Indian Educational System
(Ancient Period)

An Overview

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Fundamentals of Ancient Indian Education
• Knowledge related to life
• Close association between teacher and student resulted in all round development
• Development in social work
• Vocational Training
• Ancient Indian Educational system was developed in terms of the needs of the individual and that of the society and therefore, its efflorescence was natural.

• It had a definite ideal and a definite mission.

• The ancient educational centers, situated amidst fauna and flora and beauties of nature were the perennial and inexhaustible fountainheads of Indian civilization and culture.
The ancient Indian teachers evolved a special form of education whereby harmony was established between materialism and spiritualism and human life thus headed towards greater perfection.

The Upanishads aver that whatever good is done with full knowledge and awareness becomes forceful and fruitful in life. *Vivekananda*, the great patriot-prophet of Modern India, who could feel the pulse of the Indian nation, states that-
• Education is the panacea for all our ills.

• It is the manifestation of the perfection already in man

• It is the training by which the expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful in life.

• It is a life-building man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas
The ancient and medieval recognized all these aspects while formulating the policies guiding them. Accordingly all fields of vidya or knowledge were divided into two broad streams-

- the *paravidya* (the higher knowledge, the spiritual wisdom) and
- the *aparavidya* (the lower knowledge, the secular sciences). The latter is needed to live a comfortable life here. The former helps one to be fully prepared for the hereafter.

2. Balanced combination of both is advocated so that both civilization and culture are imparted.
The Four Vedas
• The Vedas are the oldest among the literatures of the world,

• The original sources of the philosophy of life in ancient India.

• A study of these Vedas will enable one to get a thorough knowledge not only of the philosophy of life but also of the whole fabric of ancient Indian culture.

• Consequently, the entire literature and philosophy of India, The **Upanishads**, the **Smritis** and the **Puranas**, all acknowledge the superiority of Vedas.

• The basis of Indian culture lies in the Vedas, which are four in number- Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda.
Vedas have their own characteristic features. Through them we are able to know about the culture, civilization, life and philosophy of people in ancient India.

Vedas symbolize the chief objective of human life, which has been deliverance from this world of births and deaths. The Indian philosophy of life has never accepted life as purposeless.
The Rig Veda

- The Rig Veda is established as the earliest work not merely of the Hindus, but of all Indo-European languages and humanity.
- It lays the foundation upon which Hindu Civilization has been building up through the ages.
- Broadly speaking, it is on a foundation of plain living and high thinking.
- Some of the prayers of the Rig Veda, like the widely known Gayatri mantram also found in Samaveda and Yajur veda touch the highest point of knowledge and sustain human souls to this day.
- The Rig Veda itself exhibits an evolution and the history of the Rigveda is a history of the culture of the age.
The Sama Veda

The compilation of all the hymns recited on the occasion of the Soma Yajna came to be known as the Sama Veda.

The Yajur Veda

- Though the duty of chanting the hymns on the occasion of sacrifice was mainly undertaken by the Hotri, the first order of priesthood, yet certain hymns related to prayer or invocation were sung by the Adhvaryus who were closely associated with sacrificial operations. Consequently, a separate training school was established for the education of these priests. It is the collection of prose Mantras.

- The elementary prose literature of India, which culminated in the Upanishads, lies in the rudimentary form in the Yajurveda. We get in the Yajurveda glimpses of the religious and secular aspects of life in India.
The Atharvaveda

• In the beginning only three Vedas were popular. In the course of time the fourth Veda called the Atharvaveda was also recognized. It is more original in contents. Unlike the preceding Vedas, the majority of Mantras in this Veda have not been adapted from the Rigveda.

• The Atharvaveda is thoroughly secular in character containing a vivid description of various arts and sciences
The system of education, which evolved in the Rigveda concerns itself with the acquisition of the Supreme knowledge, religion and Brahma. The aim of the Veda was the knowledge of the Ultimate Truth and the realization of the Supreme.
The admission was made by the formal ceremony Upanayana or initiation by which the pupil left the home of his natural parents for that of the preceptor.

The pupil was eligible to admission to the preceptor’s house only on the basis of his moral fitness and unimpeachable conduct.

The discipline of brahmacharya or celibacy was compulsory. It was one of the sacred duties of the pupil to serve his preceptor. He pledged devotion to him in thought, speech and deed and worshipped him as his own father or God.
• Brahman-Sangh was an organization where meritorious students were given chances to fulfill their quest of higher knowledge. These Sanghs may be compared to the seminars of the modern times as they had all qualities of these seminars.

• There was equality between the sexes in the field of knowledge. The Rig Veda mentions women Rais called Brahmanavadinis.

• Princes and other leading Kshatriiyas were trained in all the manifold sciences to make them fit for government. Most boys of the lower orders learnt their trades from their fathers. Some cities became renowned because of their teachers like Varanasi, Taxila, Ujjain and Kanchi.
Education during the Later Vedic Age
• Aim of education during the Post-Vedic period-the salvation of the soul.

• During the Vedic period the student used to attain the objective of education through penance while living with Acharya as member of his family. During the later-Vedic period, Yajna replaced the penance and a number of procedures were prescribed for the same.

• Only that education was regarded true, which helped one to realize this supreme truth.

• The *Upanayan Sanskar* ceremony was so important during the Later-Vedic period that it was usually regarded a second birth of the individual.
Curriculum

• During the post- Vedic period various types of literatures were produced pertaining to different Vedas.
• In addition to religious subject, many worldly subjects were also included in the curriculum.
• The curriculum consisted of Vedas, History Puranas, Grammar, mathematics, Brahma Vidya, Nirukti, astronomy, dance, music etc.
• The aim of education was the attainment of Brahmavarchasa i.e. knowledge of the Absolute.
• Special emphasis was laid on the study of the Scriptures, technically known as Svadhyaya or Self-study. It was a sort of sacrifice to Brahma whereby the attainment of an imperishable world was possible.
Method of Instruction

• Hearing, thinking and meditation were the three principal psychological methods of instruction during the post-Vedic period.

• Question-answer system was followed in the Upanishad literature, through this difficult and abstract ideas were made simple.

• The pupils were free to discuss points freely with the Guru. The teacher was expected to be in possession of the essential qualities viz. profundity of education, clairvoyant vision and intellectual regeneration.
At the completion of their educational period, the teachers would deliver convocational address to the students, which sought to remind them of the duties impractical life they stood at the threshold of. This was the Samavartana ceremony.

These final addresses of the teachers of ancient India can be compared to the Convocation Address of modern Universities.
Forms of Educational Institutions
Broadly there existed three types of institutions

- Gurukulas
- Parishads (Academies) and
- Sammelans (Conferences)

**Gurukula**

The training of the Brahmin pupil took place at the home of a Brahmin teacher. The aim of education was the developing of the pupil's personality, his innate and latent capacities.
Gurukula
**Parishads (Academies)**

- There were special institutions for the promotion of advance study and research. These are called in the Rig Veda as Brahmana-Sangha.
- These Academics were called *Parisads*.
- Learning was also prompted by discussions at public meetings which were a regular of rural life, and were addressed by wandering scholars. These scholars toured the country to deliver public discourses and invite discussion.
Sammelans (Conferences)

Besides the local councils or academies of disputants, there were invited occasionally by some great king, several scholars, Rishis, philosophers and psychologists to a national gathering for the sake of discussions and debates. The ablest and best scholars, speakers, philosophers and thinkers were awarded special prizes for their merits.
Education in the Sutras and Epics
• The period of Sutra literature - between 600 B.C and 200 B.C.

• Need to evolve some practicable method as may epitomize conveniently the huge mass of Vedic literature. This need brought a new type of literature, the Sutras into being.

• Sutras revealed great principles and truths in a very compressed form. The rules and regulations of education were manifested mainly in the form of Dharma-Sutras. These dharma-Sutras embodied the principles of social conduct and a code of duties for the teachers and students.
• Sutra literature consists mainly six divisions known as Vedangas.

• A pre-knowledge of various subjects such as Siksha, Chhadas, Vyakaran, Kalpa and Jyotisha was indispensable for the sake of comprehending the Vedas.

• One special feature of education of this period is specialization of students in different branches of learning.

• Sole objective of the entire system of education during this period was character formation, development of personality and protection of ancient culture.

• One special feature of the literature of the Sutra period is the unprecedented progress of philosophy.
The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the main Epics of ancient India. These epics give us glimpses into the creed of militarism of that age; nevertheless, there are in them scattered facts, which throw light upon the education of that period.
Mahabharata
The *Mahabharata* tells of numerous hermitages where pupils from distant parts gathered for instruction round some far-famed teachers. A full-fledged Ashram is described as consisting of several Departments as follows:

- **Agnisthana**, the place for fire-worship and prayers
- **Brahma-sthana**, the Department of Veda
- **Vishnusthana**, the Department for teaching Raja-Niti, Arthaniti, and Vartta
- **Mahendrasthana**, Military Section
- **Vivasvata-sthana**, Department of Astronomy
- **Somasthana**, Department of Botany
- **Garuda-sthana**, Section dealing with Transport and Conveyances
- **Kartikeya-sthana**, Section teaching military organization, how to form patrols, battalions, and army.
Brahmanic Education
The Reciting Brahman
Illustration from Sougandhika Parinava, 19th Century
The aim of Brahmanic education was similar to the aim of Vedic education when the education was considered to be a means of gaining knowledge.

In Vedic education too much emphasis had been laid on the religious aspect of education, but the Brahmanic education included worldly aspect as well.

Self-reliance, self control, formation of character, individual development, knowledge of social and civil life and preservation of national culture was accompanied with the physical development as the aim of education.
• Besides all the four Vedas, the study of Itihas-puranas, Vyakarans, Arithmetic, Astrology, Ethics, Yajurveda etc were also undertaken. The education was based on psychological principles. Corporal punishment was considered a sin.

• The oral system of teaching and learning followed in the Vedic period continued in the Brahmanic age. The students were made to practice self-study.

• The education was given through discussions and debates and conferences and Sabhas were also organized.

• A new system of education whereby through examples and parabolas, great and abstract moral truths were made easy and understandable.
Education in Buddhist Era
Education in Buddhist Era
"Education is a tool to moksha"
A Jaina preacher explains the doctrine to lay people
“The Enlightened one"
• The monasteries were the centers of education during the Buddhist period.
• Only the Bhikshus could receive religious and other types of education.
• There was no place for Yajna in the Buddhist system.
• For admission the student had to present himself before the teacher and request him for giving education.
• Teacher-taught relationship prevailed as in the Vedic period.
Pabbajja (First ordination)

According to this ceremony, the student after being admitted to a monastery had to renounce all his worldly and family relationship. After admission into ‘Sangh’, they could remain as a monk. The age limit fixed for Pabbajja was 8 years.

Upasampada (Final Ordination)

After completing the education of 12 years, the monk at the age of 20 years had to undergo the Upasampada ritual and then he becomes the permanent member of the Sangh.
Study of religious books was most important. Suttanta, Vinaya and Dhamma were the main subjects. Besides these, spinning, weaving, printing of the cloth, sketching, medicine, surgery and coinage were the other subjects of Buddhist education.

Education during this period may be classified into two parts- primary and higher.

In the primary education the emphasis was given on the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic. Knowledge of grammar was essential. The child was primarily educated in the knowledge of the alphabet, vowels, Sandhis or rules of combination.
In the higher education, religion, philosophy, military science, medicine and other difficult subjects were taught.

Method of teaching was mostly oral. The importance of discussion encouraged the logic in the Buddhist period.

After the completion of education, the students were encouraged to gain the practical and real form of the theoretical knowledge gained by them undertaking long trips.

Indeed Buddhist education was basically religious. Yet, occupational education was not neglected altogether.
Main Educational Centers and Universities in Ancient India
Taxila

- Taxila has been an important center of Brahmanical education.
- During the Buddhist period, its fame continued in Northern India.
- It attracted hundreds of students from various countries of the world. They came their to quench the thirst of their knowledge.
- Being situated at the distance of 20 miles in the West of Rawalpindi, Taxila was the capital of Gandhar Kingdom. According to Valmiki Ramayana, Prince Bharat founded this city and appointed his son Taksha as the ruler of the territory.
Taxila
• Takshshila was an educational center of different subjects, where special and higher studies were carried on.

• Students were admitted according to the decision of the teacher.

• The students were taught the subjects of their own choice.

• There was no examination system prevalent. No degree or diploma was awarded to the students who completed their education.
Only higher studies were conducted in Takshshila and so the students of more than sixteen years of age were admitted in the University.

The fees were also realized in the beginning.

The chief branches and subjects of study were Vedatrayi (Three Vedas), Vedanta, Vyakaran, Ayurveda, eighteen Sippas (crafts), Military education, Astronomy, Agriculture, Commerce, Snake Bite cure etc.

Panini, the father of Vyakaran and Jivaka, an expert in Surgery and Medicine were the product of Taxila. Kautilya, the famous author of Arthashastra had received his higher education here.

No caste distinction was observed as regards the training in these sciences.
Nalanda

- In the province of Bihar, situated at a distance of 40 miles southwest of modern Patna and seven miles north of Rajgriha, Nalanda was a famous cultural and educational center of Northern India.

- This place began to grow in importance since the rise of Mahayana branch of Buddhism in the first century A.D. By the beginning of fourth century A.D. it became educationally important and famous.
• In Nalanda higher studies were carried on.
• Meritorious students from far and wide came to this university to quench their thirst of knowledge.
• The admittance examination in Nalanda was not easy and according to Hieun-Tsang only about 20 percent of the students succeeded in this examination.
• The minimum age limit was twenty years for admission into the university. Education, board and lodging were provided to the students free of cost by the university.
Besides the study of Buddhism and Buddhist literature all other subjects of the time were also included in the course of study.

Though the Vihar belonged to the Mahayana school of Buddhism, yet Hinyanana scriptures were also taught there.

Vedas, Vedant, Sankhya, Philosophy, Dharamshastra, Puran, Jyotish, Ayurveda etc. were the subject of study along with physical education.

Students were also given practical training in many subjects. Students of this university were held in high esteem everywhere in the country.
• Three methods of teaching - verbal and explanatory, lectures and debates and discussions.

• There was the arrangement for one hundred lectures daily and it was obligatory on the part of the students to attend these talks.

• The university had a very big library corresponding to its reputation.
Valabhi

- Another important education center of Buddhist period was Valabhi, capital seat of the Maitraka Kings between 475 and 775 A.D.
- It can aptly be regarded as the rival of Nalanda in fame and educational importance.
- There were several Vihars and monasteries at Valabhi.
• These students after completing their higher education was appointed in the courts on high and responsible posts.

• This clearly indicates that Valabhi was the center not much of religious education as of other secular subjects such as Arthashastra (Economics), Law, Politics and Medical Science.

• Whereas Nalanda was a center for Mahayana branch of Buddhist religion, Valabhi was the center for Hinayana.
Valabhi was famous not only as a center of Buddhist culture and learning but also for the religious tolerance and mental freedom.

Education was imparted in book-keeping, literature and vyakaran etc. and also in many other practical subjects of worldly importance.

The graduates of Valabhi were appointed in high Government services of that time. This University had also very big library.
Vikramshila

- The Vihara of Vikramshila was established by the famous Emperor Dharampala of Pal dynasty in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century in Northern Magadh at a beautiful hill on the bank of the river Ganges.

- In Vikramshila 108 scholars were appointed as the incharge and Acharyas of the various temples. Six additional Pandits were also appointed for general management.

- As there were many learned personalities in the University so its fame spread out in various countries. It attracted a large number of scholars from Tibet, who came there for higher studies.
Vikramshila
• The university was later organized into six colleges.

• In the center there was the central big building having six gates connected with each other. The college was situated in front of it. This central building was called the Vigyan Bhawan.

• A *Dwar pandit* was appointed at the main gate. He used to examine the candidates, who came to seek admission in the University.

• Mahasthavir was the highest authority of the University and the general management was carried on under his guidance. He was called the *Kulpati* of the Gurukula and was elected with great care.
The main subjects of study were vyakaran, Logic, Philosophy, Tantra Shastra and Karamkanda. Later on Tantra Shastra gained prominence. This influenced the education system of the university.

Degrees were conferred on the graduates and post-graduates at the time of Samavartana (Convocation) by the rulers of Bengal.
Odantapuri

- This University had been established long before the Kings of Pala dynasty came into power in Magadha.
- Odantpuri could not attain that level of fame and repute which either Nalanda or Vikramshila had accomplished. Still nearly 1000 monks and students resided and received education there.
- Odantapuri contributed its share in spreading the tenets of Buddhism. It attracted students from Tibet too.
Jagaddala

• Pal King, Raja Ram Pal of Bengal had set a city on the banks of Ganga. It was the beginning of the 11th century and it was named as Ranavati.

• He also constructed a monastery and named it as Jagaddala. Soon after this University became the center of learning it remained the center of Buddhist culture for about 100 years.

• It was destroyed by Muslims in 1203 A.D. In Jagaddala there were many scholars notable for their knowledge. Their reputation reached Tibet and their books were translated in Tibetan language.
Mithila

- From 12\textsuperscript{th} century to 15\textsuperscript{th} century, Mithila had been an important center of learning and culture; and besides literature and fine arts, scientific subjects were also taught there.

- There was a Nyaya Shastra too. Gangesha Upadhyaya founded a school of New Logic (Navya-Nyaya).
Mithila
Mithila produced a number of other scholars and literary celebrities. Even up to the period of Mughal Emperor Akbar, it continued to flourish as an important center of education and culture credited with country-wide repute.

It was famous especially for its Nyaya (jurisprudence) and Tarka-Shastra (Logic).

Mithila had instituted a peculiar examination known as Salaka-pariksha, which the students would take at the completion of their education.

Success in this examination alone could entitle the students to the Degree of Graduation of the University.
Nadia

• Nadia was formerly called Navadweep.
• It is situated at the confluence of Ganga and Jalangi rivers in Bengal.
• It was the center of trade and commerce as well as learning and culture.
• It had produced innumerable scholars from time to time.
• Nadia enjoyed popularity and fame as an important center of education, especially for such branches of learning as Logic, Vyakaran, Politics and Law.
• Education in Nadia University was imparted at three centers namely-Navadweep, Shantipur and Gopaulpura.

• Sometimes students studied here for 20 years.

• Nadia in short had played an important role in the development of Education and its prominence remained unquestioned even in the middle ages.
THANK YOU