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**Book Review: The Educational
Heritage of Ancient India - How
an Ecosystem of Learning Was
Laid to Waste by Sahana Singh**

**Oliver Alexander Gonzalez-Escolano
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Contact info@prowibo.com**

In *The Educational Heritage of Ancient India: How An Ecosystem Of Learning Was Laid To Waste*, Sahana Singh provides a recital of the turbulent history of education in India. Singh provides an unfiltered approach detailing the harmful impact foreign intrusion has had on the rich and advanced educational system in India. The book is defined by a revisionist attitude denouncing distorted viewpoints of Indian history imposed by foreign influences and instead promotes a truthful outlook on Indian educative practices. The author seeks a true account of the historical events avoiding an altered or “Western-centric” viewpoint to provide an accurate description, drawing from a wide variety of literature and academic sources. Singh presents a detailed chronology of the educational system of the Indian sub-continent providing a comprehensive description of advanced learning practices in Indian universities across India’s extensive timeline.

Singh begins by providing the reader with a description of the holistic learning nature of historical Indian learning practices based in open-air learning environments provided by gurus. These “forest universities” or gurukulas and ashrams gradually experienced an institutionalization, transforming into prestigious universities such as Takshshila or Nalanda and temple universities in Southern India. Singh describes the prestigious acclamation of these ancient universities and their success in attracting students across the far reaches of the Asian continent, including influential ancient authors such as Fa-Hien and Xuanzang. Utilizing their ancient account, these institutions provided a detailed account of ancient Indian learning cultures. The author argues that the lack of attention, literature and intellectual investment by modern academics and historians on the learning practices of ancient India is due to the over-emphasis of written learning and the over-looking of ancient practices by modern standards.

Singh describes the varied learning approaches of ancient Indian education and the integration of holistic, conceptual and practical learning methods with stressed importance of logic and debate as an intrinsic component of the educative practices. Whilst ancient Indian education embraced holistic philosophy, Singh examines the specialization of universities such as the Kerala school of mathematics, which demonstrated the advanced proficiency which influenced future Western and Islamic academic figures and advancements. The book delves into the knowledge transfer of ancient Indian knowledge. This knowledge was exported internationally through translated Buddhist literature in ancient India, the adoption of Indian medicinal practices in Ancient Persia, and the utilization of Indian scientific concepts by Greek philosophers such as Democritus and Hippocrates. Singh even details the translation of Indian concepts to the European continent in the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries.

The author details the cultural and educational genocide by foreign aggression, such as the Muslim expansionism and consolidation of Indian territories by Turko-Afghan rule resulting in the destruction or abandonment of prestigious universities symbolizing a “deathly blow to learning” in India and a forced transition to Islamic teachings. Oppressive tactics and imposition of forced teachings sought to reduce the influence of Sanskrit, Hindu and Buddhist concepts. Singh details the continued oppression against Indian educative practices by the forced imposition of European, particularly British, ideologies arriving concurrently with the imperialist dominance of the British Empire in India. Furthermore, Singh denounces the imperialist and race-based ideologies of Anglicanism and Orientalism, which asserted the “innate inferiority of Indian culture” aimed at indoctrinating the native population to become “more useful as subjects of the British Empire”. Exorbitant taxation and British evangelist-based educational policies continued the coercion against native ideologies Indian concepts and regional languages. Therefore, Singh provides a revisionist approach to the ancient Indian education, denouncing the common attitude of

overlooking the rich Indian indigenous historical tradition and its educative practices damaged by deliberate “historical distortions and whitewashing”.

In conclusion, *The Educational Heritage of Ancient India: How An Ecosystem Of Learning Was Laid To Waste* advocates the mantra of Satyameva Jayate or “Truth Alone Triumphs” attempting to eliminate the deliberate distortion of history. The book is successful in describing the intricate educational system and the harm imposed by imperialist and colonial influences. The book also provides literature in a field lacking in academic exposure utilizing wide-ranging sources to provide a detailed account of the Indian educational ecosystem. Specifically, the fourth chapter is a dedication to the inclusion of women into ancient Indian education, providing an account on the inclusive educational system. The revisionist philosophy of the book provides a refreshing outlook on the indigenous historical educative traditions. However, book is considerably short for such a broad topic. This perhaps justifies for a deeper investigation, yet the publication serves as an excellent introduction. In conclusion Singh provides a refreshing outlook, distant from mainstream thinking providing a nativist “Indian” perspective detailing the harm of foreign influence from Muslim and British invasions and the permanent damage left on Indian education.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oliver Gonzalez has a Bachelor’s Degree in English Language & Communications with Spanish from the University in Hertfordshire in 2016, and is currently a Master’s student at Richmond, the American International University in London. He joined PROWIBO in the summer of 2019. Oliver is passionate about education and the promotion of equal opportunity, and hopes to become a Political Analyst in the near future.

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