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REVIVING VEDIC KNOWLEDGE FOR 21st CENTURY CHALLENGES

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Abstract

A closer look at the world around us reveals that in this 21st century, mankind is facing various challenges, ranging from individual mental crises to environmental crises and ethical value degradation to social inequality. For all these unprecedented challenges, the wisdom of Veda can illuminate our path towards a sustainable life and harmonious evolution of mankind. Vedic teaching focuses on holistic living, sustainable practice, and society with ethics and values. This study highlights the role of education in reviving Vedic knowledge for developing a healthy society. Through educational institutions, Vedic knowledge can be integrated with the contemporary curriculum that will foster a sense of moral responsibility and values in young minds. A case study was conducted on Viswatma Vidyamandir, a school situated in the Balangir district of Odisha, that integrates Vedic knowledge into its curriculum with modern pedagogical practice which imparts experiential learning for students that not only enriches the educational experience but also inculcates a sense of purpose in the young learner. The physical, mental, psychological, scientific, and spiritual development of students is the basic approach of this Vidya mandir. Objectives of the study are (i) to explore the integration of Vedic knowledge within the modern education system to address contemporary challenges (ii) to analyze its impact on students and the community, and (iii) to find out the challenges in integrating Vedic knowledge within a contemporary educational framework. The findings of the study indicate that the revival of Vedic knowledge fosters a sense of responsibility and ethical awareness in students. It encourages the students to realize their duty towards the community and nation. Although the institution faces various challenges but still, it able to shape its students into responsible citizens who can lead a harmonious society. By reconnecting with the ancient teachings, society can cultivate holistic living as well as sustainable practices which make a great impact on not only the development of individuals but also the whole society. This study calls for a concerted effort to integrate Vedic knowledge into contemporary practices, ensuring its relevance and vitality for future generations.

Keywords: Vedic knowledge, sustainable practice, holistic development, 21st century challenges.

Introduction

Nowadays human beings face several problems ranging from individual to global and climate to environment. The challenges are mental health crises, moral value degradation, social inequality, environmental degradation, global conflict, etc. For all these unprecedented challenges the Vedic wisdom can show a path towards a harmonious and sustainable life. The Vedic knowledge focuses on holistic living, sustainable practice, and society with ethics and values which can provide a roadmap for 21st-century challenges. Vedic knowledge is centered around the concepts of **Brahman** (the ultimate reality), **Atman** (the individual self), **Dharma** (moral law), and **Karma** (the law of action and consequence). Through various paths of Yoga and self-realization individual can develop an ideal being. Vedic wisdom is not just a system of spiritual teachings but a comprehensive worldview that encompasses ethics, values, and personal development. The goal of Vedic teachings is to lead individuals toward self-realization, understanding the nature of the universe, and living in harmony with the eternal truths.

This paper explores the revival of Vedic knowledge through a case study of the Viswatma Vidyamandir in Odisha, India, which embodies these principles in its educational practices and community outreach.

Historical Context of Vedic Education:

The Vedic era in India, approximately 1500-500 BCE, during which the Vedic education system flourished and marked the beginning of structured education. During this period education was not only for the acquisition of knowledge, and earning money rather it served the purpose of catalysed the spiritual and moral growth of human beings. The education system evolved as a societal need of the time, which valued wisdom, discipline, and culture as a true human being to lead a harmonious life. Not only for individuals, the Vedas were to educate humans to perform social and national responsibilities. Vedic education gives importance to practicing non-violence (Ahimsa), truth (Satya), and duty (Dharma). The education system that developed in our country in the Vedic period is the foundation stone of our modern system of education. Though the Vedic system of education was succeeded by Buddhist system of education, Muslim system of education and finally by the British system of education, yet directly or indirectly Vedic system of education remained in currency and is still continuing (S. S. Sengupta and T. Mondal, 2020). The Vedas are structured in four forms, covering different areas: **Rigveda** is the oldest Veda, consisting primarily of hymns to various deities. **Samaveda** is composed of melodies and chants, often used during sacrifices and rituals. **Yajurveda** contains formulas and rituals for conducting sacrifices, focusing on the practical aspects of worship. **Atharvaveda** includes hymns, incantations, and spells, covering a wide range of subjects, from healing to daily life.

NEP 2020 and Vedic education: As per NEP 2020, the new structure of the educational framework is a 5+3+3+4 model: five years of foundational education, three years of preparatory school, three years of middle school, and four years of secondary education. This restructuring is meant to foster experiential, and inquiry-based learning and integrate India's cultural heritage. Incorporation of Vedic wisdom into the curriculum can be a game changer for the education system of India, it will lead to a holistic and harmonious

society. the historical significance of Vedic education lies in its comprehensive approach to education that cultivates a healthy being, and balanced development of mind, body, and spirit.

Need of Vedic wisdom for 21st century: The 21st century is also known as the technology era where all beings are living in modernity and efficient enough to provide all goods for themselves. But in this era, human beings face various challenges from self to global. Nowadays most people suffer from mental health crises due to various reasons like an imbalance of work, relationships, and self. Ethical values like trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, and generosity are deteriorating in humans, the greatest challenge to resolve. Lack of patience and mental peace many young people easily get into deteriorated mental health which also leads to suicidal tendencies. Global conflict can result in the destruction of cities as well as the negative effect on the economy of that country. Environmental issues like global warming, pollution, and overuse of resources have a negative impact on human health. For every challenge we face, the only solution is education. An educational system's main objective should be to develop a person's character and shape their behaviour. Vedic education can impart those values and shape behaviour to face these challenges. The students are the main victims of all challenges around the world and they need to develop such values and personality to deal with those challenges. It only can be possible through Vedic wisdom which inculcates values like empathy, kindness, courage, leadership, and discipline, which helps them to adapt the challenging situations with dignity.

Vedic education originated in ancient India, emphasizing holistic development spiritually, intellectually, and socially. The Gurukul system allowed students to live with their teachers, engaging in rigorous study and moral training. This model fostered a deep connection to nature, community, and ethical living. However, with the advent of modern education, many traditional practices diminished. The revival of Vedic education is essential for reintroducing these values into contemporary society.

Objectives of the study are:

- (i) To explore the integration of Vedic knowledge within the modern education system to address contemporary challenges
- (ii) To analyze its impact on students and the community
- (iii) To find out the challenges in integrating Vedic knowledge within a contemporary educational framework.

Methodology

This study adopts a case study approach to explore the role of Vedic knowledge for 21st-century challenges. A qualitative case study design is chosen due to its ability to provide in-depth insight into the real phenomenon taken for study. The study focuses on a single case, Viswatma Vidyamandir which is relevant to addressing the role of Vedic knowledge for 21st-century challenges by integrating with the contemporary educational framework. Data analysis follows a thematic approach. interview and questionnaire data were transcribed into key themes.

The Vishwatma Vidya Mandir: A Case Study

Overview of the School-

The Vishwatma Vidya Mandir was established in 1995 by Swami Satyaprangyananda Saraswati. The school is based on the philosophy of Manurbhav, which is a brief but powerful hymn (sukta) from the Rig Veda that means 'Oh man, Be a Man'. The school is located in the Balangir district of Odisha. It offers a curriculum that includes Vedic knowledge and contemporary subjects such as math, science, social studies, languages, etc. The school provides education to all students irrespective of their socioeconomic background. The school provides residential as well as day boarding facilities to students.

The school is spread over 3 acres of land with a complete infrastructure that includes an academic building, an administrative building, a playground, hostel for boys. To attaining 21st-century skills the school provide information and communication knowledge and skill through computer classes. The school also develops a scientific attitude in students by providing them hands-on practice in the science laboratory. The school also has a Goshala which make the students realise the benefits and value of Goumata (Cow).

For holistic development of students, the school offers various curricular and co- curricular activities. The school is also rooted in culture, and evidenced by the celebration of various poojas like Saraswati puja, Ganesh puja, Guru Purnima, and many other festivals. To give a platform to encourage students talent the school organises annual function, annual sports.

Integration of Vedic knowledge into the school curriculum-

The school's curriculum is designed to promote holistic development of students to face the 21st century challenges:

- **Vedic wisdom:** Students study texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and Veda daily. Geeta recitation is one of the events of their prayer class. This class emphasizes values like compassion, integrity, and duty. Discussions encourage critical thinking and ethical reasoning. Recitation of mantra is in their everyday routine like morning prayer, meal time, before the classroom transaction, and bedtime which instills spirituality in students.
- **Holistic development:** Education is meant to promote holistic development in students. The school focuses on the holistic development of students through various activities like annual sports, annual functions, various co-curricular competitions, and celebrations of various days along with the prescribed curriculum.
- **Sustainable Agriculture:** The school gives the experience of organic farming rooted in Vedic principles, by engaging students (Shrama dan) in the kitchen garden to nurture the plants. This hands-on experience instills respect for nature, the dignity of labour, and sustainable practices.
- **Yoga and meditation:** The school includes yoga and Meditation for students as their daily routine. It promotes mental well-being, enhance concentration, and ideal physical health which helps to keep the students healthy in all aspects.

- **Ethical values-** The school inculcates ethical values in students by teaching them about kindness, empathy, equality and courage. Students also engage in discussion of ethical values and follow their teacher as role model. Teachers ensure that all students follow the rules set by the school to make their students disciplined.
- **Involvement of community:** The school organised many outreach programs like health camps, and plantations which involve the community to participating and realize the value of self-health as well as the environment. Besides this the school also involves the community by organising different meetings like parent-teacher meeting, matrusammilani etc.
- **National integrity:** The school celebrates all national days like Independence Day, Republic Day, and the anniversary of great leaders of the nation. These instill patriotism in students and realise their responsibility towards the nation.

Impact of integrated Vedic knowledge on students and community:

The Brahma Viswatma Vidyamandir has produced positive outcomes among its students:

- **Academic performance:** Students perform remarkably academically. They show a great proficiency in both the traditional and modern subjects. The academic achievement of students is significant and in later life, most of them hold a good position in different professions. The integration of Vedic knowledge enhances their understanding of ethical issues in contemporary contexts.
- **Mental health:** Regular Yoga and Meditation practice led to better mental health outcomes. Students report lower stress level and emotional resilience.
- **Ethical value:** The Vedic principles rely on ethical practices like empathy, honesty, discipline, generosity, respect for others, kindness etc. The daily practices and guidance of teacher enable to instill values in students. The 21st century faces a great challenge of value degradation but the integration of Vedic principles able to inculcate ethical values in students.
- **Sustainable practice and environmental awareness-** Teaching on environmental sustainability and respect for nature through various organic agricultural practices and awareness programs can develop a deep-rooted sense of environmental awareness and responsibility. This makes a generation of environmentally conscious citizens who are committed to save the nature and sustainable living practices.
- **Leadership and team spirit-** The emphasis on teamwork and community service develops leadership qualities and empathy in students. Many alumni actively contribute to their communities, applying Vedic principles in their careers and personal lives.

The school's outreach initiatives have significantly impacted the local community:

- **Health and wellness:** To provide free health check-ups the school organized health camps which improved the health outcomes of nearby communities. The awareness programs like rallies and street play also educate the surrounding people about nutrition and hygiene practices.
- **Environmental awareness-** The school's organic agricultural practices inspire many nearby people, and local farmers to adopt sustainable agricultural practices. Celebration of Banomahotsav by plantation inside as well as outside the school motivates local villagers to realize the value of nature and how to save the environment.
- **Social cohesion:** By conducting parent-teacher meeting, Matrusammilani, the school has fostered stronger community ties. Many events organised by the school such as Pravachan, celebration of the local festival (Nuakhai vet ghat) bring the students, teachers, parents, and villagers together to create a supportive network.

Challenges face by the school

Despite its successes, the Viswatma Vidyamandir school faces several challenges to integrating Vedic knowledge within a contemporary educational framework.

- **Cultural resistance-** Some community members are skeptical of Vedic education, they think that the conventional schooling method can shape their children to fit in modern society.
- **Influence of social media:** Day boarding students can experience social media besides the school time. The negative impact of social media disturbs the balanced mind of students and that influence fellow students.
- **Balancing Tradition and Modernity:** The school grapples with integrating Vedic teachings into a curriculum that also meets modern educational standards. Striking this balance is essential for the school's credibility and effectiveness.
- **Teacher training and expertise:** Traditional Vedic education often relies on oral transmission, and memorization (e.g., reciting mantras), which may differ significantly from modern teaching methods. Due to lack of training, teachers may not be able to give due justice to their task of imparting Vedic knowledge. Teachers may need to undergo special training to adapt Vedic methodologies to contemporary classrooms.
- **Technology integration:** In the age of quick learning Vedic knowledge can be practiced with deep submission of person and spirituality. In this digital age, students often prefer e-learning or learning through online mode. Integrating Vedic knowledge into e-learning tools could be a challenge. The Vedic knowledge is difficult to present in digital mode.
- **Secularism:** Vedic knowledge is closely related to Hindu philosophy, which might be difficult to accept by many secular people. They become resistant to integrating Vedic knowledge into the school system.

Discussion:

Reviving of Vedic wisdom in context of 21st century challenges present a opportunity to incient wisdom with a modern solution. This study has showcased the potential of Vedic knowledge to address contemporary challenges. The findings suggest that Vedic knowledge when appropriately adapted, can provide valuable insights for addressing critical global issues such as environmental sustainability, mental health, ethical governance, and holistic education. However, significant obstacles must be overcome in order to make this ancient knowledge relevant and accessible to contemporary society.

Vedic knowledge is not a return to the past, but it's a re-interpretation of ancient wisdom to illuminate our path to face modern challenges. Vedic knowledge is not a return to the past, but rather a re-interpretation and application of ancient wisdom in light of current challenges. Moving forward, scholars, educators, and policymakers must work collaboratively to bridge the gap between ancient and modern knowledge systems. Future research should focus on creating interdisciplinary models that blend Vedic philosophy with contemporary fields such as environmental science, psychology, and technology. Additionally, fostering a greater dialogue between Eastern and Western intellectual traditions could pave the way for more holistic approaches to education, governance, and global cooperation.

Conclusion:

The revival of Vedic knowledge through Viswatma Vidyamandir showcases how ancient wisdom can help human beings to face contemporary challenges. In 21st century all human beings need to be guided to live a harmonious and sustainable life. The school integrates Vedic principles into education to foster holistic development, and sustainable practices that lead to establishing a harmonious society. Despite various challenges, the school can develop physically, mentally, socially, psychologically, and spiritually sound students through the integration of Vedic principles in their school system. Not only students the school is also able to create a resilient, ethical, and harmonious community.

By reconnecting with the ancient teachings, society can cultivate holistic living as well as sustainable practices which make a great impact on not only the development of individuals but also the whole society. The future of education may well depend on our ability to draw from the past while innovatively addressing the needs of the present.

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