



EDUCATION IN ANCIENT BHARAT

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ABSTRACT

Education serves as a fundamental platform for shaping and preparing the younger generation for the future, providing essential knowledge and skills crucial for employability. The Indian education system is distinctive globally, evolving significantly from ancient to modern times.

In ancient and medieval periods, education aimed at preparing students to adapt and thrive in societal conditions. Post-independence, the Indian education system has grown substantially, offering comprehensive teaching in various fields. However, challenges persist in meeting global market demands.

To distinguish between ancient, medieval, and modern education, it's important to note that ancient India had both formal and informal systems. Indigenous education occurred in homes, temples, *Pathshalas*, *Chatuspadis*, and *Gurukulas*. Temples played a crucial role as centres of learning, while *Viharas* and universities focused on higher education with an emphasis on oral learning and reflection.

Gurukulas, or *Ashrams*, were residential learning spaces in serene environments. Notably, women scholars like *Maitreyi*, *Viswambhara*, *Alpa*, *Lopamudra* and, *Gargi* in the Vedic period indicated that women had access to education. The *Guru-Shishya* relationship was integral in *Gurukulas*, promoting discipline and helping students realize their potential. Students often lived away from home, strengthening the bond between the Guru and Shishya. Education covered diverse disciplines, emphasizing both external aspects and the nurturing of inner personality dimensions.

Keywords- *Education, Ancient, Curriculum, Educational Institute*

INTRODUCTION

Effective education plays a crucial role in preparing the youth for the future and contributing to economic growth by producing skilled individuals, thereby fostering industrial development. In the contemporary landscape of education, every institution and university are adopting innovative teaching methods and pedagogical approaches. India boasts one of the world's largest and most renowned education systems.



In ancient times, there were many prominent universities, including Takshashila (now north-western Pakistan), Nalanda (Magadh), Vallabhi (Bhavnagar), Vikramashila (Bihar), Shardapeeth (Pakistan, Jammu & Kashmir), Nagarjuna Vidyapeeth (South India bank of Krishna river), etc., which emphasized holistic student development. During the medieval period, two institutions, madrasahs and maqtabas, were prevalent, primarily focusing on imparting religious education and nurturing future leaders.

Ancient education involved students residing away from their parents, receiving instruction in various subjects such as physical education, mental development, politics, economics, etc. The educational approach aimed to shape students into individuals capable of thriving in diverse and challenging environments. Medieval education, while sharing similarities with ancient practices, predominantly concentrated on religious teachings.

In the modern era, prominent institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) have witnessed significant transformations in student lifestyles, curricula, and overall development. The current primary objective for students is often centered on achieving goals and attaining success in their chosen fields.

ANCIENT EDUCATION

In ancient times, two distinct systems of education emerged: Vedic and Buddhist. The Vedic system utilized Sanskrit as its language medium, while the Buddhist system employed *Pali*. Educational content in both systems encompassed the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, and *Dharmasutras*. Commencing with the *Rigveda*, the primary objective of ancient education was to foster holistic development, addressing not only the physical body but also the inner self.

Ancient education had a strong emphasis on instilling ethical values like humility, truthfulness, discipline, self-reliance, and respect for all creations. The instructional settings varied and included *Ashrams*, *Gurukulas*, *Temples*, and households. Occasionally, temple priests played the role of educators. The educational system of ancient India possessed distinctive features and uniqueness unparalleled in other ancient educational systems worldwide. Education often took place in serene forest environments under the open sky, contributing to the students' mental freshness and vitality.

During ancient times, people led simple lives, dedicating themselves to work with devotion and hard work. The revered teacher was addressed as a Guru, and students were referred to as *Shishyas*. *Gurukuls* (An ancient school), often situated in tranquil forest surroundings, became a second home for students who resided there for extended periods. This educational model was not gender-exclusive, as notable women like *Maitreyi*, *Viswambhara*, *Apala*, *Gargi*, and *Lopamudra* rose to prominence as Vedic scholars. The curriculum included practical skills such as wood gathering and cooking alongside the study of Vedas. Subjects like arts, history, and law were taught in a practical manner, moving beyond mere theoretical definitions.



AIM OF EDUCATION

The primary aim of education was to provide students with a high standard of learning, with a predominant focus on enhancing cultural, character, and personality development. The goal was to nurture and instil noble ideals, aiming for the holistic development of students' mental, physical, and intellectual capacities, ensuring their preparedness for the future and resilience in any circumstance.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EDUCATION

In ancient times, there was minimal involvement from the state government and the public in shaping the curriculum, determining fee structures, and regulating teaching hours. The relationship between teachers and students was robust, with each student assigned a dedicated teacher. The focus was significantly placed on fostering strong connections between students and teachers, encouraging individual meetings for personalized learning and instructions. In bygone eras, both royal families and state kings actively contributed their wealth to enhance the educational system's quality and infrastructure.

The curriculum was tailored to align with the requirements of that period. During those times, students would leave their homes and reside with their gurus until their education was concluded. In the initial Vedic era, there was an increased emphasis on women's education. The educational focus was on nurturing both the physical and mental aspects of students. The duration of the course spanned around 10–12 years, and since there were no written materials, students relied on memorization for learning, with memory playing a pivotal role. Education was conducted in forested areas, distanced from urban centres and people, to provide students with a serene and quiet study environment.

CURRICULAM

The curriculum holds a crucial position within the educational framework, characterized by its dynamic nature and multi-stage structure. The primary objective of constructing a robust curriculum was to foster the physical and mental development of students. Key components of the curriculum included the four *Vedas*, six *Vedangas*, *Upanishads*, *Darshanas*, *Puranas*, and *Tarka Shastra*. The six *Vedangas* encompassed *Shiksha*, *Chhandas*, *Vyakarana*, *Nirukta*, *Jyotisha*, and *Kalpa*, while the *Darshanas* comprised *Nyaya*, *Baiseshika*, *Yoga*, *Vedanta*, *Sankhya*, and *Mimansa*.

Special emphasis was placed on subjects like Algebra, Geometry, and grammar, with figures like Panini gaining renown in the field of grammar. The Buddhist system's curriculum included *Pitakas*, *Abhidharma*, *Sutras*, and also accorded significance to medicine and Vedas. Hindu learning was integrated into Buddhist learning, although the latter received greater emphasis. Both systems coexisted harmoniously during that period. Education primarily relied on oral communication and debates, with annual examinations being a



norm. The ancient education system concentrated on diverse subjects such as warfare, military tactics, politics, and religion.

METHODS OF LEARNING

During that era, teachers devoted special attention to their students, tailoring their teaching methods to the individual knowledge and skill levels. Instruction primarily occurred through oral communication and debates, utilizing distinctive methods.

In a time when books were unavailable, students cultivated the practice of learning and memorizing everything imparted in class, with teachers actively aiding in this memorization process. Students delved deeply into the subjects taught by their teachers, employing innovative methods to comprehend and retain the information. Techniques such as Listening, Contemplation, and focused contemplation emerged as novel approaches to explore the nuances of learning.

Teachers employed storytelling techniques as an effective means of imparting knowledge to students. Encouraging a participatory atmosphere, students posed questions about the subjects covered in class, leading to thorough discussions and subsequent clarifications. The educational focus during that period cantered around acquiring practical knowledge, with seminars and debates conducted at regular intervals providing students with abundant insights and information.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Gurukulas served as the residence of teachers, welcoming students upon the completion of their initiation ceremony, and providing a learning environment until the culmination of their studies. *Parishads* or academies represented higher learning establishments, facilitating education through discussions and debates. *Goshti* or conferences were forums where kings invited scholars from various institutes to convene and share their perspectives. *Ashramas* or hermitages served as additional centres of learning, where students from different regions would gather to acquire knowledge from saints and sages.

Vidyapeeth, established by the esteemed *Acharya Sri Shankaracharya* in locations like *Sringeri*, *Kanchi*, *Dwarka*, *Puri*, etc., was dedicated to spiritual learning. *Agraharas* represented institutions in villages where *Brahmins* imparted teachings. *Viharas* were educational establishments founded by Buddhists, focusing on subjects related to Buddhism and philosophy, providing students with comprehensive knowledge.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Takshashila: Takshashila also known as Taxila, held prominence as a renowned ancient center of learning encompassing religious teachings and Buddhism. It gained fame for providing advanced education across diverse subjects, including ancient scriptures, law, medicine, sociology, astronomy, military science, and 18



shilpas, among others. Eminent scholars such as the proficient grammarian Panini, celebrated for his work on *Ashtadhyayi*, and *Chanakya*, an adept in statecraft, received their education at this prestigious institution. Despite the challenges of long and arduous journeys, students from *Kashi*, *Kosala*, *Magadha*, and various countries sought enrolment in the university.

Nalanda: Initially referred to as Nala during Xuan Zang's visit, served as a centre of learning spanning multiple disciplines. Students from different regions of the country and the world gravitated towards Nalanda for its diverse curriculum, which included the study of Vedas, fine arts, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. Xuan Zang himself became a student of Yogashastra at Nalanda. Presently situated in Rajgir in Bihar state Bharat. Nalanda has earned recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Valabhi: Valabhi, situated in modern Vala in Kathiawad, served as a prominent centre for both Brahmanic and Buddhist learning from the 4th to the 7th centuries A.D., contemporaneous with the renowned Nalanda. It was also recognized as a significant Jain centre, hosting the Vallabhi council in 453 or 466 AD, where the Jains documented their religious canon under the leadership of shraman Devardhigani.

Despite its Jain prominence, the Chinese traveller Xuanzang, visiting Vallabhi in the second quarter of the 7th century, observed that the ruler was a follower of Buddhism. Later, during Itsing's visit in the last quarter of the 7th century, Vallabhi continued to be a major centre of learning, encompassing Buddhism. Notably, Sthiramati and Gunamati, esteemed Buddhist teachers from Nalanda, played a role in teaching Buddhism at Valabhi for a period.

The well-known Sanskrit work *Kathasaritsagara* mentions a *Brahman* from the *Gangetic* plain sending his son to Vallabhi for advanced education, highlighting Vallabhi's widespread reputation as a distinguished seat of learning. Functioning as the capital of the *Maithraka* kingdom, Vallabhi was also a hub for international trade, featuring numerous warehouses with rare merchandise.

During the *Maitraka* rule, the first two rulers, *Bhatarka* and *Dharasena-I*, held the title of Senapati (general), while the third ruler, *Dronasimha*, declared himself as The *Maharaja*. The last known ruler of the *Maitraka* dynasty was *Siladitya VII*. The *Maitraka* rule concluded with the sacking of Vallabhi in 524, as per James Tod, and in the second or third quarter of the 8th century A.D., according to various other scholars. However, scholars disagree on the identity of the barbarians responsible for Vallabhi's sack, and this discrepancy persisted until 775 A.D.

CONCLUSION

The examination of the education systems during the Vedic period and the Brahmanical era underscores that during those times, the dwelling places of teachers, known as *Gurukulas*, served as educational institutions. Within *Gurukulas*, teachers and students coexisted as members of a familial unit. In ancient India, particularly during the Vedic and Buddhist periods, structured educational institutions resembling those of the modern age



were not in existence. Instead, monasteries and expansive sacred sites were established, where learned individuals from diverse locations would convene for debates and discussions. Many universities are noted to have ceased operations around the 12th century, primarily due to the destruction of these centres and other sites across northern India, resulting in the loss of ancient Indian knowledge.

In the contemporary era, industries and technology are advancing rapidly. Each industry sector seeks individuals who align well with their specific needs. As the demand in industrial sectors grows, our present education system also requires upgrading. Within universities, students often focus solely on outperforming their peers without acquiring practical knowledge. The prevailing system places immense pressure and workload on students, leading to instances of severe stress and, tragically, suicides. There is a crucial need for our education system to draw lessons from the ancient and medieval educational systems, emphasizing practical knowledge implementation, fostering strong student-teacher relationships, understanding the lifestyle of students in those periods, recognizing the contributions of kings to education, and mitigating stress on students, among other important aspects.

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