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ANCIENT EDUCATION SYSTEM OF INDIA AND ITS MODERN DAY RELEVANCE.

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ABSTRACT

The ancient education system of all civilizations has their own unique features and significance. The great thinkers, philosophers, saints and *rishies* framed the destiny of the civilizations in the ancient world by their great thoughts and logics. It is because of their contributions, mankind and humanism is possible in the world. Therefore the ancient education system still has its relevance in the present day. If we look at the different ancient civilizations, we find that vocational skills, strict discipline, physical education, developing moral and ethical values among the students were the main characteristics and objectives of the education system. The education system of Egypt aimed at producing vocationally skilled citizens. On the other hand the Spartan education system concentrates on physical education along with military and civic education as they had the necessity to prepare the citizens as soldiers so that they can fight courageously against their enemy.

Ancient Indian education had been evolved strictly on the foundations of Indian epistemological and philosophical traditions. The main aim of education was to equip the students with good quality of knowledge that enrich culture, character and personality. Therefore it includes the aspects like Self realization, Self discipline, Self control and character formation. Hence, it is an attempt to review the foundation and nature of the ancient Indian education system and its relevance in our present education system.

Keywords: Ancient, *rishes*, knowledge, Self realization, Self discipline.

INTRODUCTION: The ancient education system of all civilization has their own unique features and significance and they were gradually evolved and shaped by human beings. The great thinkers, philosophers, saints and *rishies* framed the destiny of the civilizations in the ancient world by their great thoughts and logics. It is because of their contributions, mankind and humanism is possible in the world. If we look at the different ancient civilizations, we find that vocational skills, strict discipline, physical education, developing moral and ethical values among the students were the main characteristics and objectives of the education system. For instance, the education system of Egypt aimed at producing vocationally skilled citizens. So, vocational skills including architecture, engineering and sculpture were learnt by the pupils. Moreover, strict discipline and rigid method of uniformity in cultural transmission to the students were the significant aspect of the education system. On the other hand, in the Spartan civilization, physical education was compulsory for both boys and girls. Military and civic education had an important place as they wanted to prepare the citizens as soldiers so that they can fight courageously against their enemy. The ancient education system of India concentrates on the growth of complete character of the students not merely the growth of his or her intellect. So it includes the aspects of Self realization, Self discipline, Self control and character formation. Therefore the ancient education system still has its relevance in the present day.

Ancient education: an overview

In ancient India formal schooling of the students began with a social ritual called the *Upanayana* or the thread ceremony. *Ashram* and *Gurukul* were the places where education was imparted to the students. *Gurukul* was the place where students come after completing their *Upanayana* or the thread ceremony. *Ashrams* were the kind of learning centers where students from various parts of the country come to learn from saints and sages. *Viharas* were the educational institutions developed during the Buddhist era where monks studied Buddhist philosophy along with other disciplines. The entire education process was based on *Shravan*, *Chintan* and *Manan* i.e listening, thinking and realization. Education was free for all and only *gurudakshina* was paid to the gurus by offering physical labour at guru's place. It was not restricted to men only, women like Maitreyi, Viswambhara, Apala, Gargi and Lopamudra were few examples of female learner who went on to become famous Vedic scholars. Education was free from the state control. The rulers could subsidize it as a grant of land and money. One of the remarkable features of the ancient education system was that being a rigid society common/universal education was imparted to the pupils by their gurus without considering their caste and creed. For instance Lord Krishna and Sudama both studied in the same Gurukul under Guru Sandipan.

Guru-Shishya relation:

Guru and *Shishya* were the two main pillars of the education system. *Guru* was considered as the living God on earth. Besides they were the symbol of purity and honesty. *Shishyas* have also the thirst for knowledge; they had strict obedience towards the elders. Above all they have purity and emotional balance which considered necessary for concentration. Thus, the Gurukuls laid the foundation of character and learning so strong that the learner can gain knowledge of any field like, history, law, art, dance, drama, surgery, medicine etc. Universities like Taxila and Nalanda on almost modern lines were existed in the country to provide such education to *shishyas*.

Curriculum:

During the Vedic period Veda mantras were basically taught to the students. In addition to religious subject, many worldly subjects were also included in the curriculum. The curriculum consisted of veda, history, puranas, grammar, mathematics, astronomy, dance, music etc. Education was not regarded as an end in itself; it was fundamentally related to life. Attainment of Brahman was the main aim of education. After the Vedic age a new era was evolved with the growth of Buddhism. During this period the chief aim of education was to attain salvation. It was classified into two stages i.e primary and higher. In the first

stage emphasis was given on the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic. Knowledge of grammar was also considered as essential. In the higher education subjects like religion, philosophy, medicine, art, music etc were taught. The Vedas were also studied for acquiring comparative knowledge.

How ancient education would be relevant in today's perspective:

The UNESCO mentioned four pillars of learning in its report of 1996, they are:

- Learning to know
- Learning to do
- Learning to be
- Learning to live together.

The present day education system which concentrates on Science and technology is paying more emphasis on the first two pillars. It enhances and promotes skill of the students. No doubt, our youth have tremendous knowledge but sometimes in few cases the sense of wisdom is not found. Therefore sometimes knowledge becomes curse for others. It is perhaps due to the lack of communication between the parents and children. Parents are now more alert about their academics, thus ignoring the qualities of human beings. The result is lack of tolerance and sharing habits, destructive attitude, gap in rich and poor which are taking place in the youngsters. Therefore, more fighting, jealousy, hatred, restlessness, killing are increasing in the society.

It is also true that neither we go back in the ancient period nor we stop the progress and advancement of science and technology. Therefore we have to put more importance on the rest of the two pillars of learning i.e learning to be and learning to live together, then learning to know and learning to do. However after the independence the Indian government appointed several commissions to study and formulate suggestions for the upliftment of the education system. It is also noticed that all the committees and commissions also advocated education for development of character, morality, spirituality and brotherhood among all. Even Kothari Commission in his report also quoted the prayer of a sage mentioned in the Rig Veda to bring healthy revolution in the heart and mind of the people of the world for peace, tolerance and love of the whole mankind as the family of god. However there is a wide gap between the ancient and modern Indian education system. But still there are various elements of ancient education which can be accepted in the modern perception and can be a part of it.

- **Discipline and Teacher-pupil relationship:** The sense of discipline and cordial relation between teacher and pupil of Vedic age is well known to the world today. We also witnessed the educational environment that has become so venomous due to indiscipline and it has become an uncountable problem. The sense of discipline can be made to adopt the ideal relationship between teacher and pupil.
- **Character building:** Character building was one of the most important elements of the ancient education system. This character building is still relevant for the growth of children as better human beings. Therefore character building should be on first priority at both home and educational institution by mother and teacher respectively.
- **Education for Self-sufficiency:** The ancient schools followed the principle of education for self-sufficiency. The school was small integrated community self-sufficiency. The students used to grow their food products, tended cows, collect firewood and erected cottages under the supervision of the teachers. Modern education also lays stress upon preparing students to prepare themselves for their future life. Vocational subjects therefore should be included in the curriculum in order to vocationalize education but much is needed to done in this direction to achieve the desired aim.
- **Learning Environment:** A safe environment should be created by the educator so that a student can easily incorporate taught knowledge without any fear. In Vedas sashasu emphasize that teacher should organize

that his knowledge to make it relevant which is similar to the modern practice of designing degree programme, syllabus and subsequent schemes of work. All those obstacles that prevent student from learning should be removed. These obstacles may categorize as socio-political, teaching and learning and financial. Primarily financial condition being the major barrier which could be overcome by government support.

- Values and Ethics: The ancient education was basically aimed at personal growth of individual. The following are some of the Vedic ethos relevant to all categories of students revealed by the ancient scriptures are:

Atmano Mokshartham, jagat hitaya cha: All work is an opportunity for doing good to the world and thus gaining materially and spiritually in our lives.

Archet dana manabhyam: Worship people not only with material things but also by showing respect to their enterprising divinity within.

Atmama vindyate viryam: Strength and inspiration for excelling in work comes from the divine, god within through prayer, spiritual readings and unselfish work.

Parasparam bhavayantah shreyah param bhavapsyathah: By mutual cooperation, respect and fellow feeling all of us enjoy the highest good both material and spiritual.

Tesham sukhm tesham shanty shaswati: Infinite happiness and infinite peace come to them who see the divine in all beings.

Paraspar devo bhav: Regard the other person as a divine being. All of us have the same consciousness though our packages and containers are different.

In this fast globally changing era skills related to leadership, negotiation, counseling, communication, public relation and team building etc. will not serve their purpose well unless they flow from a value based pure mind. A person has to embrace the spiritual dimension beyond its physical, social and economic dimensions as it purifies the mind of decision maker. This kind of management offers human welfare, nature welfare, the quality of life and quality of work helping in bringing the human harmony and happiness in every field. Thus the ancient education was capable of developing physical, intellectual, character, social, moral and spiritual values within the students. Today the rapid growing and developing society demands for efficient citizens who can act adequately for achieving their personal goals in their lives and for the development of the society and it is possible only, when the future generation will be imparted moral and ethical values. The present generation is enriched with scientific and technological knowledge. They will stray from the right path i.e, progress and welfare of human society, if they are not developed morally and spiritually. So to prevent such situation the implementation of the principles of the ancient education system will play an effective role.

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