



The Golden Era of Ancient Indian Education: Vedic Educational System

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ABSTRACT

The Vedic Period's educational system was rooted in the Guru-Shishya tradition where teachers imparted knowledge to students in Vedic Schools and Ashrams. The Vedic Period marks the dawn of India's intellectual and cultural heritage, laying the foundation for its rich educational traditions. The Vedic education aimed to produce individuals with a strong sense of duty, morality and intellectual curiosity, laying the foundation for India's rich educational heritage. This era saw the emergence of the Vedas, ancient texts that not only shaped spirituality but also influenced the development of education. Education focused on – Memorization and recitation of Vedic texts, Spiritual growth and Self-realization, Development of intellectual and moral character, Reservation of education for elite classes (Brahmins and Kshatriyas). This period's educational framework was deeply rooted in spirituality, philosophy and cultural values, aimed to produce individuals with a strong sense of duty, morality and intellectual curiosity. The Vedic Period's legacy continues to influence Indian Education, with its emphasis on the teacher-student relationship, respect for tradition and pursuit of knowledge for self-realization.



Introduction

The word Veda means knowledge. Vedic education refers to the knowledge that is preserved in the Vedas and which was used in those times. The knowledge of the basic culture of India is preserved in these ancient religious texts. Vedic education neither believed in bookish knowledge nor was it a means of earning a livelihood, it was completely a step towards moral and spiritual knowledge. The meaning of education at that time was that a person should be enlightened in such a way that his all-round development could take place. Shravan, Manan and Nididhyasan etc. were the means of acquiring education. The Vedas which were not compiled in written form and were only memorized were called Shruti. Thus, in Vedic literature, the word education was used in the sense of 'Vidya', 'Gyan' and 'Vinay' etc.

The word 'education' has been used by ancient Indian sages in both broad and limited senses. According to Dr. A.S. Altekar, education in the broad sense means to make a person civilized and advanced. From this point of view, education is a lifelong process. Education in the limited sense means the formal education that a person receives from the Guru as a student before entering the household life. Thus, education during the Vedic period means physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual development of a person.

1. Importance of education during Vedic period

Ancient Indians believed that education is the light through which all doubts of a person are eradicated and all obstacles are removed. It is the real power through which the intelligence, wisdom and skill of a person increases. Education provides the ability to understand the importance of life's reality, which helps a person to achieve salvation. Vedic educationists accepted the real importance of education and declared that-

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That is, it is possible to attain immortality, bliss and salvation through education. The sages of the Vedic period were also focused on the worldly direction, so they had arranged education from both the physical and spiritual perspectives.



^VU/kre% i fo' kfUr ; Mfo | keq kl rA

Rrks Hkw Mo rs reks ; M fo | ; kjrk AA**

& ; tφh] 40 %9

That is, those who worship only knowledge enter darkness. And those who are absorbed only in knowledge are one-sided. Therefore, both physical and spiritual knowledge were worshipped. Dr.A.S.Altekar has expressed his views on its importance and said “Education was regarded as a source of illumination and power which transforms and ennobles our nature by the progressive and harmonious development of our physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual powers and faculties”

2. Education system during Vedic period

The Vedic period was divided into two parts, the Pre-Vedic period or Rigvedic and Uttar Vedic (which was the period of composition of Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda, besides Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads etc.). According to Indian tradition, the mantras were revealed to the sages by Brahma. Those mantras were preserved in the lineage of the clan through the sons and disciples of that sage. Thus, every Rishi clan was like a small school where the students had to live and follow celibacy.

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The Acharya used to take the brahmachari under his protection through the Upanayana ceremony.

^vkpk; k̄ mi u; ekuls cā p kfj .ka o: k̄ s̄ Hk̄ r-%*

& vfkobn] 11@5@3

In Gurukuls, the sages used to teach the lessons by heart. Emphasis was laid on preaching and pronunciation and emphasis was laid on penance, method of self-realization, preaching and pronunciation. Knowledge was imparted through mental contemplation and meditation. In the Uttar Vedic period, probably the writing period also started progressing. The teaching method included pronunciation of lessons, commentary and debate. The 'Charak' scholars who propagated real knowledge



in the country used to propagate real knowledge in the country. There were institutions called 'Panchal Parishad' for education. Apart from this, scholarly assemblies were also organized such as - the assembly of King Janak in which the prominent scholar was 'Yagyavalkya'.

3. Level variation of teachers

The education system of the Vedic period divided the teacher into different categories. The synonyms of teachers were Kulpati, Acharya, Upadhyay, Pravakta, Pathak, Adhyapak, Shrotriya (श्रोत्रियः), Guru, Ritwik (ऋषिः), Charak etc., as per their qualification. In the modern context, Acharya is a professor, Pathak and Pravachak are readers, Upadhyay is a lecturer, Shrotriya is a spokesperson. Similarly, there were different experts of different subjects. In the Vedic society, the position of Acharya or Guru was very prestigious. Along with educating the society, he also imparted Vedic and spiritual knowledge.

4. Brahmacharya life of the students

The education system of Vedic period was based on the principle of simple living and high thinking. Through the Upanayana ceremony, the Acharya gave a second life to the disciple and made him a Dwija (द्विजः). He wore deerskin and a girdle and kept long plait (शिकरी) or a crest on their heads. Thus, the students lived a simple, modest and disciplined life. Words like Brahmachari, Antarvasi, Shishya, Maanavak etc. were used for the student. For Brahmacharis, Bhiksha, Aachman, Pranayam, Marjan, Gayatripath, Veddhyaan, Abhivadan etc. were prescribed. Different nouns were used for the specialized students of different branches. For example, the students of the Taittiriya branch preached by Tittiri Acharya were called Taittiriya. The period of study of the student was 12 years. It ranged from one year to 32 years. It could also be lifelong.

5. Expansion of Vedic education

The immense treasure of Vedic education was divided into the contemporary literature and its branches and sub-branches. The collection of Rigveda's mantras is called Samhita. Samhita, Yajurveda and Arthveda are the main ones among the Samhita which have been developed on the basis of Rigveda. Thereafter, Brahman, Aranyaka and Upanishads were expanded. Brahman texts are the oldest texts of prose literature in which Aitareya Kaushitaki and Taittiriya are the main ones. Upanishads are called Vedanta. Under Swadhyaya, Samhitas and history, Puranic stories were studied. We get to know which subjects the students used to study in these Acharya clans in the context of Chandogya Upanishad, in



which the conversation between Maharishi Sanatkumara and Narad Muni is mentioned. On being asked by Sanatkumara, Narad has enumerated the subjects which he had studied. Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, Atharvaveda, History, Puranas, Grammar Vidya (Fifth Veda), Pitra Vidya or Mathematics, Daiva Vidya (study of word meaning & etymology), Nidhi shastra (excavation knowledge), Logic, Ethics, Brahma Vidya (knowledge of the ultimate reality), Ghost Vidya (science of paranormal), Star Vidya, Snake Vidya, Devjan Vidya. It is clear from this that the students of that time, while living in Acharya clans, used to study mathematics, astrology, logic, grammar, warfare and medicine etc. in addition to the Vedas. The meaning of some of the subjects mentioned is not clear. Probably Bhut Vidya was the science of Panch Mahabhutas and Devjan Vidya was dance and music. In that period, six Vedangas (Shiksha, Kalpa, Vyakarana, Nirukta, Chand and Jyotish) and four Up Vedas had also been developed and it can be easily assumed that the Brahmacharis living in the Acharya clan used to study all these as well.

6. Teaching Method

The Vedic period teaching method was oral and question-answer based. It was also known as 'Pratyaksh Vidhi'. The nature of education was completely individual. Students used to recite and interpret mantras in their daily life. In the field of literature and justice, continuous debates, refutations and support were done by the students, which developed the students' quick thinking, problem-solving skills and oratory skills. Education of politics and morality was given through stories, the interpretation of which was done through Guru-disciple dialogue. This education was free. After getting education, the disciple used to give Guru Dakshina to the Guru in the form of cow, food or horse. The 25-year period of celibacy of the students was divided into sessions and time in a progressive developmental order. The day when studies were closed was addressed as Anadhyay (वु/क;). The end of studies was called Samaparan (l eki u). Therefore, on the completion of education, Samavartan (l ekorū) Sanskar was performed.

7. Courteous discipline

Polite discipline was the central point of the entire Vedic education. To attain self-knowledge or Brahma-knowledge, the power of self-control was essential in a child. This power was acquired by the child from the intimate and sweet relationship between the Guru and the disciple. Therefore, the conduct and behaviour of both was based on ideals and imitation. Humility was proven and evidenced on both sides.



The most important discipline of Vedic education was self-discipline. The disciple eager to attain the Turiya state (रिग्वेद; कल्फक 4th stage) of the soul always kept himself under control. For this, the rules and discipline prescribed for brahmacharis and acharyas are indicative of the educational research of that time. When a brahmachari went for alms, it was prescribed to say- "Sir, please give me food." This was the first lesson of discipline. "It is mentioned in the 'Vidya Suktam' of 'Nirukta' that a student who looks at education with hatred, who is devious and undisciplined, should not be given education, but a student who is pure, meditative, intelligent, celibate and truthful towards his teacher should be given education." During the study period, the student also had the discipline of shaving his head. Many rules have been mentioned in this regard. Greetings were also done daily and on a casual basis. Thus, there was idealistic discipline in Vedic education built on the foundation of strong idealism.

Objective means to point towards the higher direction. The aim of man's life was to fulfil his objectives. That is why the sages and munis considered the fulfilment of man's objectives as their ultimate duty and introduced him to the Vedic religion which was the means of fulfilling all objectives.

The sages and saints knew that the ultimate goal of life is salvation which can be achieved by knowing the secrets of death. They devoted their entire life to understand the unity of the soul and the Supreme Soul. Dr. A.S. Altekar has written that "the main objectives of Vedic education were the feeling of God and religiosity, character-building, personality development, fulfilment of civic and social duties, improvement of social efficiency and preservation of national culture.

The aim of Vedic education is to develop a person completely. For this, qualities like self-respect, self-confidence, self-control, justice etc. have to be developed. While setting the objectives of education, Prof. Shivdatt Gyani has written that "the aim of the ancient education system was to make a man a true human by developing his natural powers properly. So that he can be able to solve the puzzles of life. No aim of education is clear in Vedic literature. The objectives of education of that time have been explained with the help of relevant texts.

8. Elevation of man's religious instincts

Religion had an important place in education during the Vedic period. Religious attitudes have a dignified place in human life. The development of destiny and religion in the life of students is done through education. Religion was respected the most in the Vedic period. It was said about this



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That is, by adopting which one can attain worldly prosperity and spiritual welfare. The main objective of education of this period was to become God and to strictly follow the rules of religion. There were various rites for fulfilling this objective. Daily activities, evening prayers, observance of fasts by a brahmachari have been contributing to the upliftment of his religious instincts. Cleanliness, purity, etiquette, bath etc. and evening prayers were the religion of the person.

^mi uh; x#%f'k"; af'k{k; BNk%vknr%

vkpkj a/fxudk; Z p l d; ki kl ued pA**

euqefr] 2@69

Brahmachari used to follow religious instructions faithfully and used to clear his doubts if he had any. By following the rules based on religion, he was able to understand worldly and spiritual life. He used to gain knowledge of spirituality through religion only. Penance, charity, non-violence, speaking the truth and following the vow of celibacy were considered mandatory in human life because these were the basis of religious tendencies.

9. To give character education to Human

In Vedic period education, it was better to be of good character than to be learned. According to our ancient sages, the meaning of human life lies in the secret of character building. In this, a person moves towards the right path.

Good character was considered to be the ornament of a person. Since student life was called the dawn of a person's life, it was the most suitable period for character building. The one who was religious and of good character was a Pandit. When a person got full knowledge of truth, he behaved accordingly. During his student life, a person used to follow his duties according to the rules while building his character. The life of a Brahmachari was a life of penance and rules, hence it is said-

^cāpkjh cā Hkk't" k foHkfrZ



rfLeu nɔk vf/k fo' os fu"knɔA**

vFkbbn] 11@5@24

By observing his vows with the help of firewood (l fe/kk) and girdle (es[kyk), Brahmachari used to make the world prosperous by the influence of religion and penance.

^cāpkjh l fe/kk es[ky; k]

/keɪk ykɔkLri l k foHkfrA**

vFkbbn] 11@5@4

It is believed that the king built the nation by following the vow of celibacy. The Acharya initiated his disciples through celibacy.

^cāp; ɪk ri l k jkɪk jk"Vāfoj{kfr]

vkpk; k̄cāp; ɪk cāpkj .kkfePNrA**

vFkbbn] 11@5@17

Penance was an essential part of celibacy. Cleanliness, purity, bathing, evening prayers were its main elements through which character is elevated. The character of students is formed through the excellent environment of Gurukuls and the ideals of great personalities. Dr. Vedmitra has told - "The building of the character of student was deemed as one of essential objects of Education"

10. Development of human personality

Education develops the personality of an individual. Through education, an individual performs various duties. This develops self-control, self-confidence, introspection and spiritual attitude in the individual.

In the Vedic period, it was believed that a person can develop in all aspects only if he has self-confidence. That is why he used to stay in the proximity of the Guru and the Guru used to develop self-confidence in him.



Even before the beginning of education, prayers were offered to Agni to awaken the self-confidence of the child. He should have mercy on the student and increase his growth, intelligence and strength. Agni was the god of brightness. Agni should give fame to the child like the flames of fire and his fame should spread in all directions. It was believed that by worshipping many gods, all the gods would protect him.

Savitri (Surya Dev) used to protect the child from death and diseases. ऋषिः सवित्रोऽपि ब्रह्मचरिणोऽपि कर्मणोः।
Brahmachari was taught self-restraint which meant self-control. He was taught to control his senses so that the personality of the child developed smoothly.

11. Fulfilment of civic and social responsibilities

The aim of Vedic education was to make children capable of performing civic and social duties. Man is a social animal and he has to live his life in society.

Children were made aware of their duties towards society so that they could understand their duty towards society and perform it properly. A person was made aware of his duties towards society, home and family. When a child returned after completing his education from Gurukul, the Guru would make him aware of his duties towards everyone and teach him to follow them and wish for his bright future.

It was said in the Samvartan sermon of the student. To speak the truth. To follow the religion. To not be negligent in self-study. To not break the tradition of progeny production after giving dakshina to the teacher. To not deviate from the truth. To not deviate from religion. To not be negligent in profitable work. To not be scornful in the work of gods and ancestors (yagya etc.). To consider mother as goddess. To consider father as god. To do faultless work. All castes had different occupations. The work of all varna castes was divided. A person used to take up other occupations too, leaving his own occupation.

12. Ethics based life

In India, the teaching of ethics has been given importance since ancient times. In the Vedic period, students lived in Gurukuls and, being free from all vices, sat near the Guru and learnt ethics. Gurus developed qualities like truth, non-violence, penance etc. They were taught religious ethics. They were taught to promote and protect religion. Character building was also necessary for this. They had to control their mental tendencies. Dr. R.K. Mukherjee has written about this- "The aim of Education was chittavritti nirodh; inhabitation of those activities of the mind by which it gets connected with the world



of matter or object" Thus, the ethical development of man was the ultimate duty of the teacher. In the Rigveda, Varuna was considered the god of ethics who is very strict.

13. Introduction to the spiritual life

God Spirituality means knowing God. Spiritual education is ancient and profound. Through spirituality a person understands all the mysteries of life and believes in the supernatural world. The mundane world becomes false for him. Through spirituality he satisfies many queries. Spiritual knowledge leads to Brahma knowledge. Vedanta has told that 'ॐ ईश्वर-साक्षात्' and also told that 'ॐ ईश्वर-साक्षात्'.

In the Vedic period, education was acquired for knowledge. Everyone was encouraged to think and contemplate in the Gurukuls. At that time, Vedas were heard, meditated and meditated upon, hence spiritual knowledge could be acquired through these three methods. It is said in the Atharvaveda that it has an atmosphere of spiritualism and sympathetic magic. Its cultural level is lower than the Rigveda and it is derived from the disestablished religion of the Aryans and it contains many non-Aryan elements.

In the Vedic period, education was inspired by spirituality. This was known as Aparā Vidya. By knowing this, the path of salvation was paved for a person, which was the final and ultimate goal of his life. The state of experiencing unity in Brahma and Atman is called salvation. The path of knowledge was propounded for salvation. This path of knowledge was to experience the non-duality between Brahman (ब्रह्म) and Atman (आत्मा).

Conclusion

The Vedic educational system has been effective in maintaining and disseminating its literature and culture throughout the world. Education took on an idealistic form during the Vedic era, with teachers emphasizing the worship of God, religiosity, spirituality, character development, personality development, and fostering an interest in order to foster the growth of culture, nation, and society—all of which led to significant advancements. The Vedic Education System placed a strong emphasis on understanding Vedic texts, which leans more toward religious neutrality and a more spiritual way of living. The Vedic System of education provided free education and modelled conduct for its students. Swadhyaya was considered more important during that period. Like father and son relationships



throughout the Vedic Period, the teacher-student connection was very friendly and supportive of one another in many aspects of life.

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