contentious issue in the region (Krishna, 2018). According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), despite the improvement in the numbers of rural student admissions and school attendance, more needs to be done to improve the quality of education in India.

The knowledge society offers the option for traditional Indian education to those in rural areas who find modern education complex (Jain, 2005). Although traditional education does not employ the use of scientific and technological knowledge, it forms an essential part of the Indian identity. India is a nation that hosts a diverse group with different cultures, traditions, and religious beliefs. Traditional education provides the community with knowledge of customary laws, religious ideologies, values, cultural mannerism, and traditional craft skills (Srikanth, 2015). The information is transmitted through oral tradition. In modern schools, children are also taught on moral values, history, and ancestry of their society. These are concepts inspired by traditional knowledge and education.

“Education is the key to success” is a commonly used adage with significant implications on the society. Education presents several benefits to the Indian society. Unfortunately, there are several disparities associated with the education system. For instance, the privatization of the higher education system further limits the access to education to those of a lower socio-economic status (Jain, 2018). Privatization results in reduced number of admissions, resulting in few professionals and results in the decline of socio-economic growth. Therefore, there is a need for policymakers to address the socio-economic and political disparities surrounding education. The government should ensure equitable distribution of quality education in rural and urban areas to create an opportunity for the equitable socio-economic development of India (VivekBist, 2017). Development and integration of technology into the education system will result in improved living standards for all the Indian people.

The report revealed that there were very few schools in the rural regions and that over half of the fifth-grade students in the rural areas cannot articulate or read proper second-grade textbooks or solve simple math sums. Most children have to drop out during and after primary school to assist their low-income families to make additional income (Shilpa, 2011). Inadequate access to information is not only limited to schools but reflects on the society. The majority of villagers lack the understanding of the essential role of education in eradicating poverty and promoting socio-economic growth. Urban India, on the other hand, presents opportunities for children to access quality education especially those from well to do backgrounds. Apart from school, limited access to technology prevents rural access to information (Trevelyan, 2011). Few villages have access to

electronic gadgets and communication systems and can barely afford to make newspaper purchases. The urban areas comprise diverse groups; there are those who have access to information systems and knowledge and others suffering from acute poverty and residing in slums ("Rural education in India," 2015).

Both India and Indonesia are developing states in Asia with rapidly growing populations. However, unlike India, Indonesia has put in place strategies to improve its education system as a way to bridge the gap between its urban and rural regions. In 2015, Indonesia celebrated its first decade since the introduction of the BOS school scheme. The program has done a commendable job in providing education funds, reducing the cost incurred by households in educating children and the development of an effective education system. Currently, the program serves over 43 million students in Indonesia (primary and secondary school). The Indonesian government has also created the Masterplan for Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia's Economic Development (MP3EI), an initiative to promote socio-economic growth in the country. According to the plan, Indonesia aims to improve its per capita income to \$4.5 trillion by 2025. The critical elements of the vision include entrepreneurship and innovation. The country also encourages national innovation to boost areas of production both in rural and urban areas (Samer Al Samarrai, 2015). The plan also advocates for technological advancement through the development of advanced industrial, infrastructure and communication networks, both in rural and urban areas.

CONCLUSION

India and its political structures have been moving toward a knowledge society, with the first example of success being the "new middle class." Within India as a knowledge society, the "new middle class" is actually a "Privileged Elite" because of the access they have to the essential four pillars of a knowledge society. The divide between urban and rural access, particularly with education and training, paints a clear example of this divide. India faces unique challenges in overcoming the urban and rural education and training divide, and has implemented a series of policies to take this divide on. They have been somewhat effective, when compared with policies seeking the same goals in Indonesia. There will likely be policy changes and a continued effort of ongoing attention by the Indian government. Their further intervention will likely be necessary if the Indian government is to reach their goal of turning the "new middle class" into the standard middle class in India rather than a "Privileged Elite."

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