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EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SOCIETY'S
**K.B.COLLEGE OF ARTS & CONFERENCE FOR
WOMEN, THANE**

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ANCIENT INDIAN EDUCATION

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Abstract

India has a rich tradition of learning and education right from the beginning of time. The education system of ancient period had unique characteristics and qualities which were not found in the ancient education system of any other country in the world. Gurukul (ashram) was a type of school in ancient India, residential in nature, with pupils living in proximity to the teacher (guru). Ancient Education System in India was based on making of Man and not for just survival. It was sought as the means of self-realization, as the means to the highest end of life. viz. Mukti or Emancipation.

This paper brings out the salient features of the Ancient Education System, its curriculum, teaching methodology and system of evaluation. It also discusses the aims and main objectives of the ancient education especially in India.

Introduction:

India has a rich tradition of learning and education right from the ancient age. Scholars in ancient India believed that life has a definite aim, an ideal and the attainment of which was thought to transcend all material achievements. The educational evolution in ancient India was also founded upon this very ideal.

Dr. R.K. Mukherjee said, *Learning in India through the ages had been prized and pursued not for its own sake, if we may so put it, but for the sake, and as a part, of religion. It was sought as the means of self-realization, as the means to the highest end of life viz. Mukti or Emancipation.*

Ancient Indian education system was unique in nature and character. Aims of education are always influenced by the philosophy of life of the people of that country. In India it was attainment of self-realization and character building. Preservation and enrichment of culture, personality development and cultivation of noble ideals were the other aims of education in ancient India. But at the same time it was also recognized that different individuals have naturally different inclinations and capacities. Hence, not only the highest philosophy but also subjects like literature, science and vocational training found a place in ancient education system. Over a period of time, two system of education developed, the Vedic and the Buddhist. In the Vedic system, Vedas, Vedangas, Upanishads and other allied subjects were taught while in the latter system, thoughts of all the major school of Buddhism were taught. While Sanskrit was the medium of instruction in the Vedic system of education, Pali was the medium of instruction in the Buddhist system of education. But both system offered vocational education apart from religious education of their respective faiths. There was also a purely vocational system of education wherein master craftsmen and artisans taught their skills to students who worked as apprentice under them.

The quality of education imparted in ancient India was unparalleled. Hence in spite of various hardship and hurdles students from different parts of the world flocked to Indian universities. Amir Khusrau (1252-1325 A.D.) mentions that scholars have come from different parts of the world to study in India but no Indian scholar have found it necessary to go abroad to acquire knowledge. Indian scholars were in great demand abroad. Caliphs like Al Mansur

and Harun Al Rashid (754-809 A.D.) sent embassies to India to procure Indian scholars. Astronomical treatise like *Brahmasiddhanta* and the *Khanda Khadyaka* of Brahmagupta and the medical books of Charaka, Susruta and Vagbhata were translated to Arabic. As a home of knowledge and wisdom ancient India produced scores of scholars on various subjects like Buddha and Shankara (philosophy), Kautilya (political science and administration), Sushruta (surgery), Charaka (medicine), Kanada (physicist; propounder of atomic theory), Nagarjuna (Chemistry), Aryabhata and Varahamihira (Astronomy), Baudhayana and Brahmagupta (mathematics) and Patanjali (yoga) to name a few.

The education system of ancient India may claim to be unique in the world in many respects like-

- The State and the society did not in any way interfere with the curriculum of studies or regulating the payment of fees or hours of instructions.
- The ancient Indian education system was compulsorily residential. The student had to live in the house of his teacher (Gurukulas) for the whole duration of his studies and learn from him not only what was taught but also observe how his teacher responded to different situation arising in daily life and learn from it.
- Stress was laid on having a personal relation between the teacher and the taught. Each student used to meet the teacher separately and learn from him through separate instruction and guidance.
- Education was absolute free and the teacher looked after the primary needs of the students including food and clothing.
- The Indian system of education upheld the dignity of labour. Hence even a student aiming at the highest philosophical knowledge was duty bound to do some manual labour daily such as collecting fuel, tending cattle, etc.
- Education in ancient India was more of seminar type where students used to learn through discussions and debates.

Subject of Study:

The main subjects of study in the Vedic system of education were the four Vedas, six Vedangas (phonetics, ritualistic knowledge, grammar, exegetics, metrics and astronomy), the Upanishads, the six darshanas (nyaya, vaiseshika, samkya, yoga, mimamsa and vedanta), puranas (history), tarka shastra (logic), etc. The art of writing was known in India for a long time. Those who wanted to become religious leaders had to learn several scripts. In Jaina works like *Samavaya Sutra* and *Pragnapara Sutra* reference to 18 different scripts are available. Buddhist literary works like *Lalitavistara* and *Mahavastu* mention different types of scripts in vogue. Regarding the curricula of school students, the Chinese traveller *Hiuen Tsang* says that children began by learning the alphabet and then began the study of five subjects like grammar, arts and crafts, medicine, logic and philosophy. This was the general scheme of studies for laymen of all sects. Other subjects of study were law (dharmashastras), arithmetic, ethics, art and architecture (silpasastra), military science (dhanurvedya), performing arts, etc.

Vocational Education:

A majority of people earned their livelihood by following various professions. Ancient Indian literature refers to sixty-four arts which include weaving, dyeing, spinning, art of tanning leather, manufacture of boats, chariots, the art of training elephants and horses, art of making jewels, implements and equipment, art of dance, music, agriculture, building houses, sculpture, medical science, veterinary science, the profession of a chemist, manufacture of perfumes and a host of other professions. In the vocational system of education young men used to work as apprentices under a master for a number of years and gained expertise in their respective professions. The apprentices were taught free of cost and provided with boarding and lodging by the master.

Women Education:

Women were also permitted to receive education in Ancient India. In the *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad we get a reference to Gargi taking important part in the philosophical discussions. The Upanishads also mention several women taking as teachers. However, the women specialized in fine arts like dancing and singing, the accomplishments which were considered unfit for men. According to Dr. A. S. Altekar, "home of course, was the main centre of the education of girls in the domestic science. Women were taking part in every ritual with their husbands. Education of girls were looked after in the same way as that of the boy and many amongst them gained highest education. These were called 'brahman vadini' and achieved the status of 'rishika. Some of the woman were regarded as 'devis', women even composed hymns. Apala, Homasha, Shashpati, Ghoshla, Mamata, Lopamudra were notable among vedic scholars."

Methods of Learning:

In ancient India close relationship existed between the pupil and the teacher. The teacher used to pay individual attention on his students and used to teach them according to their aptitude and capability. Knowledge was imparted orally and the different methods of learning were-

Memorization– The preliminary stage of learning was learning by heart the sacred text through indefinite repetition and rehearsal by both the teacher and the taught.

Critical Analysis– This was another method in which knowledge was comprehended. It was through critical analysis that Sri Ramanuja and Sri Madhvacharya differed from their teachers on the interpretation of the *Brahmasutra* composed by Sri Shankara and later came out with their own interpretation of the *Brahmasutra*. Madhvacharya even made his teacher subscribe to his view which shows that gurus were open to new ideas and views articulated by their students.

Introspection– Sravana (listening), Manana (contemplation) and Nididhyasana (concentrated contemplation) of the truth so as to realize it was another method to study Brahma Vidya (Vedanta).

Story telling– The teacher used stories and parables to explain. This was the method Buddha used to explain his doctrines.

Question and Answer method– In this method the pupils used to ask questions and the teacher used to discuss at length on the topics and clear their doubts.

Hands-on method– For professional courses including medical science, students/apprentices used to learn by observation and through practical method.

Seminars– The students also gained knowledge thought debates and discussions which were held at frequent intervals.

Period of Study: It took 12 years to master one Veda. Hence depending upon the wish of the student to learn as many subjects, the period of study varied. It was 12 years, 24 years, 36 years or 48 years. A graduate was called Snataka and the graduation ceremony was called Samavartana.

Evaluation: Being built into the total teaching-learning process as an integral part, the ancient Indian system of judging student abilities was comprehensive as compared to being segmental, flexible as compared to being rigid, pupil centric as compared to being system centric. Evaluation was based on the overall performance and ability of the students to deal with the difficulties in day to day life. It was not the one time examination system like modern times wherein students simply memorize the content without understanding the core concept and appear in the examination to score good marks. In ancient times those who used to teach also used to test. Evaluation used to be, thus, based upon its judgements on the basis of the focused observation of the day-to-day progress and behaviour of the students, which was monitored in its varied ramifications. The judgements, though subjective, were most certainly valid and reliable. No doubt, these were informal evaluations but surely more authentic than the formal ones. The teacher was trusted and treated with respect and his assessment was honoured by everybody.

Conclusion:

The ideal of education has been very grand, noble and high in ancient India. Its aim, according to Herbert Spencer is the 'training for completeness of life' and the moulding of character of men and women for the battle of life. The history of the educational institutions in ancient India shows how old is her cultural history. It points to a long history. The realization of the ultimate reality was the ideal of India. Material progress was never the end in itself but was considered as a means to the realization of the end. The aim of education was not only material progress but also spiritual growth. The curriculum, methodology and system of evaluation were based on the philosophy of ideal life. The main focus was to develop the inner qualities of a student in order to make him a responsible individual of the society.

British Sanskrit scholar Arthur Anthony Macdonell (1854-1930) says, *Some hundreds of years must have been needed for all that is found in her (India's) culture. The aim of education was at the manifestation of the divinity in men, it touches the highest point of knowledge. In order to attain the goal the whole educational method is based on plain living and high thinking pursued through eternity*

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