



Revisiting the Past: Relevant Features of Vedic Education for Modern Educational Systems

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ABSTRACT

The ancient Indian education system has been a profound source of inspiration for educational systems worldwide. Notably, it encompassed several key elements that are often lacking in our present system, including selective admission policies, an effective monitorial system, low teacher-pupil ratios, conducive learning environments, free education at school and college levels, empathetic treatment of students, and a balanced approach to discipline and punishment, all of which were carefully regulated to foster a holistic educational experience. This article will primarily focus on the acceptable features of Vedic education that can inform and enrich modern educational practices.

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INTRODUCTION

The Vedic system of education, which began in ancient India, was a groundbreaking approach to learning. This system was based on the Vedas, ancient Indian texts that provided guidance on all aspects of life. The Vedic Educational System was divided into several sub-periods, including the Rig-Veda period, Brahmanic period, Upanishad period, Sutra period, and Smriti period. Despite these divisions,



the Vedas remained the foundation of the system, ensuring a consistent set of educational goals and values.

Education was highly valued in ancient India, as reflected in the saying: “A king is revered in his own country, but a scholar is revered everywhere.” This quote highlights the importance of education in Indian culture. The Vedic period education system had unique features that set it apart from other ancient educational systems.

The Vedic system emphasized the development of the whole person, including intellectual, spiritual, and physical growth. Students learned from experienced teachers who provided guidance and mentorship. The system also encouraged critical thinking, debate, and discussion, helping students develop their analytical skills.

The Vedic system of education played a significant role in shaping Indian culture and society. It helped preserve and transmit ancient knowledge, values, and traditions to future generations. Today, the Vedic system remains an important part of India’s cultural heritage, and its principles continue to inspire educational systems around 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”

Acceptable Features of Education of Vedic Period for Modern Education

There is a significant difference between ancient Indian education and modern Indian education. However, many ancient educational principles remain relevant and can be applied to modern education, both in theory and practice.

Idealism: We are proud of our heritage and the rich cultural values that have been passed down to us. Even in today’s modern world, we continue to uphold the principles of our ancestors. We prioritize spirituality, selflessness, good character, and seeking knowledge over wealth and scientific progress.



Unlike the values of the modern world, which often focus on wealth and power, we value truth, non-violence, and self-control. Our commitment to idealism inspires us to live a virtuous life, guided by the wisdom of our ancestors.

We believe that living a simple and honest life is more important than accumulating wealth. We strive to be good people, to help others, and to make the world a better place. Our ancestors' values are still relevant today, and we are committed to passing them on to future generations.

By following the principles of our ancestors, we hope to create a better world, where people value truth, kindness, and compassion over wealth and power. We believe that this is the key to living a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Discipline: The traditional educational system placed great emphasis on discipline as a vital component in shaping successful individuals. Students were expected to adhere to strict rules, which were deemed more important than mere academic instruction. This discipline was fostered through rigorous adherence to regulations governing student life, grounded in moral and religious principles.

Students were required to renounce vices such as desire, anger, greed, vanity, arrogance, and excessive indulgence. The Gurus, or teachers, explicitly prohibited behaviors like gambling, lying, backbiting, hurting others' feelings, engaging in inappropriate relationships, and harming animals.

Every student in the Gurukul was encouraged to live a simple life, regardless of their financial background. This approach exemplified the fundamental right to education and can be seen as a precursor to the modern concept of universal education.

Teacher-Pupil Relationship: In ancient India, the strong bond between teachers (Gurus) and students (Sishyas) was a unique feature of education. Teachers played a dual role: educator and guardian. They cared for their students like parents, providing food, clothing, and education.

If a student fell ill, the teacher looked after them until they recovered. Students often lived with their teachers, developing a deep sense of loyalty and responsibility. This close relationship helped students grow academically and personally.

Subject of Studies: Unfortunately, the study of Sanskrit language and literature has been overlooked. This ancient literature is full of valuable lessons about peace, kindness, humanity, and unity, making it



essential for our education system. By teaching Sanskrit in schools, we can pass on the wisdom and values that have shaped Indian culture and heritage for thousands of years to future generations.

This will help young people understand and appreciate their cultural roots, and develop important values like compassion, empathy, and respect for all. It will also enrich their understanding of Indian history, philosophy, and traditions. By reviving the study of Sanskrit, we can preserve our cultural heritage and promote a more harmonious and inclusive society.

Teaching Method: In the past, ancient Indians used effective teaching methods such as listening, meditation, and hands-on experience. They also used question-answer sessions, discussions, lectures, and debates. These traditional methods can still be successfully used in our modern classrooms today.

Simple Life of Students: In the past, students lived simple lives, focusing on their studies and personal growth. However, many young people today prioritize a luxurious and fashionable lifestyle. They have moved away from the valuable principle of “Simple Living and High Thinking,” which emphasizes the importance of living modestly and thinking deeply.

Instead, many young people have adopted a lifestyle of “High Living and Simple Thinking,” where they focus on material possessions and external appearances rather than inner growth and development. This imbalance can have negative consequences, leading to a lack of depth and meaning in life.

To address this issue, it’s essential to teach young people the value of a simple and traditional way of life. By embracing simplicity and modesty, they can focus on what truly matters, such as personal growth, relationships, and contributing to society. This can lead to a more fulfilling and purposeful life.

By promoting the principles of “Simple Living and High Thinking,” we can help young people develop a stronger sense of values and priorities. This can have a positive impact on individuals and society as a whole, leading to a more balanced and meaningful way of life.

All-Round Development of the Child: In ancient India, education was designed to help children grow and develop in all areas of life. This goal is still the same today. Ancient education focused on helping students grow intellectually, spiritually, and physically. To achieve this, students learned in peaceful and natural environments.



Although modern schools say they aim to develop students physically, morally, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually, they often focus too much on book learning. It's essential to put the idea of all-round development into practice.

This means creating a balanced education system that helps students grow in all areas of life, not just academically. By doing so, we can help children become well-rounded, confident, and capable individuals who are prepared to succeed in all aspects of life.

Equality of Opportunity: In ancient India, education was deeply rooted in democratic principles, where students from all walks of life were treated with equal respect and dignity. This egalitarian approach ensured that education was accessible and inclusive, fostering a sense of community and social cohesion. The Indian Constitution, too, emphasizes the importance of equality in education, guaranteeing that all citizens have equal opportunities to receive education.

However, despite these lofty ideals, the reality in many public schools and professional institutions falls short of this promise. Socio-economic disparities, caste-based discrimination, and other forms of exclusion continue to plague the education system, undermining the principle of equality. Many students from marginalized backgrounds face significant barriers in accessing quality education, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage.

To revive the democratic spirit of ancient India's education system, it is essential to address these systemic inequalities and ensure that education is truly inclusive and accessible to all. This requires a concerted effort from policymakers, educators, and civil society to create an education system that values diversity, promotes social mobility, and empowers students from all backgrounds to reach their full potential.

Education for Self-Sufficiency: Ancient Indian schools, known as Gurukuls, emphasized the importance of self-sufficiency and hands-on learning. Under the guidance of their teachers, students were actively involved in various activities that fostered independence and resourcefulness. They cultivated their own food, tended to animals, and constructed their own shelters, developing essential life skills that would benefit them in the long run.

In contrast, modern education systems have largely shifted their focus towards academic achievement, often neglecting the practical aspects of learning. However, there is a growing recognition of the need to



prepare students for real-life challenges and responsibilities. In response, vocational subjects have been incorporated into the curriculum, aiming to equip students with industry-specific skills and knowledge.

Despite these efforts, more needs to be done to achieve the goal of making students truly self-sufficient and prepared for their future lives. This can be accomplished by incorporating hands-on learning experiences, promoting entrepreneurship, and fostering a culture of innovation and creativity. By striking a balance between academic rigor and practical skills, we can empower students to become confident, capable, and self-sufficient individuals who are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

Free and Universal Education: In ancient India, education was available to everyone, regardless of their background or financial situation. It was free, and students only paid their teachers once they started working and earning a living. The government also provided students with free food and accommodation. India's constitution also guarantees free education to all children between the ages of 6 and 14. However, despite various initiatives and programs, this goal has not yet been fully achieved.

The ancient Indian education system has many valuable lessons for us today. It shows us that education should be accessible to everyone, and that it's possible to provide high-quality education without charging high fees.

In fact, many of the principles of ancient Indian education, such as free and universal education, are still relevant today. By learning from the past and incorporating these principles into our modern education system, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone has access to quality education.

CONCLUSION

The ancient Indian education system was incredibly effective in preserving and sharing the country's rich culture and literature. This was achieved without relying on written records, which is truly remarkable. Unfortunately, many valuable literary works were lost when temples and monasteries were destroyed by invaders. Despite this loss, the ancient education system's impact can still be seen today. The cultural unity that exists across the vast Indian subcontinent is a testament to the system's enduring legacy. By teaching students important values like responsibility and social awareness, the system achieved its goals with great success.



The ancient Indian education system was deeply rooted in the sacred Vedas. These ancient texts laid the foundation for India's rich cultural heritage, which continues to shape Indian society today. The system's emphasis on preserving and sharing knowledge helped to create a strong sense of national identity.

The success of the ancient Indian education system is a reminder of the importance of preserving cultural heritage. By learning from the past and appreciating the value of traditional knowledge, we can work towards creating a brighter future for ourselves and for generations to come.

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