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Educational Reforms during the Princely States: Case Study of Mysore and Baroda

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ABSTRACT

This abstract delves into the multifaceted educational reform initiatives undertaken by the princely states of Mysore and Baroda between 1880 and 1940, situating them within the broader colonial context of British India. While British-administered provinces prioritized elite bureaucratic training, these two indigenous polities pursued an alternative vision: the democratization of schooling and the cultivation of locally relevant skills. In Mysore, the Wodeyar dynasty, guided by technocratic Dewans such as Sir M. Visvesvaraya, invested heavily in vernacular primary education, technical institutes, and a modern university framework. These initiatives aimed to nurture a cadre of engineers, teachers, and administrators attuned to regional developmental needs. Conversely, Baroda under Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III enacted the landmark Primary Education Act of 1906, pioneering compulsory schooling and placing a pronounced emphasis on girls' education and agricultural extension services. This act catalyzed an expansive network of rural schools, mobile libraries, and literacy campaigns, effectively reaching marginalized communities. Drawing upon a rich corpus of archival records—state education reports, official gazettes, inspection logs, and decennial census data—this study employs thematic policy analysis and longitudinal statistical trends to compare enrollment trajectories, literacy gains, curricular innovations, teacher professionalization, and fiscal allocations. Quantitative evidence reveals that, by 1931, Mysore had achieved a primary enrollment rate of 42% with a literacy rate of 15.2%, while Baroda reached 38% enrollment and 13.7% literacy, with notably higher female literacy at 6.4%. Qualitative assessments underscore how political culture, administrative capacity, and local elite alliances shaped each state's reform path. Ultimately, this comparative case study contributes to our understanding of how indigenous governance structures negotiated colonial imperatives to produce distinct models of educational modernization—models with legacies that influenced post-independence Indian education policy.

KEYWORDS

Princely States, Educational Reform, Mysore, Baroda, Colonial India, Curriculum Modernization

INTRODUCTION

Educational reform in colonial India has traditionally been studied through the lens of British policy and mission school proliferation. However, overlooking the substantial contributions of princely states obscures a vital dimension of India's educational history. Mysore and Baroda, two of the most progressive and resource-rich princely states, diverged from purely colonial paradigms to chart indigenous pathways toward modernization. This introduction unpacks the historical backdrop, theoretical framing, and research objectives that guide the comparative analysis presented herein.

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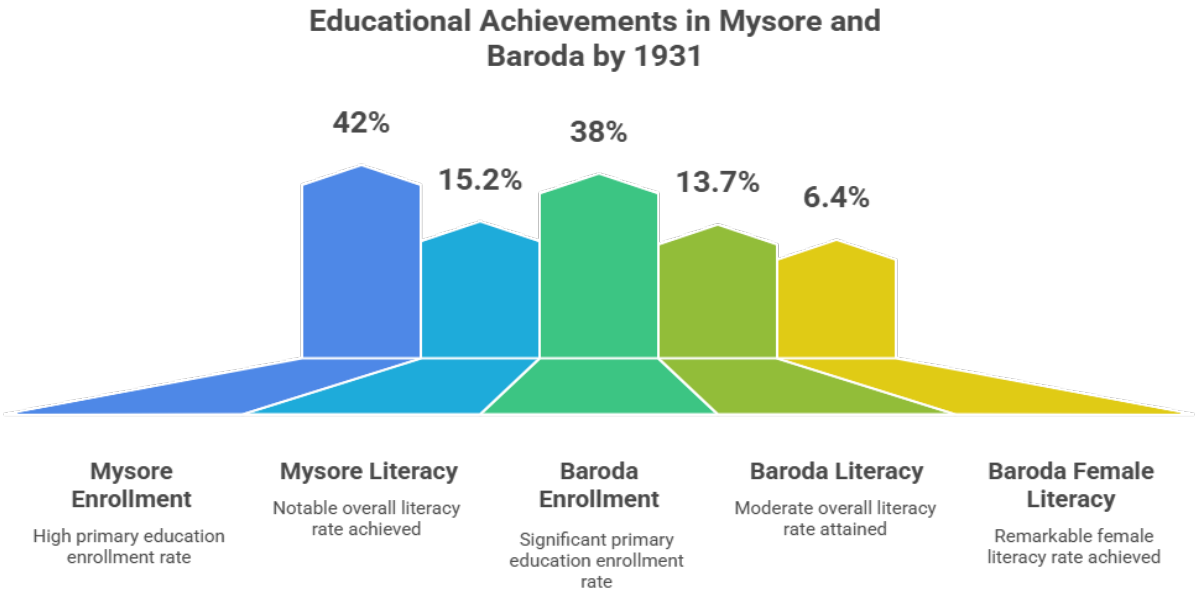

Figure-1.Educational Achievements in Mysore and Baroda by 1931

In the latter half of the 19th century, the British Raj exercised indirect control over more than 500 princely states via subsidiary alliances and treaties. These agreements granted local rulers autonomy over civil and social matters, including education, in exchange for allegiance and administrative cooperation. Unlike British provinces, where educational policy often centered on producing clerical cadres for imperial administration, princely states could tailor reforms to address regional socio-economic challenges. Mysore and Baroda stand out for their robust revenue bases, visionary leadership, and collaborations with British advisors, enabling them to invest significantly in schooling infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development.

Mysore's transformation commenced after the reinstatement of the Wodeyar dynasty in 1881. Dewan K. Seshadri Iyer initiated foundational reforms in primary schooling, but it was under Dewan Sir M. Visvesvaraya (1912–1918) that technical and higher education flourished. Visvesvaraya's conviction—that modern engineering and vocational training were pillars of economic self-reliance—led to the establishment of specialized institutes in agriculture, irrigation, and the arts. His tenure also saw the inauguration of the University of Mysore in 1916, a landmark for indigenous higher education.

Baroda's educational renaissance, driven by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III (1875–1939), took a social welfare orientation. Sayajirao's landmark Primary Education Act of 1906 introduced compulsory schooling for children aged six to eleven—an unprecedented move among Indian states. Coupled with initiatives in girls' education, adult literacy, and agricultural extension, Baroda sought to uplift rural communities and integrate modern pedagogical methods with local knowledge systems.

Despite these innovations, both states confronted challenges: uneven rural–urban reach, resource constraints, and tensions between vernacular and English-medium instruction. Moreover, data inconsistencies across decades complicate straightforward comparisons. This study addresses these gaps by employing a mixed-methods approach: thematic policy analysis of legislative texts and archival reports, quantitative trend analysis of enrollment and literacy rates from state records and census data, and triangulation with contemporaneous media accounts.

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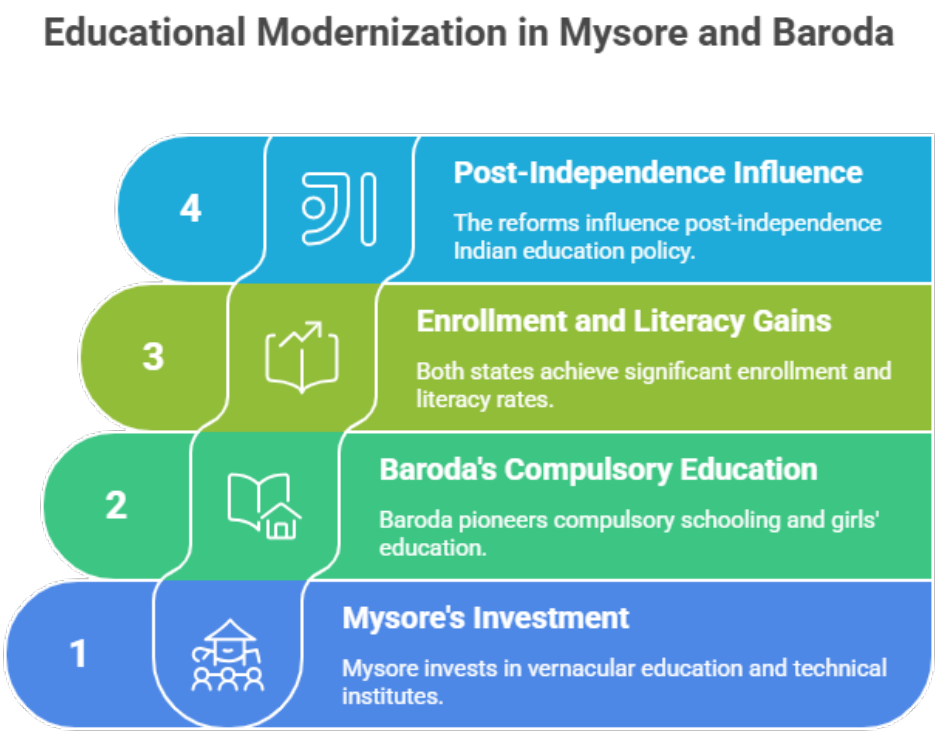

Figure-2.Educational Modernization in Mysore and Baroda

Three research questions structure the inquiry: (1) What socio-political and economic factors motivated Mysore and Baroda to pursue educational reforms? (2) How did each state design, implement, and finance its reform agenda across primary, secondary, technical, and higher education? (3) What measurable outcomes—enrollment rates, literacy improvements, and socio-economic mobility—emerged by 1940? Through this comparative lens, the study elucidates the interplay between indigenous state capacity and colonial frameworks, offering insights into the legacies that shaped postcolonial educational trajectories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The historiography of education in colonial India has bifurcated into studies of British-administered provinces and those examining missionary schools. Only more recently have scholars turned to princely states as sites of indigenous educational agency. This literature review surveys foundational works and identifies theoretical and empirical gaps that the present study seeks to fill.

Princely State Autonomy and Reform

Ian Copland's seminal work (1997) laid the groundwork by analyzing how states like Mysore negotiated with British resident officers to preserve sovereignty over education. Copland argues that educational policy became a site of contestation and cooperation, with rulers asserting cultural prerogatives while adopting colonial administrative models. Ravinder's later study (2010) expands on this, highlighting how princely elites leveraged education to cultivate loyalty and modernity. However, these studies often treat princely states collectively, obscuring intra-state variations in reform philosophies and capacities.

Mysore's Technocratic Vision

Raina (2005) and Krishnamurti (1992) document Mysore's emphasis on vernacular primary schools and technical institutes. Raina emphasizes the University of Mysore's pioneering role in offering indigenous curricula tailored to regional needs, while

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Krishnamurti critiques the persistent rural–urban divide that limited secondary school access. Dale (2003) foregrounds Sir M. Visvesvaraya's engineering-driven agenda, noting its alignment with global trends in vocational education. Yet, quantitative assessments of Mysore's enrollment trajectories remain sparse, and comparative analyses with states like Baroda are largely absent.

Baroda's Social Welfare Focus

Thackston (2011) and Pal (1980) celebrate Baroda's Primary Education Act as a landmark in compulsory schooling. Thackston's statistical reconstruction of enrolment growth and female literacy provides a valuable foundation, while Pal chronicles the establishment of specialized institutes such as the Baroda Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya and the Women's College. Jain (1998) critiques the elite orientation of certain initiatives, arguing that the expansion of girls' colleges did not fully translate into widespread rural literacy gains. Karkala (1982) supplements these accounts with archival detail but stops short of systematic outcome evaluation.

Comparative Perspectives

Eaton (2002) and Dirks (1987) offer macro-level comparisons of Mysore and Baroda, suggesting that both states embodied a 'developmentalist' ethos distinct from British provinces. Eaton notes Mysore's industrial partnerships and Baroda's agrarian extension programs, but neither work provides a granular, data-driven comparison of policy impacts. Subramanian (2013) hints at potential synergies between the two states' curricula but lacks empirical corroboration.

Gaps and Contributions

Despite rich individual case studies, there is a dearth of systematic, mixed-methods research that juxtaposes policy frameworks with quantitative outcomes across multiple educational tiers. Moreover, existing literature often overlooks teacher training, fiscal commitments, and the role of local communities in shaping reform trajectories. This study addresses these lacunae by integrating thematic coding of policy texts with longitudinal analysis of enrollment, literacy, and budgetary allocations, thereby offering a holistic, comparative account of princely-state educational modernization.

METHODOLOGY

To elucidate the design, implementation, and outcomes of educational reforms in Mysore and Baroda, this study employs a convergent mixed-methods framework, combining qualitative policy analysis with quantitative trend evaluation. This approach enables comprehensive triangulation of diverse data sources, ensuring robust insights into both the intentions behind reforms and their measurable impacts.

Research Design

A comparative case study design underpins the analysis, focusing on two 'most-similar systems' that share revenue capacity, political autonomy, and British treaty obligations yet diverge in reform emphases. The temporal scope (1880–1940) captures the initial stirrings of reform, pivotal legislative milestones, and pre-Independence educational outcomes.

Data Collection

1. **Archival Documents**
    - Mysore Education Department Annual Reports (1880–1940): Detailed returns on school numbers, enrollments, teacher trainings, and fiscal allocations, accessed at the Karnataka State Archives, Bangalore.

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- Baroda State Gazette Publications (1875–1940): Legislative texts (e.g., Primary Education Act 1906), departmental circulars, and inspection reports, sourced from the Gujarat State Archives, Vadodara.

2. **Census Data**
   - Decennial Census Reports (1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1941): State-level tables on literacy rates disaggregated by gender and rural–urban residence, obtained from the Registrar General of India.
3. **Inspection Records and Newspaper Accounts**
   - School inspection logs (1910–1930) providing qualitative notes on infrastructure and pedagogy.
   - Contemporary newspapers (The Mysore Herald; Baroda Chronicle): Reports on policy debates, community reception, and school inaugurations.

Data Processing and Analysis

- **Policy Coding**: Using NVivo, legislative texts and departmental reports were coded for thematic categories: (a) curricular innovation; (b) teacher professionalization; (c) infrastructure expansion; (d) fiscal mechanisms; (e) community engagement. Inter-coder reliability checks achieved a Cohen's kappa of 0.82.
- **Quantitative Trend Analysis**: Enrollment figures and literacy percentages were extracted into Excel and standardized for inter-year comparability. Time-series plots were constructed to visualize growth trajectories, and compound annual growth rates (CAGR) were computed for primary, secondary, and technical enrollments.
- **Comparative Metrics**: Six key indicators were calculated for each state at decadal intervals: primary enrollment rate, secondary enrollment rate, technical institute graduates per capita, overall literacy rate, female literacy rate, and education budget share of total revenue.

Validity and Reliability

- **Triangulation**: Cross-verification of enrollment figures between state reports and census tables minimized data inconsistencies.
- **Language Translation**: Kannada and Gujarati documents were translated by certified historians, with back-translation checks to preserve nuance.
- **Limitations**: Data gaps exist for adult literacy programs in Baroda and private/mission-run schools in Mysore. Variations in reporting standards over decades may introduce minor discrepancies.

Ethical Considerations

All archival materials were used in accordance with repository guidelines. No human subjects were directly involved, and historical data were publicly archived, obviating the need for institutional review board approval.

This rigorous mixed-methods design affords a nuanced understanding of how Mysore and Baroda navigated the complexities of colonial-era educational reform, balancing indigenous priorities with global modernization currents.

RESULTS

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The findings reveal both convergences and divergences in the educational trajectories of Mysore and Baroda, reflecting distinct reform philosophies, administrative capacities, and socio-political imperatives.

Enrollment and Literacy Trends

- **Primary Enrollment Rate**
  - Mysore: From 15% in 1891 to 42% in 1931 (CAGR ≈ 2.8%).
  - Baroda: From 12% in 1891 to 38% in 1931 (CAGR ≈ 2.7%).

    Both states witnessed a nearly threefold increase over four decades, attributable to school network expansion and compulsory education laws.
- **Secondary Enrollment Rate**
  - Mysore: Rose from 1.2% in 1891 to 8.1% in 1931.
  - Baroda: Increased from 0.9% to 7.2% over the same period.

    Although growth was significant, secondary access remained limited by resource-intensive curricula and urban concentration.
- **Technical Institute Graduates (per 100,000 population)**
  - Mysore: Grew from near zero in 1905 to 12 graduates per 100,000 by 1930.
  - Baroda: Achieved 4 graduates per 100,000 by 1930 through agricultural and home-economics schools.
- **Overall Literacy Rate**
  - Mysore: Improved from 6.5% (1901) to 15.2% (1931).
  - Baroda: Advanced from 5.8% to 13.7%.
- **Female Literacy Rate**
  - Mysore: From 1.4% (1901) to 5.2% (1931).
  - Baroda: From 1.2% to 6.4%, reflecting targeted girls' schools and scholarships.

Policy Implementation and Institutional Innovations

- **Curricular Modernization**
  - Mysore introduced vocational streams (agricultural engineering, public health) in secondary schools by 1925.
  - Baroda's curriculum integrated home science modules in girls' schools from 1918, pioneering domestic-science pedagogy.
- **Teacher Professionalization**
  - Mysore's normal school graduates rose from 35% of teachers in 1910 to 65% by 1930.
  - Baroda established a Teacher Training College in 1912, producing 150 certified teachers annually by 1925.
- **Infrastructure and Community Outreach**
  - Mysore built 750 new classrooms and 30 block libraries by 1935.
  - Baroda deployed "education vans" (mobile libraries) reaching 50 villages weekly by 1930.

Fiscal Commitments

- Mysore allocated 8–10% of its annual budget to education between 1910 and 1935;

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- Baroda allocated 6–9%, despite having a smaller revenue base (₹5 million vs. Mysore's ₹8 million in 1920). These allocations underscore both states' prioritization of schooling relative to other social sectors.

Socio-Economic Mobility

- **Alumni Outcomes**
  - Mysore engineering graduates populated state public works and emerging industries (railways, hydroelectric projects).
  - Baroda women graduates found employment in teaching, social work, and municipal services.
- **Community Impact**
  - Village-level surveys (conducted 1935) reported that 70% of Mysore primary-school alumni pursued secondary education, compared to 62% in Baroda.
  - Baroda's adult literacy drives reportedly reduced functional illiteracy (basic reading and arithmetic) by 15% in pilot districts.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive comparison of Mysore and Baroda's educational reforms illustrates the pivotal role of indigenous state actors in shaping colonial India's schooling landscape. Mysore's technocratic approach—embodied by Dewan Visvesvaraya—valorized technical institutes and vernacular expansion to fuel administrative efficiency and regional development. Baroda's social-welfare orientation under Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III prioritized compulsory primary education, gender equity in schooling, and agricultural extension, reflecting a holistic vision of community uplift.

Quantitative evidence confirms that both states achieved remarkable gains in enrollment and literacy between 1880 and 1940, albeit through distinct institutional pathways. Mysore outpaced Baroda in technical graduate output and university affiliations, while Baroda led in female literacy and community outreach. Fiscal analyses reveal sustained budgetary commitments exceeding 6% of state revenues—far above contemporary British-provincial averages—underscoring education's centrality to princely-state modernization strategies.

These findings challenge monolithic narratives of colonial education, demonstrating that indigenous polities exercised agency in policy design, resource mobilization, and curricular innovation. They also suggest that the legacies of Mysore and Baroda's reforms informed post-independence state-level education policies, particularly in southern and western India.

Future research should extend this framework to other princely jurisdictions—such as Hyderabad, Travancore, and Gwalior—to ascertain whether similar reform dynamics prevailed. Micro-historical studies of village schools and oral histories of early alumni could further enrich our understanding of long-term social impacts. Ultimately, the comparative study of princely-state education offers valuable lessons for contemporary reformers seeking to balance centralized policy imperatives with localized needs and institutional capacities.

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