

INDIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE VEDIC PERIOD

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Abstract

The aims of Indian Education were initially laid down by the Vedas. According to Vedic worldview, the world is pervaded by divinity and the aim of every living being is to achieve liberation. Thus, according to the Vedas, the aim of education is liberation. According to a famous statement, that is knowledge which gives liberation. Therefore, A.S. Altekar has rightly pointed out, the knowledge is the third eye of man, who gives him insight into all affairs and teaches him how to act. In the spiritual sphere, it leads to our salvation, in the mundane sphere; it leads to all-round progress and prosperity. The illumination given to us by education swatters illusions removes difficulties and enables us to realize the true values of life. The cause of liberation and bondage, according to Vedic thinkers is the mind or chital. Therefore, liberation is possible only through the control of the mind. The Indian philosophers developed a whole technique for the control of the mind. The equanimity of the mind leads to self-realization. The Vedic axiology does not distinguish between the social and the individual values since according to it both are part of fundamental universal values.

Keywords: Vedas, Indian philosophers, Upanishads, Vedic Rishis, Parishades, Vidyas

The ancient Indian education was even more developed by the Upanishads. While in the field of religion the Upanishads were more introverts and monistic, they continue the tradition of the Vedas. According to ancient Indian philosophy, knowledge may be gained by three steps, Shravana or hearing, Manana or meditation and nididhyasana or realization. Shravana or hearing is further categories into six types: (a) upakrama, a formal ceremony performed preceding the study of Veda, (b) abhyasa, recitation of the texts, (c) apurvata, a ready grasp of the meaning, (d) Palau, a comprehension of the outcome, (e) arthavada, the reading elucidatory books and (f) appetite, attainment of final conclusion. Education in ancient India was from any external control like the State or Government or any party politics. It was one of the king's duties to see that the learned Pundits pursued their studies and their duty of imparting knowledge without interference from any source whatever. So also education did not suffer from any communal interest or prejudices in India. There were agencies of education. This, as the name indicates, was the family of the teacher and his residence where the students used to stay during the period of study. Gradually, the Gurukul as was extended to include a number of buildings. However, the institution was built up around the family of the teacher. The primary duty of the student was to serve the teacher and his family. The students were like the sons of the teacher and the whole institution lived like a family. These were bigger educational institutions where several teachers used to teach different subjects. This may be compared to a college. Sammelan literally means getting together for a particular purpose. In this type of educational institutions, scholars gathered at one place for discussions and competitions generally at the invitation of the king. The Vedic system of education very much emphasized the importance of discipline in the attainment of knowledge. This, however easy self-discipline In fact, it was self-control which was realized by the observance of the rules of the Brahmacharya ashram. The Parishades or the local academies were initiated by the king. Therefore, the scholars and the aspirants of knowledge gathered at the Parishades with a perfect academic order. There was hardly any need for insisting upon rules and regulations as these were laid down by the scriptures. No one questioned the scripture's command concerning discipline. Therefore, discipline was self-imposed as a part of self-culture. Vedic Rishis spread the knowledge not only in India but in the whole world. They brought the humanity from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge throughout the world. The Indian education system is the

oldest in the world. It had peculiarities which were not found anywhere else in the world. In Chandogya Upanishad Narada told Sanatkumara, "I have read all the 'Vidyas'. He had counted them in these words, I read Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and fifth the Itihases and Puranas, which is Veda of Vedas". Thus the Vedas are the oldest texts available in the world that are the creations of Indian Rishis. Beyond doubt, education started first in India. The traditions of earning knowledge were in existence even in the Vedic-age. Following were the aims of Vedic education.

The literature and culture of ancient India were mostly the means of preaching religion. Religion was predominant in every sphere of life. So it may be said, that ancient India was built up in religious much more than in political, economic and social fields. The ancient Indian literature was the vehicle of religions. As has been observed by MacDonell, "since the birth of the oldest Vedic poetry we find Indian literature for a period of more than a thousand years bearing an exclusively religious stamp, i.e., even those latest productions of the Vedic age which cannot be called religious, are yet meant to further religious ends. This is, indeed, implied by the term Vedic, for Veda primarily signifying knowledge designates "sacred lore as a branch of literature". Even the literature which was not purely religious had the trend or religious publicity. The ancient Indian education system also developed on the same line. In India, the knowledge was not gained only for the sake of knowledge, but it was a means of gaining 'salvation' (Moksha). To quote R.K. Mookerjee, "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 salvation or self-realization, as the means of the highest end of life, viz., Mukti or emancipation". Indeed the ultimate aim of human society of that age was the achievement of absolute (Brahma), which he himself is, and it was recognized that the entire visible world is fully pervaded with the absolute (Brahma).

It is said that the difference between soul and Absolute is false, it is based on ignorance. A man should engage in karmopasana i.e., worship of work and thus purifies his inner senses and attain the 'Absolute'. The welfare of the soul is possible only when the oneness of soul and Absolute is achieved. The ignorance of factuality of Absolute with soul and the world is illiteracy. The scholars say that the soul, thought an integral part of the Absolute, has forgotten the whole, i.e., Absolute bad so it has to be born and die in the world. It is a bondage which cannot be unfastened without full self-realization and oneness with the Absolute. The souls of all the animate Beings come into this world, to face the consequences of their good or bad deeds. The souls forget the Absolute, due to ignorance and illiteracy and so it thinks it as one who is neither born or dies and suffers the miseries. The 'Upanishads' teaches the way of 'Salvation' and oneness with Absolute by the destruction of ignorance, which is the cause of all worldly sufferings. They say that only the Absolute is true, and the whole world is false.

It should also be remembered that according to ancient Indian Education it is the realization of Brahma in the material world. Material type of knowledge pollutes the soul and thus it forgets its real form. This is the reason that physical knowledge has been called ignorance, which diverts the soul away from the real knowledge of the Absolute. Real knowledge is possible only with 'inner meditation' and 'self-realization'. This knowledge should be heard from the Guru and then it should be meditated over through Nididhyasan. The enlightenment of soul is the way of gaining real knowledge. Thus, finally being set up in his form of self-realization, man realizes the Absolute and achieves Mukti or Salvation.

It has been said, "If we really think cool-mindedly, then we find this as the ultimate aim of human life and it is the consequence of the real education. Lord Krishna himself said, "I am the spiritual knowledge of all the knowledge". The knowledge had been taught by the Upanishads, Mundak Upanishad says, "Ultimate knowledge is that only, which enables one to realize the absolute. Being acquainted with the absolute, the soul gets rid of all the worldly sufferings, even the sufferings of taking birth and undergoing death. Various Upanishads have declared their aims in different 'sutras'. Thus, the central ideas of all the Vedic teachings were to follow the action approved by Shasta's in the world of duties. The development of Vedic Education was based on an organized and thought out the scheme with a message of humanity. They were the sources of real education and culture which enabled the proper development of the humanity. This was the condition of Indian Education in the age when other parts of the world

were unable to even to pronounce the letters and words. Vedic literature includes the Vedic Samhitas Brahmanas and Aranyakas (Upanishad) but while considering the Vedic education, it is proper to think over the Vedas only. In his "Discovery of India", Jawaharlal Nehru said, "the Rig Veda, the first of the Vedas is probably the earliest book that humanity possesses." The period of Vedic age is now fully recognized by the scholars as about 1500B.C. In 600 B.C. The literal meaning of 'Veda' is the knowledge and the world is derived from the root 'Vid' meaning 'to know'. Thus, 'Veda' means the knowledge of various types. Vedas are composed in verses, but some portion of it is written in prose also. Knowledge of Aryan culture is stored in them. The Vedic prose is called 'Yajush', the verse is called 'Richa' or 'Rita' and melodious verse is called 'Sama'. Due to these varieties, they are called three Vedas i.e., Vedtrayee. Riches and saunas are also called 'Sooktas' meaning fine expression. No doubt, they are full of such fine expression. It is said that the Vedas were written in ancient times, and they were traditionally inherited by disciples and also by sons from their teachers (gurus) and fathers. Thus, they were preserved orally. Later on, during the epic age, they were compiled and confined by Veda-Vyasa. He compiled four 'Samhitas' Viz., Rigveda Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda.

The earliest among them is Rigveda consisting of 1017 'skates and 11 Balkhilyas. By concluding these numbers become 1028. The Rigveda is divided into 10 mandalas and the name of Rishi and gods is also given with every sukta. The general meaning of Rishi is 'mantradrasha'. The seers of hymns were chosen who realized the seams of hymns. Vedic Gods mean the God who was worshipped along with those particular hymns. The most important amongst the 'Rishis of Rigveda' are. Gritsamda, Vishwamitra, Vamadeva, Attri, Bharadwaja, Vashishtha, Manu, Aushinar, Madhuchandra, etc amongst the 'Rishis' of 'Vedas', there were some women too, amongst whom Lopamudra is famous.

Yajur Veda: The two branches of 'Yajur Veda' namely 'Shukla Yajur Veda' and 'Krishna Yajur Veda' are available at present. 'Shukla Yajur Veda' is also called 'Vajsaneyee Samhita' having two branches as 'Kanva and Madhyandhiya'. Krishna Yajurveda has its four branches as 'Katha Samhita' 'Kaspsthal Samhita, 'Maitreyee Samhita' and 'Taittiriya Samhita'. Due to the variety of the branches, there are some differences in the hymns, even though; they are compiled separately in the performance of various rituals. The last pertain of 'Yajurveda' is 'ishopanished' which is related to spiritual meditation instead of performance of the rituals.

Sama Veda: Though 'Puranas' speaks of one thousand branches of 'Samaveda' but at present only three 'Custom Shanarniya' and 'Jaimini' are available. Modern scholars recognized the 'Kauthum' branch as more current and reliable. The two parts of 'Samaveda' namely, 'Architaka' and 'Uttarachitaks' have 1,810 hymns, but many of them are repeated and 1,947 hymns are found in 'Rigveda', also 'Samaveda' has only 75 hymns of its own. Possibly only those hymns were separately complied with 'Sama Veda' which was sung.

Atharva Veda: 'Atharva Veda' has 'Shaunak' and 'Pipalad' as two branches in which 'Shaunak' is considered famous and reliable. It has 20 chapters and 731 Suktas and hymns numbering 6,000 but many of them are found even in Rigveda. During the Vedic age "education is the source of knowledge which shows the real way in the various fields of life". This is approved by the Rigveda state. "If anyone is greater than the other that does not mean that he has extra bodily organs. But he is great because his intellect and mind has become enlightened and completed by real education". The educational system of Vedic age aimed at the proper and all-round development of humanity. Vedic Education was carried on verbally by two methods. (i) The Rig Vedic hymns were composed and (ii) those hymns were preserved. The first was based on the inward meditation, which enabled the formation of the hymns and the second was based on the outward learning method, which enabled the presentation of those hymns. The Rishis, who brought the hymns in spiritual being, were enlightened with the inner light and eternal knowledge. In the Vedic age, were recognized as 'Deva'. In Rig Veda, Acharya guru, is called 'Agnipracheta' which means especially learned. From the very beginning, there was two forms of Vedic education: (i) verbal self-study, (ii) meditation. Vedic hymns were preserved for hundreds of years in the form of threats. Vedic Rishis used to cause their sons and grandson learning hymns by heart. The families of the Rishis were the pathshalas were their sons and grandsons studied. The shape and form of the rituals developed gradually and various methods and systems were introduced,

resulting in the admission of other children also as disciples. These were considered as well as their sons. This spiritual education was aided by the ideal background of practical knowledge. The Vedic system of education was psychological. Verbal education was imported in such a way that it could be preserved for thousands of years. In his book, A Survey of Indian history, K.M. Karr said, A unique degree of verbal authority has been maintained up to this time in the form of the utterances and the 'mantras' of the sacred texts'. The hymns were learned by remembering and they were realized through meditation. The 'Acharya' used to produce the hymns correctly and the students repeated them. Their mistakes were corrected. The sound (Dhvani), words (Shabda) and verses (Chanda) were pronounced in their original form. Practice made them perfect, not only in learning the hymns but also in the systematic line of learning.

The hymns were learned outwardly by remembering and they were realized through meditation and realization. Therefore, the 'Acharya' used to produce the hymns quite correctly and the student repeated them. Side by side their mistakes were also corrected. As the education was based on a settled line, so the sound (Dhavani), words (Shabda) and verses (Chanda) were pronounced in their original form, and the practice made them perfectly efficient, not only in learning the hymns but also in the systematic line of learning. To keep the hymns entirely correct the 'Samhita path', Jay-path and 'Ghan-path' was practiced. Moreover, there are 52 'Dhavanis' (sound), 13 vowels and 39 consonants and the correct pronunciation of all these were attained duly. 'Atria Brahman' describes the three methods of pronunciation as three words, double words and gradual pronunciations. The general belief of the people in Vedic age was that the incorrect pronunciation of the hymns caused the sin and destroyed their effect. An ordinary alternation of sound or accent alters the actual meaning. 'Panini Siksha' says that in the sacrifices (yajana) of Indra or killing Vritrasur, the sound of the hymns was incorrectly pronounced which resulted adversely. Thus, due to this settled system of learning of Vedic hymns orally, the 'Mantras' are still found in their unaltered and original form. The word 'Mantra' means born of meditation. Thus, meditation helped preserve the meanings of the 'Mantras' and development of the sound of the disciple. The disciple tried to understand the sense and the echo of the scene by meditation of every word of the hymn and thus realized the spiritual elements and their experience. There were such students also, who remembered the hymns by hearing only once and they were called 'Shrutdhars' and they hymn says that 'I had met such people by myself'. This was the students spent regulated and royal life in which they kept their sense diverted away from worldly attraction and concentrated on the ultimate knowledge of the Absolute. Thus, they realized the real light of the spiritual knowledge of the Absolute. Being enlightened they entered the society as the Guru of the people.

In Vedic education, meaningless outwardly knowledge has been condemned and a person having meaningless outwardly knowledge has been compared with the donkey loaded with Sandalwood. The mere cramming of Vedic texts has been condemned as Aryak by the Rig-Veda. It is true that to maintain the meditative system well, the meritorious students were taught in this system. The courses of study in Vedic period were not limited to religion only. The disciples were also taught the grammar. Generally the study of Shiksha, Kalpa, Vyakaran, Jyotis, Chanda and Nirukt etc Were taught in the Vedic period Besides, logic was also taught and with its assistance the knowledge of true religion was also taught in those days. It was an organization where meritorious students were given chances to fulfill their quest of higher knowledge. These Sanghs may be compared to the seminars of the modern times as they had all the qualities of these seminars. The education was free to everyone. There is mention of such families in which the father is Vaishya, the son Vedic poet, and the mother is a laborer doing the grinding. Thus, it is clear that the members of all the castes were free to gain higher education and this statement is supported even by Yajurveda. Similarly, there is also evidence in the Rig Veda that many Rishis of the Rig Veda were Kshathriyas and Ambreesh, Trasadasyu and aswamediha, etc. Composer of Attareya Brahman, Mahidas was the son of a Sudra mother. In short all the castes were eligible for gaining an education in the Vedic period. Home, of course, was the main center of education of girls in the domestic science. Women were taking part in every ritual with their husbands. Education of girls was looked after in the same way as that of the boys and many amongst them gained higher

education. These were called 'Brahman Vadini' and achieved the status of 'Rishika'. Some of the women were regarded as 'Devis'. Women even composed hymns. Apulia, Homasha, Shashpati, Choshala, Mamata, Lopamudra were notable among Vedic scholars. Women were given practical and useful education, such as spinning, weaving, etc. This is mentioned in Rig Veda and Atharva Veda. The word Duhita used for daughter is derived from a root word 'Duk' which means one who the cows. It shows that in the Vedic age, women were milking the cows, too. Thus, it is clear that women were given 'shastriya' as well as practical education.

A most wonderful thing we notice in India is that the forests, not the town are the fountain of all its cultures. In those days the wards were sent to 'gurukuls' or the homes of the 'Acharyas' for education, just after the 'Upanayana' ritual. There they led the life of chastity and purity, served the Acharya and gained knowledge. Naturally, such a man acquired many qualifications of the teacher. Only Brahmacharis were allowed in 'Gurukuls'. The Gurukuls were fully free from the government control and influence, therefore they are fulfilling their aims. The Gurukuls system which necessitated the stay of the student away from his home of the teacher or in boarding houses of established reputation was one of the most important features of ancient Indian education. Teachers of the Vedic age were men of the highest caliber in society from the point of knowledge and spiritual progress. They possessed the influence of fire (Agni) and chivalry like 'Indra'. Naturally, they maintained generally reputation. Living in their 'Ashramas' they always paid attention to the proper and spiritual development of their thoughts. They kept them like their sons and managed for their footing and lodging and helped them in need. Thus, every responsibility of the taught was on 'Gurus', who always tried to develop the qualities of his, taught us that he might become higher than himself.

Following were the duties of the students who lived in Gurukula. (a) A student had to do the service of the 'Guru' and necessary jobs of the 'Gurukula'. He had to keep the 'Gurukula' tidy. He also prepared the necessities for the rituals (Yajnas) and grazed the cows of the 'Gurus'. (b) He had to go out for alms. This created the spirit of meekness and generosity in them. (c) Living in 'Gurukulas' the students slept on the ground, took simple food and obeyed the 'Guru' in all respects. (d) His main duty was to study and they very gently learned and attended to the instructions of the 'Guru'. Thus, it is clear that while living in 'Gurukula' the student life was an ideal student, a simple and well-regulated life. On Vedic age, the relation between the Guru and the Shishyas was just like that of father and son. 'Guru', very affectionately looked after he taught'. He never let them suffer in any way and always tried for their all-round development and the students also tried to satisfy the teacher and so far as possible did not give any ground for displeasure to him. Ancient Indians were convinced that no good result could follow if education is begun late in life, therefore, they insisted that education ought to commence in childhood. In Vedic period education started in early life. They thought it necessary to begin the education in early age, for the full development of inner and outer talents of the students. Perfection education the full knowledge of the particular subject was aimed at after the general knowledge of various needful subjects.

Education was meant to be a religious initiation. The teacher had to teach the pupil how to pray, to offer sacrifice, to perform his duties according to his stage of life. Indian education was essentially religious and personal. Ancient education was dominated by religion. The courses of study were mostly related to religion, aiming at the generation of kindness, forgiveness, perseverance, nobleness, etc. in students. The vedic teacher thought that if the students would learn good habits from their early life, their future would be peaceful and happy. The regulated daily routine was considered essential for the cultivation of good habits. They had to get up early in the morning, perform the daily rituals, spread the truth, live simply and behave properly within everyone. The Vedic education system was psychological. Two systems were encouraged in that are verbal and meditative. The teacher and taught were both sincere. Students put forward their doubts before the teacher who tried to remove them as well. Side by side, self-study, and meditation was also encouraged so that the students might realize the meaning and the sense of the lesson. 'Samavartan' rituals were performed at the completion of education. It was more or less like the convocation of the universities. The education of women received proper attention in the Vedic age. Women became Rishikas. The composed hymns they used to take part in religious

rituals. They were also taught practical and useful handicrafts and household duties. Conclude the aim of 'Vedic' education was lofty. It aimed at providing full opportunities for the development of human traits to enable students to get full opportunities to develop themselves. Thus, Vedic education was fully capable of character-building, development of various branches of knowledge and leading to social and economic prosperity.

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