



"Origin and History of Value Education in India: Understanding the Ancient Indian Educational system"

KEYWORDS

Ancient Indian Education, Vedic period, Guru, shishya, Gurukulas, Value Education

Sampurna Guha

Research Scholar, Faculty of Disability Management and Special Education, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Coimbatore-641020

Dr. Sudha.A

Asst. Prof. Department of Mental Retardation, Faculty of Disability Management and Special Education, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Coimbatore-641020

ABSTRACT

Contemporary educational system serves the intellect alone, while the ancient Indian education during the Vedic period laid emphasis on the all round development of the shishya. The aim of receiving education was not mere learning of knowledge or becoming proficient in certain skills for vocational efficiency; rather it was aimed at man making and character building education catering to the nurturing of the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual planes of the pupils. The inculcation of civic and social duties, promotion of social efficiency, spread of religious preachings and maintenance of culture may be described as the chief aims of Vedic education in ancient India. The present study aims to "understand the origin of value education in India", tracing it back to the educational systems prevalent in ancient times, subjects taught, role of the Guru and the various approaches used to inculcate good values among pupils, in the Gurukulas.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of education should be man making, character building and nation building (Sw. Vivekananda). Revisiting the ancient Indian educational system exposes us to the Vedic system of education, which is having 'emancipation' as its cherished goal – *sa vidya ya vimuktaye* (Mukhopadhyay, 2004). The inculcation of civic and social duties, promotion of social efficiency, preservation national culture and spread of religious preachings may be described as the chief aims of education in ancient India (Altekar, 1944). According to Vedanta, ignorance is of two kinds- *tulavidya* (empirical ignorance) and *mulavidya* (causal ignorance). Learning removes the first one and brings knowledge of empirical objects; while the removal of causal ignorance opens the door to Self-knowledge, leading to the manifestation of our inherent divinity, or consciousness (Sw. Prabhānanda, 2007). Such a type of education, which helps the pupils to realize the true goal of learning and knowledge – 'Self Realization', the realization of oneness with *Brahman*, was the very essence of Vedic Education. *Gurukula* stands at the very core of the ancient Indian educational system, with the Guru as the preceptor of knowledge who loved and looked after the pupils as his own sons. The pupils also known as *shishyas* stayed in the residence of the *Guru*, looking after the cleanliness of the surroundings, learning the Vedas and at the same time serving the *Guru* as their own father. 'School was home and home was school', thus the *Gurukulas* served as centers of learning as well as residence, acting as windows of life at home and learning, assisting in the process of character building for the pupils by giving rise to the feelings of sharing, caring and holistic development.

The Vedic Period: The term *Veda* = 'knowledge', originated from the word *vid* = (root), to know (Bhatnagar and Mullick, 2008), thus it means to have knowledge, which is composed in verses (*Yajush*). The main aim of education during this period was self realization or realization of the *Brahman*, of which the self or the *Atman* is just a part and salvation by removal of ignorance through religious preachings. This period is marked with the extensive

spread of moral and value education. *Gurukula's*, *Rishikula's* and Vedic schools were the centers of learning and imparting education.

Major objectives and ideals of Vedic Education: In the ancient Indian educational system, education was considered as the real way to show the path in various fields of life, leading to all round development of man (Bhatnagar, 2008). According to the *Rigveda*, "If anyone is greater than the other, does not mean that he has extra bodily organs, but he is great because his intellect and mind have become enlightened and completed by real education." The main ideals of ancient Indian education which promoted development of values among pupils, according to Altekar, 1944 were:

Infusion of religious piety and religiousness: In ancient India, teachers were priests and Vedic *Rishis* (seers). Students had to perform various religious practices (*vratas*) and *yajnas* like *Upanayana* ceremony, daily prayers etc which helped to infuse faith in God and established routine leading to self discipline. Celebrations of festivals, led to infusion of religious piety which helped to infuse good spiritual ideals that in turn promoted development of good moral conduct.

Formation of character: the second ideal of education was development of proper moral character and feeling. It is a belief in India, that when a man receives education, his regard for morality needs to be strengthened and his control over the mind needs to be perfected, thus helping man to control his original animal nature and develop an ideal nature through moral feeling. The importance given to character development in ancient Indian educational system can be understood by reflecting on these lines as stated in Manu, II.118, (as cited by Altekar, 1944) : *सावत्स्रीमात्रसारेण वरं वपिः सुयत्नतः। मायंत्तिसुत्रविदोपिः सर्वाशी सर्ववकिर्यी।।* the meaning that the Vedas are held as being revealed, thus their preservation through learning and memorization was considered as a matter of national importance, yet it was a belief that a person of good character with a mere

smattering of Vedic knowledge was to be preferred to a scholar, who though well versed in Vedas, is impure in his life, through habits and thoughts.

Spiritual goal of education: Knowledge was considered to be of two kinds- *Para Vidya* and *Apara Vidya*. *Apara Vidya* dealt with the material aspect of education and the *Para Vidya* dealt with knowledge related to intellectual pursuits for achieving salvation and self realization. Thus overall development of the pupils took place, in form of spiritual emancipation, moral, spiritual and character development, under the guidance of the *Guru*, thus helping one to realize the identity of the *Atman* (individual soul) and *Brahman* (universal soul) (Bhatnagar, 2008).

Moral goal of education: It aimed at promoting understanding of the moral values of life, helping one realize eternal values like truth, non-violence, beauty, goodness.

All round development of students: Stress was laid on the development of a healthy attitude and dignity of labor among the students. The pupils depended on oral learning (*shruti*) as the mode of instruction, with careful attention paid to the correct pronunciation and commitment to memory, leading to intellectual emancipation. Attention was paid to- sound (*dhvani*), words (*shabda*) and verses (*chanda*) (Bhatnagar, 2008). Subjects taught to cater to the overall development of the pupil consisted of learning of the three Vedas (Rigveda, Yajurveda and Samaveda) and eighteen practical sciences, like military sciences, archery, medicine, astrology, astronomy, accountancy, commerce, agriculture, magic, arts, dance, music, snake charming among others depending on the caste and *gotra* of the student (Altekar, 1944).

"The tree of education ought to flower in wisdom, in knowledge as well as in manners"- Altekar

Approaches towards development of character in the ancient Indian educational system:

- Daily religious worship or prayer
- Serving the preceptor/ *Guru* as one's own father
-
- Listening to the *Vedic mantrams* transmitted orally by the *Guru*, with great attention, memorizing them, and meditating on the inner meaning. (The word *mantram* means "born of meditation")
- Enforcement of strict discipline and routine in *Gurukulas*
- Strict emphasis on following *Brahmacharyashrama* by all pupils (the term *Brahmacharya* means 'abstention from sex', but derivatively means a life spent in realizing *Brahma* (God) with the mode of living activities in harmony with His ways (Mukhopadhyay, 2004)
- Developing a sense of duty for the welfare of all, the *Guru*, fellow students, birds and animals by following the example led by the teacher

Duties of *shishya*: The duties performed by the pupils ranged from (Bhatnagar & Mullick, 2008):

- Serving the *Guru* as one's own father
- Keeping the *Gurukula* neat and clean
- Collecting firewood, fuel for cooking
- Begging for alms
- Sharing and caring for fellow pupils/ peers
- Taking simple food (*sattvic food*)
- Being truthful, caring by nature

The pupils were instilled with the values of truthfulness,

brotherhood and compassion towards all. They were taught that 'human beings are all leaves of one tree- a universal tree' (Sw. Prabhananda, 2007). This prompted them to care, share and behave in a good manner with all living beings. The teacher instilled such values in the students through his own action. Much stress was laid on the cultivation of truthfulness, as being truthful is a sterling quality, and is the very foundation of our ethical and spiritual life. The *shishyas* were taught that a practitioner of truth must be constantly alert to ensure harmony between thought, speech, and behavior. And to manifest such truthfulness, one needs courage, strong determination, indomitable will power and unflinching perseverance (Sw. Prabhananda, 2007). According to the *Aitareya Upanishad*: *Om! May my speech be based on (accord with) the mind; may my mind be based on speech. O Self-fulgent One, reveal Thyself to me. May you both (speech and mind) be the carriers of the Veda to me. May not all that I have heard depart from me. I shall join together (obliterate the difference of) day and night through this study. I shall utter what is verbally true; I shall utter what is mentally true. May That (Brahman) protect me; may That protect the speaker (i.e. teacher); may That protect me; may That protect the speaker, may That protect the speaker.*

Om! Peace! Peace! Peace!

Hence our ancient Indian educational system catered to the development of all round personality of the pupil by imparting the knowledge contained in the *shastras*, scriptures, Vedas and experiences of daily life, which were further based on the fundamental aspects of reverence, faith and guidance of the *Guru*, constituting the three pillars of educational foundation (Mukhopadhyay, 2004).

Role of the Teacher: Sanskrit term for the teacher is *Guru*, the remover of ignorance, the giver of knowledge. The etymological meaning of the term *Guru* is one who can remove (*ru*) darkness of nescience/ignorance (*gu*). It is a general belief that 'values are caught and not taught', hence students follow what the teacher does, so the teacher must practice what he preaches, teachers have to build their own character and then help others to build their character (Sw. Nikhileshwarananda, 2014).

Centers of learning in the Vedic Period: Education was provided in *gurukulas*, *rishikulas*, *viharas*, *ashramas*, cottages of the preceptors.

Lifestyle of students: The *shishya's* followed *Brahmacharya*, took simple and pious food, learnt to serve the *Guru*, looked after the needs of self and others, performed cooking, cleaning and other daily living skills apart from practicing specialized arts like archery and weaponry among others. They lived with their *guru* in the same *ashrama* and looked upon him as their own father.

CONCLUSION

India has long been known as the land of spirituality. Religion, philosophy, and spirituality in the Indian tradition have always been an integral part of the ancient Indian education system. The Vedic educational system viewed 'learning to be and become' as one long continuing process, unlike the modern western educational system which promotes one dimensional growth of man and leads to erosion of values due to its lack of ideal. Hence Value education should be made an integral part of modern day educational system so as to meet the demands of the changing times without losing on values and virtues, which have been a part of Indian nation since times immemorial.

REFERENCES

1. Altekar, A.S. (1944). *Education in Ancient India*. Benares: Nand Kishore & Brothers
2. Bhatnagar, S.& Mullick, M.(2008). *Development of Educational System in India*. Meerut: R. Lall Book Depot.
3. Disha.(2011).Development of Education during Vedic Period in India. Accessed from: <http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/education/development-of-education-during-vedic-period-in-india/44815/> on 30-1-15
4. Sw. Gambhirananda (Translator).(2000). *Eight Upanishads- with the Commentary of Shankaracharya*.(Vol.-2). Calcutta - Advaita Ashrama
5. Kumar, H.(2008). Essentials for Value Education. Indian Journal of Science and Technology, 1(5). Accessed from www.indjst.org on 5-5-15
6. Mukhopadhyay, M. (2004). *Ancient Indian Education*. Delhi: Shipra Publications
7. Swami Prabhananda.(2007). *Spiritual Values to Live By*. Kolkatta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture
8. Swami Nikhileshwarananda.(2014). *Teacher: As a torchbearer of change*. Advaita Ashrama
9. Swami Vivekananda. *Education*. Compiled from the speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda by Avinashilingam, T.S. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math