

# EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA



## CONTENTS

- ❖ Introduction
- ❖ *Salient Features Of Vedic Education In Ancient India*
- ❖ *Forms Of Educational Institutions In Vedic Period*
- ❖ *Role Of Teacher And Students*
- ❖ *Conclusion*

## INTRODUCTION

The education system which was evolved first in ancient India is known as the Vedic system of education. In other words, the ancient system of education were based on the Vedas and therefore it was given the name of Vedic Educational System. Vedas occupy a very important place in the Indian life. The basis of Indian culture lies in the Vedas which are four in number – Rigveda, Samveda, Yajurveda, and Atharavaveda. Some scholars have sub divided Vedic Educational period into Rig Veda period, Brahmani period, Upanishada period, Sutra (Hymn) period, Smriti period etc but all these period, due to predominance of the Vedas, there was no change in the aims and ideals of educations. That is why, the education of these periods, is studied under Vedic period.

**“Swadesh Pujyate Raja, Vidwan Sarvatra Pujyate”**

This verse widely quoted in India illustrates the significance of education in India. The education system of Vedic period has unique characteristics and qualities which were not found in the ancient education system of any other country of the world.

According to Dr. F. E. Key, “To achieve their aim not only did Brahmans develop a system of education which, survived even in the events of the crumbling of empires and the changes of society, but they, also through all those thousands of years, kept a glow of torch of higher learning.”

In the words of Dr. P. N. Prabhu, “Education in ancient India was free from any external control like that of the state and government or any party politics. It was the kings duties to see that learned Pundits, pursued their studies and performed their duty of imparting knowledge without interference from any source what so ever.”

The education system that prevailed during the Vedic times had some unique characteristics. Education was confined to the upper castes, and to those who were BRAHMACHARIS. In Indian tradition, a person’s life cycle is divided into four stages of which BRAHMACHARI is the second phase. This is the time set aside for learning and acquiring skills. During Vedic period, most of the upper castes, which were either Brahmins or Kshatriyas had their education in a unique system called GURUKULAM. Students had their education by living with their preceptors in forests far removed from cities, towns or villages. The life of students who were called SHISYAS was very rigorous and demanding. Those who failed to live up to these high standards would simply fall by the wayside. There were legendary acharyas like Sanandepani and Dronacharya who taught epic heroes like Krishna and Arjuna martial skills, but what makes the Vedic period unique is the existence of sages like Gautama and Jaimini who were founder of different schools of Indian philosophy like *Nyaya* and *Purva Mimamsa*. This was a period of intense intellectual activity and speculation, which we hardly find even now. While *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika* were theistic philosophies, *Sankhya* was atheistic.

There were of two types of BRAHMACHARIS who attended such GURUKULAMS, they were: UPAKURVANA BRAHMACHARI who remains a student for a limited time period after which he marries and becomes a householder and NAISHTHIKA BRAHMACHARI who remains a student and celibate throughout life dedicated to the pursuit of learning.

### ***SALIENT FEATURES OF VEDIC EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA***

#### **1. Infusion of Spiritual & Religious Values:**

The primary aim of ancient education was instilling into the minds, of pupils a spirit of being pious and religious for glory of God and good of man. The pursuit of knowledge was a pursuit of religious values. Education without religions instructions was not education at all. It was believed that a keener appreciation of spiritual values could be fostered only through a strict observance if religious rites.

#### **2. Character Formation and Personality Development**

In no period of the History of India, was so much stress laid on character building as in the Vedic period. Wisdom consisted in the practice of moral values. Control of

senses and practice of virtues made one a man of character. Moral excellence could come only through practising moral values. The teacher and the taught were ideals of morality, for both practiced it all through their lives. The Guru in the ancient times realized that the development of personality is the sole aim of education. The qualities of self-esteem, self confidence, self restraint and self respect were the personality traits that the educator tried to inoculate in his pupils through example.

### **3. Development of Civic Responsibilities and Social Values**

The inculcation of civic virtues and social values was an equally important objective of education in India. The Brahmachari after his education in the Gurukulas went back to the society to serve the rich and the poor, to relieve the diseased and the distressed. He was required to be hospitable to the guests and charitable to the needy. After a certain period of studies he was required to become a householder and to perpetuate his race and transmit his culture to his own off springs.

### **4. Knowledge:**

Education is knowledge. It is mans third eye. This aphorism means that knowledge opens mans inner eye, flooding him with spiritual and divine light, which forms the provision for man's journey through life.

### **5. Aims of Education:**

The ultimate aim of education in ancient Indian was not knowledge as preparation for life in this world or for life beyond, but for complete realization of self for liberation of the soul from the chains of life both present and future.

### **6. Methods of Instruction**

It was a pupil centered education. No single method of instruction was adopted, though recitation by the pupil followed by explanation by the teacher, was generally followed. Besides question – Answer, Debate and Discussion, Story telling was also adopted according to need. There was no classroom teaching. However monitorial system was prevalent and senior pupils were appointed to teach Juniors. Travel was regarded as necessary to give finishing touch to education so the methods of teaching generally practiced during vedic period were mainly Maukhik (oral and other method was based on Chintan (thinking or reflection) In the oral method the students were to memorize the mantras (Vedic Hymns) and Richayas (Verses of Rigveda) in order that there might not be changed wrongly and they might remain preserved in their original forms.

## **7. Medium of Instruction**

As these educational institutions were managed and organized by Brahmans and all the books written in Sanskrit, therefore the medium of instruction was Sanskrit.

8. The 'Upnayana' Ritual The word upnayana means to take close to, or to being in touch with. A ceremony called the upnayana ceremony was performed before the child was taken to his teacher. This ceremony was performed at the ages of 8,11 and 12 for the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, respectively. The ceremony signaled the child's transition from infancy to childhood and his initiation into educational life. In this context, the term upnayana means putting the students in touch with his teacher.

## **9. Celibacy or Brahmacharya**

Every student was required to observe celibacy in his specific path of life. Purity of conduct was regarded as of supreme importance. Only the unmarried could become students in a Gurukul. On entering student life, the student was made to wear a special girdle called a makhla. Its quality depended on the caste of the student. The students were not allowed to make use of fragrant, cosmetic or intoxicating things.

## **10. Alms System**

The student had to bear the responsibility of feeding both himself and his teacher, this was done through begging for alms, which was not considered bad. Since every domestic knew that his own son must be begging for alms in the same way at some other place. The reason behind the introduction of such a practice was that accepting alms induces humility. The student realized that both education and subsequent earning of livelihood were made possible for him only through society's service and its sympathy. For the poor students, Begging for alms was compulsory and unavoidable, but even among the prosperous, it was generally accepted practice.

## **11. Practicability**

Apart from intellectual aspect of education its practical side was not lost sight of and along with art, literature and philosophy, students got a working knowledge of animal husbandry, agriculture and other professions of life. In addition education in medicine was also imported.

## **12. Duration of Education**

In the house of the teacher, the student was required to obtain education up to the age of 24, after which he was expected to enter domestic life students were divided into three categories:

- a) These obtaining education up to the age of 24 – Vasu
- b) These obtaining education up to the age of 36 – Rudra
- c) These obtaining education up to the age of 48.- Auditya.

### **13. Curriculum**

Although the education of this period was dominated by the study of Vedic Literature, historical study, stories of heroic lives and discourses on the puranas also formed a part of the syllabus. Students had necessarily to obtain knowledge of metrics. Arithmetic was supplemented by the knowledge of geometry. Students were given knowledge of four Vedas – Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. The syllabus took with in its compass such subjects as spiritual as well as materialistic knowledge, Vedas, Vedic grammar, arithmetic knowledge of gods, knowledge of the absolute, knowledge of ghosts, astronomy, logic philosophy ethics, conduct etc. The richness of the syllabus was responsible of the creation of Brahman literature in this period.

### **14. Plain Living and High Thinking**

The education institutions were residential in the form of Gurukulas situated in forest, where teachers and pupils lived together. Education imparted was in the pure, calm and charming atmosphere of the Gurukulas and Ashramas and emphasis was laid on the development of character through ‘\_Plain Living and High Thinking‘.

### **15. Academic Freedom**

Due to academic freedom students remained busy in thinking and meditation. It enhanced originality among them

### **16. High place to Indian culture**

Indian culture was full of religious feelings and it was assigned a very high place in the field of education. Vedic culture was kept intact and transmitted through word of mouth to succeeding generations. The ancient Indian education system was also successful in Preserving and spreading its culture and literature even without the help of art of writing, it was only because of the destruction of temples and monasteries by invaders that literature was lost. The cultural unity that exists even today in the vast-sub continent in due to the successful preservation and spread of culture and the credit goes to Ancient Education System.

## **17. Commercial Education and Mathematics Education**

Commercial education and Mathematics education is also one of the chief features of vedic period. The ideas of the scope and nature of commercial education can be held from manu. Knowledge of Commercial geography, needs of the people of various localities, exchange value and quality of articles and language spoken at different trade centre were considered necessary. Theory of banking was also included in the course. Though there were no organized educational institutional training was usually imparted in the family. As far as Mathematics education is concerned, ancient Indian quite early evolved simple system of geometry. Shulva sutra are the oldest mathematical works probably composed between 400 BC and 200 A. D. Aryabhata (476.52 BC) is the first great name in Indian Mathematics. The concept of Zero also belonged to this period.

## **18. Female Education**

During the Vedic age women were given full status with men. For girls also the Upanayan (initiation ceremony) was performed and after that their education began. They were also required to lead a life of celibacy during education. They used to study the Vedas and other religious and philosophy books, they were free to participate in religious and philosophical discourses. Many 'Sanhitas' of Rigveda were composed by women. In Gurukulas the gurus treated male and female pupils alike and made no distinction what-so-ever.

## ***FORMS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN VEDIC PERIOD***

### **1. Gurukulas**

Gurukulas were the dwelling houses of gurus situated in natural surroundings away from noise and bustle of cities. Parents sent their wards at the age of five years to nine years according to their castes after celebrating their Upanayan Sanskar. Pupils lived under the roof of their guru called 'antevasin' under the direct supervision of their Guru.

Gurukula 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 Gurukula were extended to include a number of buildings. However the institution was built up around the family of teacher. The primary duty of the student was to serve the teacher and his family. The students were like sons of the teacher and the whole institution lived like family.

## **2. Parishads**

Parishads were bigger educational institutions where several teachers used to teach different subjects. This may be compared to a college parishad in Upanishads, has been used for a conference of learned men, assembled for deliberations upon philosophical problems. Later on the 'Parishads' were set up at the places where learned men lived in good number and gradually these institutions became permanent centres of imparting knowledge. In the words of Dr. R. K. Mukherjee Parishad correspondences to University of students belonging to different colleges.

## **3. Sammelan**

Sammelan literally means getting together for a particular purpose. In this type of educational institutions scholars gathered at one place for learned discussions and competitions generally on the invitation of the king. Scholars were appropriately rewarded.

### ***ROLE OF TEACHER AND STUDENTS***

In Bhartiya Darshan 'Guru' has significant place. It consists of two words, Gu-ru. The word 'Gu' indicated darkness and 'ru' means controller. It means to avoid darkness or ignorance. In Vedas the term acharya is used for guru. Guru is considered greatest treasure of knowledge.

In educative process teacher and students are the two components; a teacher provides physical, materialistic and spiritual knowledge to his students. The educative process is teacher centred. Guru satisfies the curiosity and needs of his students. Guru was the spiritual father of his pupils. Gurus were taking care of their pupil in same manner as a father takes care of his son.

When a student was to become a pupil of any Guru, the recognized way of making application to him was to approach him with fuel in his hands as a sign that he wished to serve him and help to maintain his sacred fire. With 'Upanayan' ceremony the disciple (shishya) gained the generous shelter and patronage of his gurus. The term 'shishya' indicates the following qualities.

- a) He is to be administered guru
- b) He is able to obey his guru
- c) He may be punished by his guru
- d) He is be wished by his guru
- e) He is to be Preached by his guru
- f) He is to be treated equality
- g) He is devoted committed to acquired wisdom

In the Dharam Sutra, there are rules laid down for the conduct of both teachers and pupils. The pupil was subjected to a rigid discipline and was under certain obligations towards his teacher. He should remain with his teacher as long as his course lasted and not live with anybody else.

### ***CONCLUSION***

In Vedic era education had the prominent place in society. It was considered as pious and important for society. Education was must for everybody for becoming cultured. Relationship between Guru and pupils were very cordial during vedic and post- vedic period. By means of education efforts were being made to infuse —Satyam Shivam and Sundaram|| inside the students. A great importance was attached to veda in education system, self study Swadhyaya was considered more important during that period. The vedic period favored women education.

The ancient Indian education system was successful in preserving and spreading its culture and literature even without the help of art of writing. It was only because of the destruction of temples and monasteries by invaders that the literature was lost. The cultural unity that exists even today in the vast sub-continent is due to successful preservation & spread of culture. The education system infused a sense of responsibilities and social values. The ancient education system achieved its aims to the fullest extent.

**Ancient education emerged from Vedas. The basis of Indian culture lies in the Vedas.**

**Written by Pankaj.P.Mishra**