

# Platonic Academy Vis-A-Vis Contemporary Indian Education System

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**Abstract:** Education is a process through which we equip ourselves with knowledge. Anything that can have a formative influence on the way a person thinks, acts and feels may be considered as education. Undoubtedly, Plato's Academy has been the most prestigious and most influential of all educational institutions in antiquity. Plato laid the foundation of this academy in 385 B.C.E. in Akademeia, then a northern suburb six stadia outside of Athens. Many influential personalities of pre-20th century weren't educated in academies but had developed interests as well as excellence in diverse disciplines. These people laid the foundations of science through self-learning. Aristotle, Newton, Jabir-Ibn-Hayan, Galileo, Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Faraday, Nikola Tesla, and numerous others excelled in versatile fields. Today, unfortunately, auto-didacticism or self-directed learning is looked down upon in the mainstream world. Through the medium of this research paper, we will study the platonic academy's education system vis-à-vis contemporary Indian education system. The paper will cover the era of inception of Platonic academy, its study pattern and then it will move to the present time education policies and study pattern. Also, this paper discusses how Plato's theory of education has influenced the modern-day education system in India.

**Keywords:** philosophy, education, academic

## 1. Introduction

"If a man neglects education, he walks lame to the end of his life." - Plato

Plato was a philosopher in Classical Greece and the founder of the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world. He is widely considered the pivotal figure in the development of Western philosophy, along with his teacher, Socrates, and his most famous student, Aristotle. In addition, Plato has also often been cited as one of the founders of Western religion and spirituality. Due to a lack of surviving accounts, little is known about Plato's early life and education.

The philosopher came from one of the wealthiest and most politically active families in Athens.

Ancient sources describe him as a bright though modest boy who excelled in his studies. His father contributed all which was necessary to give to his son a good education, and, therefore, Plato must have been instructed in grammar, music, gymnastics and philosophy by some of the most distinguished teachers of his era. His mother was aristocratic. He had two brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus as well as a sister, Potone, whose son Speusippus, later became the head of Plato's school.

Plato was not the first to whom the word "philosopher" should be applied but the questions he raised backed with richly suggestive arguments and reasoning coupled with logic left an indelible impression on the minds of readers. Plato's dialogues make fundamental contributions to almost every area of philosophy ranging from ethics, morality, cosmology, metaphysics, and epistemology to philosophy of mind and language. He was concerned about human soul, human nature, human life and the real question is how to live best in the state within European intellectual traditions. He has been described as a poet of ideas, philosopher of beauty, and the true funder of Idealism. His concern for human excellence, human

perfection, self realisation and the knowledge of truth made him to establish Plato's Academy.

Plato's Academy was a centre for knowing oneself and analyzing oneself. The Academy was initially a religious group dedicated to the worship of Muses and its leader Apollo. Plato saw in the academy a training school for future philosophic rulers. It was the permanent institute for the pursuit of science by original research. Plato spent the last years of his life at the academy teaching and instructing. He died in 347BC while attending the wedding feast of one of his students. The Republic, the Statesman and the Laws are some major works of Plato in political philosophy. The Republic, the greatest work of Plato, is in the form of dialogue, a method of great importance in clarifying questions and establishing truth. No other writer on politics has equalled Plato in combining dialectic reasoning with poetic imagery and symbolism. Alfred North Whitehead, an English mathematician and philosopher, best known as the defining figure of the philosophical school known as process philosophy, once noted "the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."

The Platonic Academy persisted throughout the Hellenistic period as a sceptical school, until coming to an end after the death of Philo of Larissa in 83 BC. Aristotle (384-322 BC) studied there for twenty Years (367-347 BC) before founding his own school, the Lyceum. The Platonic Academy was destroyed by the Roman dictator Sulla in 86 BC. Today, Political empowerment has affected the educational perspectives and curriculum within the educational system. Various organizations have been formed such as 'The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)' which develop educational tools to help people live as global citizens, free of hate and intolerance. The aim of the education is to ensure the holistic development of individual which is incomplete without the knowledge of philosophy of education. Introspection, intuition, insight,

rationality, whole part logic used to bring to consciousness the forms or concepts which are latent in mind.

Education has always been accorded an honoured place in the Indian society. The great leaders of the Indian freedom movement realized the fundamental role of education and throughout the nation's struggle for independence, stressed its unique significance for national development. Gandhi formulated the scheme of basic education, seeking to harmonize intellectual and manual work.

Hence idealistic method of teaching complements the scientific approach of teaching. Idealistic education focuses on morals, goodness, beauty, realizing the power of self-imagination and truth. This will lead to the development of moral values in child. In the process of idealistic education, the teacher plays a very crucial role. The teacher influences the students by his idealistic notions and sympathetic encouraging behaviour. In most countries today, full-time education, whether at school or otherwise, is compulsory for all children up to a certain age. Due to this the proliferation of compulsory education, combined with population growth, UNESCO has calculated that in the next 30 years more people will receive formal education than in all of human history thus far.

## 2. Statement of problem

The basic aim of this study is to analyze the system of education as advocated by Plato in some of his works like Republic, explore The Platonic Academy established by him outside the city walls of Athens and compare them with the cotemporary education system in India to find basic similarities and differences between them.

### Significance of the study

The findings of this study will redound to the benefit of the Indian education system considering that it is largely seen to be promoting rote learning<sup>5</sup>. Plato was one philosopher who advocated for an objective and analytical thought process. India is home to 422 million young people according to the 2011 census report<sup>6</sup> and these people need an objective thought process to solve real life problems. This study will also help the readers in gaining insight to the education system advocated by Plato and its influence on some of the issues concerning today's education system in India.

### Objectives of the study

The researchers of this study have tried to achieve the following objectives:

- (1) To explore the Platonic academy and study its features,
- (2) To analyze Plato's philosophy of education and collate it with the contemporary Indian education system.

Who was Plato?

Plato was a Greek philosopher born in Athens in an aristocratic and wealthy family. His birth year is said to be

427 BC but it is disputed by some accounts. His father, Ariston, was descended or 50 legends has it from Codrus, the last king of Athens. He had two brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus as well as a sister, Potone, whose son Speusippus later became the head of Plato's school.

He began his philosophical career as a student of Socrates. When the master died, Plato travelled to Egypt and Italy, studied with students of Pythagoras, and spent several years advising the ruling family of Syracuse. Eventually, he returned to Athens and established his own school of philosophy at the Academy. About 387 BC, Plato founded a school in Athens, in a grove sacred to the demigod Academus, called the Academy (which is where we get the word academics from today).

The Academy and collation of its features with aspects of contemporary Indian education system. Since the words "academy" and "academic" come from the name of the area where Plato taught, it is worth spending a moment to describe the park which was used for gymnastics from the sixth century B.C. Academus or Hecademus, a mythical hero who had a cult following, left a garden and grove, which was about a mile north west of the centre of the city of Athens, to the citizens to use for gymnastics. The area, named after Academus, was developed by Hippias, the son of Peisistratus, who built a wall round it and put up statues and temples. Excavations have detected the foundations of Hippias's wall. The statesman Kimon planted olive and plane trees there and diverted the river Cephissus to make the dry land fertile. Festivals were held there, as were athletic events in which runners would races between the altars, and funeral games also took place in the Academy.

The ancient Academy was also not a school, but rather a public park, with beautiful old trees, a sacred precinct, originally dedicated to an old Attic local divinity, a hero by the name of Akademos. The Academy was thus the precinct of the hero Akademos, a precinct which, admittedly, in historical times, was also dedicated to the goddess Athena.

Plato's Academy is often said to have been a school for would-be politicians in the ancient world, and to have had many illustrious alumni. It is worth mentioning that during Plato's leadership of the Academy, its members did not pay any fees, and following his death, the Academy continued its operation for nearly 200 years.

The Academy was not open to public, and the membership was exclusive, no membership fees was charged at least during Plato's time, there was probably not at that time a "school" in the sense of a clear distinction between teachers and students, or even a formal curriculum.

India had a fairly formal education system through the early years of independence but it lacked uniformity, after the implementation of the first National Education Policy of 1968, one of the most important developments achieved due to this was the acceptance of a common structure of education throughout the country and the introduction of the 10+2+3 system by most of the States.

Reception of Plato's views on position of women in a society are to some extent contradictory with some of the prominent feminists praising his views, Kate Millett, highly regarded feminist, has made laudatory references to him for the "liberal suggestions" in her book *Sexual Politics*, while others have argued that he had "an equal contempt for hatred" (besides his hatred of democracy and trades people) In his new society, he says, all will have an education, all will receive an education, males and females alike, and it will be the same education, including all the training in things like horsemanship and the use of weapons which had once been confined to males. On the suggestion that male is stronger than the female. Plato replies that this difference is not sufficient to prevent women from being trained for warfare. Women were allowed to study in the academy, at least two women are known to have studied at the, Axiothea of Phlius and Lasthenia of Mantinea. These accounts clearly suggest that Plato was way ahead of his time and he needs to be applauded for the thoughts he put forward and the actions he implemented.

The Indian society has largely been apprehensive about education of women, but Indian leaders and reformists have continuously demanded for equal rights for women in the realm of education, social reformer couple Jyotiba Phule- Savitribai Phule was among the first native Indians to open a school for girls of India, However women's education got a fillip after the country got independence in 1947 and the government has taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women. Under Article 15(3), the Constitution of India allows for positive discrimination in favour of women. The article, under right to equality, states: "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children."

As a result, women's literacy rate has grown over the three decades and the growth of female literacy has in fact been higher than that of male literacy rate. While in 1971 only 22% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2001 54.16% female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate is 14.87% As compared to 11.72 % of that of male literacy rate.20 but still India needs to go a long way in bridging the gap with the world, with 65.46% female literacy rate as per the 2011 census, women's education in India is still a point in question. It is still below the world average of 79.7%.

Plato emphasized on compulsory education for all. While Indian leaders differed to some extent. Jawaharlal Nehru accepted education as the most important means to social change. Education is the means to socialization, the tool which trains citizens in the art of thinking. Education is the most important requisite, according to Nehru, to open up the individual. Freedom from ignorance is as essential as freedoms from hunger. For economic and political reformation improved human relations are also required. Social development is inconceivable without mental development and broadening of mental horizon achieves the spirituality. So, education aims for the victory of the mind and soul over lifeless matter. Nehru said, "Unless

this conflict of the spirit is solved there is going to be no peace in any country".

M.N. Roy, Marxist leader, was against any compulsion in education, because compulsion is against liberty. Education should help man and women to think rationally and to decide themselves, about the problems to be solved. General education by government is the mental slavery which promotes the masses to sing songs of patriotism, to salute the national flag, to study the history edited by government and to work collectively to achieve success of the state. This kind of national education is not true democratic education Neither explaining his democratic new educational system Roy pointed out that as a pre-condition of democracy education is not primary education nor is it traditional, higher or scientific education. It is the process of raising the intellectual and cultural level of the masses. Therefore, so long as the moral and cultural level of the people does not rise, the aim of education is not realized. It is the consciousness towards its rights to be human beings and the consciousness of its excellence and dignity. The purpose of education is to help them in utilizing their reason in this thinking. Only this type of education leads to a real democracy not only in a nation but in the whole world.

The Academy functioned under Plato's successors until 86 BC, when it was destroyed by the Roman general Lucius Cornelius Sulla during his siege of Athens. Scholars moved to different sites in the city. The Academy was not restored until AD 410, when it was revived by the Neo-Platonist, who called themselves the successors of Plato and kept attracting philosophers from the wider Hellenistic world. It lasted until AD 529 when, being a non-Christian school, it was closed by the Byzantine emperor Justinian I.

In at least Plato's time, the school did not have any particular doctrine to teach, rather, Plato posed problems to be studied and solved by the others. There is evidence of lectures given, most notably Plato's lecture "On the Good" but probably the use of dialectic was more common. According to an Unverifiable story, dated of some 700 years after the founding of the school, above the entrance to the Academy was inscribed the phrase "Let None but Geometers Enter Here."

Even in India, the government has accepted that education in field of science, which promotes rationality, is a must for the nation to progress. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 suggested a paradigm shift in science education in India. As per NCF 2005, inquiry skills should be supported and strengthened by language, design and quantitative skills. Schools should place much greater emphasis on activities aimed at stimulating investigative ability, inventiveness, creativity and transfer of learning in varied situations. The perspective of NCF-2005, on science has been translated into syllabi, textbooks and teacher support material developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Today, the government of the day is promoting rational scientific learning. The Ministry of Human Resource Development launched the Rashtriya Avishkar

Abhiyan (RAA) in July 2015, across School Education and Higher Education to encourage children towards learning Science and Mathematics through activities related to Science and Mathematics. National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) under the Atal Innovation Mission established Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) in schools across India. The objective of this scheme is to foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds; and inculcate skills such as design mindset, computational thinking, adaptive learning, and physical computing etc.

In the matter of curriculum, Plato followed the traditional Pythagorean quadrivium of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Plato assigned to mathematics a role which was above just an ordinary introductory subject. Its purpose was not to store the memory with useful knowledge but to create, a mind capable of receiving and understanding truth, Plato wanted to avoid simple memorization about relationships between angles and arcs; he hoped that students could be taught to perceive and understand such relationships, so Plato did accept the fact that pupils learn best when they are helped to gain insights, to conceptualize, to perceive. Such action stresses thinking rather than memorizing unrelated facts, a valid modern learning principle.

Speaking of the educated person, Plato said, "He sings well and he dances well; now must we add that he sings what is good and dances what is good. In India, the concept of rote learning and getting better grades is more prevalent, but nevertheless, this proposition seems to be changing with government and the community promoting co-curricular activities like singing and dancing.

### 3. Conclusion

Plato, an aristocrat, who lived twenty-three centuries ago, must have gazed into a crystal ball when he so ingeniously conceived his educational system for his ideal state. It is clear that his ideas, conceived in the fifth century B. C., are still practical and in use in modified form in the twentieth century.

A valid interpretation of Plato's theory of education is that his ideas underwent an evolution throughout his lifetime of investigation and reflection. In the republic, he presented an ideal state and an idealistic and intellectual viewpoint of education.

Plato has put together a system of education that has substantially withheld the erosion of time. In a real sense our educational system has a foundation of thinking of all great educators of the past. Yet, it is clear that modern education is greatly credited to Plato. Looking at our educational system today we can see many of Plato's ideas incorporated into our school system. In the schools of the future perhaps more of his thoughts and ideas will be selectively usable. How often he has anticipated reforms wholly alien to the society of his time. This insightful quality makes Plato in thought and action more modern than many present-day people.

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