

Indian Educational System: An Overview of the Ancient Indian Education

Introduction

India has a rich tradition of learning and education right from the antiquity. These were handed over generations to generations either through oral or written medium. A single feature of ancient Indian or Hindu civilization is that it has been molded and shaped in the course of its history more by religious than by political, or economic influences. The fundamental principles of social, political, and economic life were welded into a comprehensive theory, which is called Religion in Hindu thought. The total configuration of ideals, practices, and conduct is called Dharma (Religion, Virtue or Duty) in this ancient tradition. Indian culture is suffused thoroughly by religious values. The approach of our forefathers to life, their subtle analysis and codification of duties, all indicate their cherished spiritual values. Their political as well as social realities were not circumscribed within the narrow geographical bounds. Their attitude to life was characterized by width of vision and they identified their duty with devotion to the ideal of '*summum bonum*' of mankind. Multi-dimensional progress of all mankind became the sole objective of her civilization.

The ancient Indian polity, eschewing the imponderables of violence, friction and self- aggrandizement, was based on the principles of love, honourable conduct and good behaviour. Life had a definite aim, an ideal and the attainment of which was thought to transcend all material achievements. The educational evolution in ancient India was also founded upon this very ideal. Dr. R.K. Mukherjee said, *Learning in India through the ages had been prized and pursued not for its own sake, if we may so put it, but for the sake, and as a part, of religion. It was sought as the means of self-realization, as the means to the highest end of life viz. Mukti or*

Emancipation. Ancient Indian education is also to be understood as being ultimately the outcome of the Indian theory of knowledge as part of the corresponding scheme of life and values. The scheme takes full account of the fact that Life includes Death and the two forms the whole truth. This gives a particular angle of vision, a sense of perspective and proportion in which the material and the moral, the physical and spiritual, the perishable and permanent interests and values of life are clearly defined and strictly differentiated. Of all the people of the world the Hindu is the most impressed and affected by the fact of death as the central fact of life. The individual's supreme duty is thus to achieve his expansion into the Absolute, his self-fulfillment, for he is a potential God, a spark of the Divine. Education must aid in this self-fulfillment, and not in the acquisition of mere objective knowledge.

Philosophy of Life in Ancient India

The outstanding characteristics of the ancient philosophy of life in India are that while no great significance is attached to the physical existence in the world, yet the importance of action in this material world is not overlooked. The doctrine of action (Karma) occupies a very significant place in the Indian system of life and of education. Action or Karma should not be for the redemption of mankind. This has been the ideal of the doctrine of karma as also of the educational system of ancient India. Hence, the ultimate object of devotion for an individual is the Brahma and not this world. The material world is the lab of the human soul where the individual has to receive systematic education for bringing about self-development. The ancient Aryan culture of India lays the greatest emphasis on plain living and high thinking as the moral basis of education for self-development. Consequently, the individual has been bidden necessarily to gain both kinds of knowledge, materialistic and spiritual.

All fields of vidya or knowledge were thus 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. Hence a balanced combination of both is advocated so that both civilization and culture are imparted.

The materialistic education embodies various aspects of the knowledge of physical sciences. It is for a student that the developed social structure exists. The student engaged in the pursuit of material knowledge has consequently been treated as the fulcrum or the axis of the social structure, for in his development lies the well being of the society. Spiritual knowledge has been regarded as the means of attaining the final beatitude. For the realization of the great truth, deep meditation in privacy is essential and hence the individual has been bidden to take recourse to severe penance (Tapa) once again. The devotee of spiritual knowledge has been enjoined upon to keep aloof from material objects and to consume himself wholly in self-meditation because the main elements constituting divine or spiritual knowledge cannot be understood and realized through hearing or by means of intellect. These can be realized only through divine graciousness.

The ancient Indian system of education is pervaded with the desire for bringing about salvation and final beatitude along with the full physical development of the individual in the same manner as the philosophy of life is shot through by the spirit of religion. The Indian system of education caters to both physical and spiritual solitariness.

Fundamentals of Ancient Indian Education

Ancient Indian Education had been evolved strictly on the foundations of Indian epistemological and philosophical traditions. The idea of the ephemerality of life and the world, the concept of ultimate death and the futility of mundane pleasures had provided them with a special angle of vision. The entire educational tradition originated in these

principles. Thus, the Indian sages devoted themselves to the study of a Supra-sensible world and spiritual powers and moulded their life accordingly. The ultimate aim of education emerged as the *Chitti-Vritti-nirodha* (the control of mental activities connected with the so called concrete world). However, education did not neglect the development of the pupil's powers for his all-sided advancement.

1. Knowledge related to life

During the ancient times in India, the pupil away from the haunts of din and distractions of the material world, amidst beautiful natural surroundings, sitting at the feet of his teacher, would comprehend all the intricate problems of life through listening and meditation. He would not remain contented with mere bookish learning but acquire fairly practical knowledge of the world and society through close contact with the people. An attempt was made to make the student capable of experiencing the Supreme truth himself and mould the society accordingly.

2. Close association between teacher and student resulted in all round development

The residence of the pupil at the house of the teacher accompanied by a sense of devoted service had been a unique tradition in ancient India. The pupil, through such a close contact with his teacher, would naturally imbibe his qualities through emulation. This was regarded as indispensable for the fullest development of his personality because the teacher was supposed to symbolize all the good ideals, traditions and code of behavior of the society from where the pupil hailed.

3. Development in social work

Another important characteristic of ancient Indian educational system was that the same was wedded to the practical ends of life. The pupil's residence at his teacher's house would make it possible for him to develop social contacts as it was his sacred duty to collect fuel- wood,

supply water and do other household odd jobs for the teacher. In this way, not only would he receive instructions related to domestic life, but also learn the concrete lesson of the dignity of labour and social service.

4. Vocational training

Students were given training in occupations of animal husbandry, agriculture and dairy farming etc. by tending his teacher's cows and serving him in diverse ways. Evidently, the ancient Indian education was not merely theoretical but was related to the realities of life. The modern concept of Learning by Doing as understood in the West today, was the very core and essence of education in ancient India. Life served as the laboratory for the educational experimentation from where many noble traditions were developed. Similarly, begging alms by the pupils for their own subsistence and service of the Guru fostered in them humanitarian virtues.

Thus, 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 Four Vedas

The Vedas regarded as the oldest among the literatures of the world, are 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 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, 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 deliberance from this world of births and deaths. The Indian philosophy of life has never accepted life as purposeless.

Before giving a detailed account of the Vedic Education, it is necessary to make a short appraisal of the four Vedas as the education of that period was based on them.

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.

Other Vedas

Following Rigveda, came into existence the three Samhitas of Sama, Yajuh and Atharva in close succession. These Vedas ushered in a new kind of literature. The order of hymns included in the Rigveda is not in accord with that of the sacrifices; so much so there are some such hymns as have no relation to the Yajna or sacrifice at all. On the contrary, in the Sama, Yajuh and Atharva the hymns follow closely in order of the sacrifices. Priesthood was gaining ground. Higher education later on related itself to priesthood and the ritualistic aspect of religion. The curriculum of education was the same for all the students called

Brahmcharinis; each of them was required to attain proficiency in the melodies of verses and ritualistic aspects of yajna. In course of time however, essentiality of division of labour was strongly felt owing to the growing complex nature of formal aspect of sacrifice, because no single individual priest could be expected to specialize in the triple aspect of the yajna.

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

It is the collection of prose Mantras. 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. 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.

Evolution of Education in the Rigveda

The Rig-Veda, in the form in which we have it now, is a compilation out of old material, a collection and selection of 1,017 hymns out of the vast literature of hymns, which have been accumulating for a long period. When the Rigvedic texts was thus fixed and appropriated for purposes of the Samhita, its editors had to think out the principles on which the hymns could be best arranged. These show considerable literary skill, originality of design, and insight into religious needs. Rishis were chosen, who were seers of truth. Their works were utilized to constitute six different Mandalas. These Rishis are Gritsamada, Visvamisra, Vamadeva, Atril, Bharadvaja, and Vasistha.

When the highest knowledge was thus built up by these Seers and revealed and stored up in the hymns, there the methods were then necessarily evolved by which such knowledge could be acquired, conserved, and transmitted to posterity. Thus, every Rishi was a teacher who would start by imparting to his son the texts of the knowledge he had personally acquired and such texts would be the special property of his family. Each such family of Rishis was thus functioning like a Vedic school admitting pupils for instruction in the literature or texts in its possession. The relations between teacher and taught was well established in the Rig Veda. The methods of education naturally varied with the capacity of pupils. Self-realization by means of tapas would be for the few. It is believed that these sages, by virtue of their Tapas or asceticism and Yoga, were gifted with the vision of a clairvoyant, capable of knowing about the past, present and the future.

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 Curriculum of Vedic Education

The students started the recitation of the Vedic hymns in early hours of morning. The chanting of Mantras had been evolved into the form of a fine art. Special attention was paid to the correct pronunciation of words, *Pada* or even letters. The Vedic knowledge was imparted by the Guru or the teacher to the pupil through regulated and prescribed pronunciation, which the pupil would commit to memory, having listened to it alternatively. Only that knowledge, which was received from the lips of the teacher, was regarded as purely Vedic. Thus, the teaching was oral.

Various subjects were incorporated in the curriculum of Vedic education. Grammar, rhetoric, astrology, logic, Nirukti (etymological interpretation of words) was the main subjects. Vedang was the synonym of all these subjects taken together- the performance of sacrifice, correct pronunciation, knowledge of prosody, etymology, grammar, and jyotishi or the science of calendar. The study of logic occupied a special place, because knowledge of any other subject was tested on its basis. Debates and discussions were organized for training in logic.

Though the Rigvedic education, being essentially religious and philosophical in character, was imparted only to those who were fit to make quest of Eternal Truth and acquire Supreme knowledge, yet there was arrangement for secular education and vocational training for the masses. The people would receive training in diverse arts and crafts for material gain. Agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry attained to a high norm of progress. Thus, we can safely conclude that secular, social and practical form of education was in existence during the Rigvedic era.

Method of Teaching

Two methods of teaching were being practiced during the Vedic period. The first method was Oral and the second was based on Chintan i.e. thinking. In the oral method the students were to memorize the Mantras (Vedic hymns) and Richayas (verses of Rigveda) in order that they might

not be changed wrongly and they might remain preserved in their original forms.

Thinking method was another part of the teaching method. Through this an attempt was made to reserve the Veda Mantras and Richayas. The thinking principle, Manana Shakti was reckoned higher than the subject of thinking. So the primary subject of education was the mind itself. According to the ancient Indian theory of education, the training of the mind and the process of thinking, are essential for the acquisition of knowledge. So the pupil had mainly to educate himself and achieve his own mental growth. Education was reduced to the three simple processes of Sravana, Manana and Niddhyaasana. Sravana was listening to the truths as they fell from the lips of the teacher. Knowledge was technically called Sruti or what the ear heard and not what was seen in writing. The second process of knowledge called Manana implies that the pupil has to think out for himself the meaning of the lessons imparted to him orally by his teacher so that they may assimilate fully. The third step known as Niddhyasana means complete comprehension by the pupil of the truth that is taught so that he may live the truth and not merely explain it by word. Knowledge must result in realization. Just as in modern days teachers encourage intelligent students by guiding them to make research, similarly in ancient days Manan (reflection) was a method especially for highly intelligent students.

Main Characteristics of Vedic Education

Some special features of the educational system of the Rigveda era may be summed up as follows-

- 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. In this new home he had a second birth and was called *Dvijya* or twice born.

- 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. Though a married youth was entitled to get education, yet he was denied the right of being the residential pupil.
- 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. Pupils who neglected their duties were debarred from education and expelled from the institution.
- 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.
- There was equality between the sexes in the field of knowledge. The Rig Veda mentions women Rasis called Brahmanavadinis.
- Princes and other leading Kshatriyas 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. Chief among them were - Varanasi, Taxila from the day of Buddha and Kanchi in the beginning of the Christian era. Varanasi was famous for its religious teachers. Taxila was known for its secular studies. Among the famous men connected with Taxila was Panini, the grammarian of the fifth or fourth century B.C.: Kautilya, the Brahmin minister of Chandragupta Maurya and Charaka one of the two leading authorities of Indian medical sciences. The institutions imparted Vedic knowledge that exists even today. There were also universities like Taxila and Ujjain for medicine and learning including mathematics and astronomy respectively. In the south Kanchi became an important center of learning.

In the Rigvedic period occupations were not dependent on Varna system. At that time the nature of education was religious; but this sort of education was meant only for those persons who, rising above the mundane interests, were capable of attaining spiritual heights. Ordinary people were still engaged to advance the material well-being of the society This age is

exemplary for its economic, political and religious progress and famous for various arts and crafts, agriculture, commerce and trade. It thus, leads to the inevitable inference that the period must have evolved an elaborate system of vocational, scientific and commercial education.

Conclusion

Thus, the ideal of the Vedic education was lofty. Ample opportunities were provided to the pupil for the development of his personality. The preceptors took personal care of the pupils, which resulted inevitably in a multi-dimensional development. The educational system of Vedic period achieved a pronounced success in connection with character-formation, development of personality, and contribution to knowledge in all branches of learning as well as social well being and material prosperity. The Vedic education was essentially spiritual and religious in character, yet it did not ignore the material aspect, the evidence whereof is available in the Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda. Thus it points unmistakably to the future evolution of Aryan culture.

Education during the Later Vedic Age

In Vedic period, the educational sphere was inordinately dominated by priesthood hence knowledge pertaining to sacrificial rituals had considerably advanced. There were scholars and thinkers who had developed an attitude characterized by mysticism towards life and meditated on speculative subjects such as God, Soul and Universe, Life and Death etc. In later- Vedic age, this trend of speculative thought grew intense and vehement. The philosophers now meditated upon self-realization. Their mystical experiences manifested themselves through the scriptures known as *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas*. The Upanishads were next to emerge into being. The Upanishads aver that whatever good is done with full knowledge and awareness becomes forceful and fruitful in life. They

are the archives preserving ancient culture and civilization. The Vedanta, an important trend in philosophical thought, which can rightly be regarded as the culminating point of the Vedic knowledge, was revealed through the pages of the Upanishads. The spread and propagation of the post-Vedic education was influenced through diverse institutions known as *Sakhas*, *Charanas*, *Parishads*, *Kulas* and *Gotras*- an improvement on the oral tradition of the Vedic literature.

Aim of Education

The basic aim of education during the Later-Vedic period has been the same as during the Vedic Age- the salvation of the soul, but the method of attaining this goal has been different between the two periods. 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 post-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 Post-Vedic period that it was usually regarded a second birth of the individual.

Curriculum

Veda mantras (hymns and verses) were principally taught in the Vedic period. 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. Education was not regarded as an end in itself; it was fundamentally related to life. Its aim was the attainment of Brahmavarchasa i.e. knowledge of the Absolute. The performance of sacrifice and other ritualistic operations were directed to the same end, but 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. Also question-answer system was followed in the Upanishad literature, through this difficult and abstract ideas were made simple.

Important place of Teacher

Teacher (Guru) enjoyed a predominant place not only in his Gurukul but also in the entire society. He was regarded as a great guide for all. 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. Rules of conduct were enforced keeping in view the physical, mental and moral development of students. Strict adherence to rules of conduct and discipline was an inseparable aspect of education in those days. The duration of education was twelve years.

Duties of Students and Teachers

Students had to beg alms for the support of the Guru and himself. This tradition was carried out by all, be he poor or rich. This would beget in the students the virtue of humility and thereby he learnt the concrete lesson of charitable good done to him by the society and in return his sense of obligation to it. Along with the external duties study was the main duty of the pupil. The study of Vedas would initiate their education. The pupil prior to receiving education was called upon to prove that he was peaceful, patient and tenacious of purpose. Simple living and high thinking was the motto of his life.

At the completion of their educational period, the teachers would deliver convocational address to the students, which sought to remind them of the duties in practical 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.

The teacher was expected to possess all moral and spiritual qualifications. His profession made it indispensable to master the Vedic knowledge thoroughly and dwell entirely in the Brahma. He illumined the inner being of his pupils with his own spiritual enlightenment. It was traditional knowledge to pupils through a succession of teachers, which came to be known as *Guru Parampara*. The teachers felt the natural desire that their truths and principles, learning and experience should survive them and promote good of the society. The life of the teacher served as a model for the pupils to follow and imitate.

Forms of Educational Institutions

Broadly there existed three types of institutions namely *Gurukulas*, *Parishads*(Academies) and *Sammelans* (Conferences) in that age. According to sacred texts, the training of the Brahmin pupil took place at the home of a Brahmin teacher. In some texts the guru is depicted as the poor ascetic and it is the duty of the student to beg for his teacher. The first lesson that was taught to the student was the performance of *sandhya* and also reciting of *gayatri*. The family functioned as a domestic school, an ashram or a hermitage where the mental faculties of the pupils were developed by the teacher's constant attention and personal instruction. Education treated as a matter of individual concern, did not admit of the method of mass production applicable in industry. The making of man was regarded as an artistic and not a mechanical process. Indeed, the aim of education was the developing of the pupil's personality, his innate and latent capacities. This view of education as a process of one's inner growth

and self-fulfillment evolved its own technique, its rules, methods and practices.

Besides these regular schools of instructions, 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; there is a reference to the Panchala Parisad in the Upanishads, in whose proceedings even kings participated. These Academies were the main forums where students belonging to higher order of learning gathered and quenched their insatiable thirst for knowledge through discussions and discourses. 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. The Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads abound in such instances.

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. In addition to the above mentioned forms of educational institutions, courts of kings too, served as important centers of learning where several scholars and philosophers, hailing from different countries, would flock together, talk, discuss and throw light on metaphysical, theological and other problems.

During the Vedic period one could choose a particular profession as he liked and accordingly his Varna was determined. But during the later Vedic period Varna came to be determined by birth. Consequently the whole society was divided into four Varna- Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Secular education was prescribed for all these Varnas or castes

according to the requirements of their respective duties they had to perform in life towards the society.

The main duties of the Brahmans were studying and teaching of the Vedas, performance of the Yajna for themselves as well as for others, receiving and giving gifts. The brahmanas had to undertake the responsibility of the education of the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas in view of their specialization in the profession of teaching. They came to be regarded as the guides and teachers of the entire community. Their presence was considered to be indispensable on the occasion of religious ceremonies and rituals.

With the passage of time the Vedic study came to be regarded as of secondary importance by the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. They thought it sufficient for them to have acquired merely superficial knowledge of the Vedas, Vedangas and the Upanishads. The sphere of duties appropriate to the Kshatriyas was limited only to defense, protection of people and administration. Military training was thus important for the princes. The Ramayana and The Mahabharata also contain reference to the military training of the kings and princes.

As regards the Vaishyas, agriculture and animal husbandry and trade was their chief occupation, and as such they were given technical education of agriculture, animal husbandry and trade. Education of the Vaishyas, too, was under the direct control and supervision of the Brahmans. Study of Vedas was regarded as of secondary magnitude to them. Knowledge of various languages, rates of wages, rules applicable to purchase and sale of commodities, was regarded, as indispensable for the Vaishyas. To acquire this cumulative information, the study of arithmetic, general geography as well as economic and commercial geography, science of agriculture and business method was extremely essential.

There was no provision of higher education for the Shudras. To serve was their occupation. Nonetheless their education resembled more or less that of Vaishyas. They learnt *devajana Vidya*, which according to Shamkara, included dancing, vocal music, orchestral music and dyeing of clothes. No established technical institutions were in existence for the sake of imparting technical education, but their knowledge was transferred from generation to generation as heritage.

Thus, the Aryans had established and recognized the superiority of Varna system. In addition to these, there were prevalent certain arts and sciences which could be regarded as non-parallel in the history of that period.

Education in the Sutras and Epics

Education In Sutras

The period of the Vedic literature was followed by that of Sutra literature. It falls between 600 B.C and 200 B.C. The growth of Vedic literature had become so vast and diffused that the need was strongly felt 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. These Sutras revealed great principles and truths in a very compressed and succinct form. In this age, 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.

The entire Sutra literature consists of 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. This period is

the most important one from the viewpoint of its constructive and creative aspect in ancient Indian education in as much as such important branches of learning as Geometry, Algebra, Astronomy, Astrology, Physiology and Grammar reached culminating point in this period.

The commentary of Patanjali is an immortal creation of ancient India. The Nyaya and Mimamsa Shastras too were the production of this age. Besides these works the Smritis were written for the proper guidance of life. The account of education in the Sutra period will not be complete without the consideration of the evidence of the grammatical literature as represented in the works of Panini and his two famous commentators, Katyayana and Patanjali. Panini throws light on the literature of his times.

The educational system during the Sutra period was identical with that of Upanishad period. All the current unwritten regulations, social and religious traditions and long standing conventions, had been compiled in the sutras in a well-arranged and systematic order. This newly created literature became the proper course of study for the students. The necessity of regular institutions was felt for higher education. Various sciences and arts such as handicrafts, medicine, sculpture and architecture had attained the peak of development. Thus, the 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. Theories of philosophy had enjoyed an uninterrupted continuity since the Vedic age. The period of Upanishads can well be regarded as the meridian of philosophy. But the period of the Sutras witnessed the consummation of its progress. In this period, the current of philosophical thought flowed out chiefly in six different channels. In this way developed six systems of philosophy, viz, The Samkha of Kapila, The Yoga of Patanjali, The Nyaya of Gautama, The

Vaisheshika of Kanada, Karma or Purva-mimansa of Jaimini and Uttara Mimamsa or Vedanta of Badarayana.

In this way the study of philosophy was complete in itself. It presented a correct solution to the problems of discipline, humanity and Supreme knowledge. Indian philosophy is a unique contribution of our country to humanity at large. It was a system of thought that kept the flame of Indian culture ablaze through a succession of stormy ages.

Education in the Epics

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.

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 which are enumerated as following:

1. Agnisthana, the place for fire-worship and prayers
2. Brahma-sthana, the Department of Veda
3. Vishnusthana, the Department for teaching Raja-Niti, Arthaniti, and Vartta
4. Mahendrasthan, Military Section
5. Vivasvata-sthana, Department of Astronomy
6. Somasthan, Department of Botany
7. Garuda-sthana, Section dealing with Transport and Conveyances
8. Kartikeya-sthana, Section teaching military organization, how to form patrols, battalions, and army.

The most important of such hermitage was that of the *Naimisha*, a forest, which was like a university. The presiding personality of the place was *Saunaka*, to whom was applied the designation of Kulapati, sometimes defined as the preceptor of 10,000 disciples.

The hermitage of *Kanva* was another famous center of learning, of which a full description is given. It is situated on the banks of the Malini, a tributary of the Sarayu River. It was not a solitary hermitage, but an assemblage of numerous hermitages round the central hermitage of Rishi Kanva, the presiding spirit of the settlement. There were specialists in every branch of learning cultivated in that age; specialists in each of the four Vedas; in sacrificial literature and art, Kalpa-Sutras in the Chhanda (Metrics), Sabda (Vyakarana), and Nirukta. There were also Logicians, knowing the principles of Nyaya, and of Dialectics (the art of establishing propositions, solving doubts, and ascertaining conclusions). There were also specialists in the physical sciences and art. There were, for example, experts in the art of constructing sacrificial altars of various dimensions and shapes (on the basis of a knowledge of Solid Geometry); those who had knowledge of the properties of matter (dravyaguna); of physical processes and their results of causes and their effect; and zoologists having a special knowledge of monkeys and birds. It was thus a forest University where the study of every available branch of learning was cultivated.

The hermitage of Vyasa was another seat of learning. There Vyasa taught the Vedas to his disciples. Among the other hermitages noticed by the Mahabharata may be mentioned those of Vasishtha and Visvamitra and that in the forest of Kamyaka on the banks of the Saraswati. But a hermitage near Kurkshetra deserves special notice for the interesting fact recorded that it produced two noted women hermits.

Military science was generally called Dhanurveda. The Mahabharata marks the culmination of military art and science. In ancient times, military education was not only organized by the State, but on the

other hand private individual instructors too would undertake this duty. In every village, there were military training camps where villagers were given military education for self-defense. Mainly speaking, dancing, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, carpentry and smithery were some such arts and crafts, which helped a major portion of the population of the country to earn their livelihood. In the early Vedic age handicrafts and agriculture were held in high esteem.

Students approached the learned souls for the acquisition of knowledge. Parents too encouraged it and sent their boys to the institutions. When their number began to increase the institutions formed with these students began to grow gradually. With the lapse of time these institutions turned into Universities and were maintained with the gift of the public and the state. In this way many institutions were formed of which Taxila, Ujjain, Nalanda, Benares, Ballavi, Ajanta, Madura and Vikramsila were very famous. Taxila was famous for medicine and Ujjain for Astronomy. Both were pre-Buddhist. Jibaka the well-known medical expert and the state physician of the King of Magadha of the 6th century B.C. and Panini the famous grammarian of the 7th century B.C. and Kautilya, the authority on Arthashastra, of the 4th century B.C. were students of Taxila.

The academic year has several terms. Each term is inaugurated by a ceremony called Upakarmana and ends by the Utsarga ceremony. Holidays (Anadhayas) are regularly observed on two Astamis (eight day of the moon) two Chaturdasis (fourteenth day of the moon), Amavasya, Purnima and on the last day of each of the four seasons, called Chaturmasi. Besides these Nitya (regular) holidays there are Naimittika (occasional) holidays due to accidental circumstances, eg. storms, thunder, rain, fog, fire, eclipses etc.

Conclusion

To sum up, in ancient India secular vocational training was essentially a practical and useful education. There was complete absence of formal paraphernalia of education required in modern times; education was imparted by the father to his son according to practical and direct method. Industrial occupations were at the peak. Indian artists have bequeathed to the world many fine artistic creations, which will be regarded as the valuable treasure of the past, present as well as the future.

Brahmanic Education

Most of the aspects of human existence found fullest scope for development and evolution during the period of the Vedic education. The Brahmanical education has its own peculiar importance as regards the harmonious development of physical, mental and spiritual aspects of human life. It helped a lot in the development of character and individuality of human beings.

Mr. F.E. Keay, in his book named 'History of Indian Education, Ancient and Later Times' observes,

“Not only did Brahman education develop a system of education which survived the crumbling empires and the changes of the society, but they also, through all these thousands of years, kept aglow of the torch of higher learning, and numbered amongst them many great thinkers who have left their mark not only on the learning of India, but upon the intellectual life of the World.”

Thus, 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.

Some Important characteristics of Brahmanic Education were as follows:

1. The disciple lived in direct contact with the Acharya. The Guru took all the responsibilities of their taught in regard to fooding, lodging etc.
2. The daily routine of the students was regulated.
3. Brahmanic education paid a good deal of attention to the formation of character and nature of the students.
4. The students were supposed to maintain strict celibacy.
5. It prepared the students for the entire life in its fullness. Yet the tendency towards specialization had grown up.
6. In Brahmanic education instead of collective teaching, individual teaching prevailed. Thus, there were more opportunities to develop the inner talents of the students.
7. Brahmanic education was not only theoretical; it also gave the practical knowledge to face the struggles of life.
8. In Brahmanic education the course of study was much more vast than that of Vedic- period. Besides all the four Vedas, the study of Itihas-puranas, Vyakarans, Arithmetic, Astrology, Ethics, Yajurveda etc were also undertaken.
9. The education was based on psychological principles. Corporal punishment was considered a sin.
10. Students were free to study according to their choice and ability.
11. In Brahmanic education Karma siddhant and stratification of caste system also had an effect on the courses of study.

The oral system of teaching and learning followed in the Vedic period continued in the Brahmanic age. They 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 parabolae, great and abstract moral truths were made easy and understandable. Like Vedic period, in Brahmanic age also, the art of writing had not developed well and so the education was mostly oral.

The students had to study in the Gurukulas for about 12 years. After that they were allowed to go home, and the Guru gave them final instructions. This ritual was called the *Samavartan Sanskar*. They were at that time specially instructed to speak the truth, to fulfill the duties and never to be careless in self-study. The curriculum was basically predominated by religious elements, production of literature pertaining to Havan, Yajna etc., Itihas and puranas and variety of subjects of worldly and spiritual concerns.

Although Brahmanic system of education had many qualities to sustain life, yet it was not free from the defects. It was fully dominated by religion. Since most of the teachers were Purohites, they yield stress on religion and Karamkand, History, philosophy; Natural sciences etc were relegated into background. Since a good deal of importance was given to the Shastras in this system of education, everything based on them was correct and nothing else. Brahmanic system of education did not have the coordination in teaching of various subjects. Study of the subject in broad perspective or comprehensive study was lacking.

In short, inspite of many defects, this system of education was more or less ideal and well planned and it did succeed in bringing about all round development of the personality of the educands.

Education in Buddhist Era

Buddhist education can be rightly regarded as a phase of the ancient Hindu system of education. Buddhism, itself, especially in its original and ancient form, is, as has been admitted on all hands, rooted deeply in the

pre-existing Hindu systems of thought and life. Max Muller in Chips from a German Workshop said, *"To my mind, having approached Buddhism after a study of the ancient religion of India, the religion of the Veda, Buddhism has always seemed to be, to a new religion, but a natural development of the Indian mind in its various manifestations, religious, philosophical, social, and political."*

The monasteries were the centers of education during the Buddhist period. Besides monasteries, there were no other organizations for imparting education. Only the Bhikshus could receive religious and other types of education. Other persons were deprived of this facility. 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. The teacher was fully responsible for education of his pupil. In turn, the pupil had also to be responsive to the instructions received from the teacher. Thus, a relationship was established between the teacher and the taught as during the Vedic period.

Pabbajja (First ordination)

It means 'going out'. 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. At the time of entering into the Sangh, the disciple must have attained the age of 8 years. There they had to receive education for 12 years and during this period the new monk made his preparation for the Sangh life. After that he had to undergo the *Upasampada* ceremony, which entitled a student for a full-fledged membership of the monastery.

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. This ceremony was democratic in nature. The Shraman had to present himself before all other monks (Bhikshus) of the monastery. One could be admitted for the Upasampada ceremony only when the majority of the monks voted in favour of the same.

In the Vedic age the student was given education upto 25 years of age and after that he was permitted to go home and lead the life, in the Buddhist system after having received education the student never came back to his parents place for leading the life of a householder. He remained a monk for good and cut off his worldly relationships forever.

There always existed cordial relationship between the teacher and the taught. The teacher too had to observe all these rules of conduct, which were prescribed for the students. It was the highest and most sacred duty of the teacher to impart intellectual and spiritual education of a higher order to his disciples. If any pupil ignored to respect his preceptor, he was deemed unfit and consequently was expelled from the Order. The teacher too put forth the ideal of high learning, excellent moral character, self-possession and spiritualism before his pupils to compel inherent high respect from them.

Curriculum

It was chiefly spiritual in nature. It was so because the chief aim of education was to attain salvation. Study of religious books was most important. *Suttanta*, *Vinaya* and *Dhamma* were the main subjects prescribed for the study. 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. The Vedas were also studied for acquiring comparative knowledge; nevertheless the Atharvaveda was not included in the curriculum upto the Jataka period. As regards higher education, Hiuen-Tsang has quoted the example of Nalanda where Buddhist philosophy, the Literature, the Yoga and other spiritual sciences were taught. The institution at Vikramshila was reputed for imparting education in Logic and Jurisprudence.

Method of Teaching

The main aim of education in Buddhist period was the purity of character. Therefore, like Vedic educational system, they also emphasized much on the practice and training for pure character instead of psychological development of the students. Later on to attain the stage of Bodhisattva personal development was considered essential and mental and moral development began to be emphasized. Originally there was predominance of religions.

At first the teacher gave a lecture on a certain topic and the students were required to listen to him with attention. Afterwards students were expected to memorize the same. Thus, method of teaching was mostly oral. The importance of discussion encouraged the logic in the Buddhist period. It was useful to argue controversial matters and on the development of the mental power and knowledge of the students. Followers of different religions held occasional discussions; hence students were trained in the art of debating from the very beginning of their academic career. Since the

main aim was to propagate Buddhism, some Acharya gave importance to tours for educating the students. 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. Thus, their knowledge became solid and evident.

The teaching method in regard to technical education in Secular Science, Arts and Crafts was identical with that of Brahmanical education i.e. students were given education through both theoretical and practical methods. On the beginning (Pratipada) and close (Purnima) of each month learned people used to assemble together. This type of assembling together was a very important part of Buddhist education. Purpose of this assembly was to maintain the moral standards of all the monks (Bhikshus) because the total education system was based on morality.

Commercial and Occupational Education

Indeed Buddhist education was basically religious. Yet, occupational education was not neglected altogether and Mahabagga mentions about spinning and weaving, tailoring etc. Among the other useful arts- Architecture, Arithmetic, Painting, Agriculture and Animal Husbandry etc were also taught. In Buddhist period emphasis was laid on the development of the medical science. There were many medical experts during that period. The Indian Chikitsaks (medical men) were not only experts in the examination and treatment of most serious diseases, but they were also efficient in serious surgical operations like that of brain, stomach etc. Takshila was the main center of medical education and the complete course of the science was completed in 7 years.

In short the following conclusions may be drawn in regard to Buddhist education.

1. **Centers of Education-** In Buddhist period, there were many such centers where foreign students used to come for higher education. Among such centers, Takshila was notable. It might be called the spiritual capital of India of the time.
2. **Minimum age of education-** The minimum age for admission in Takshila University was 16 years because here the students were taken only for higher studies.
3. **Education fee-** It was about 1000 coins at that time, which was probably charged in the beginning. Those who were unable to pay the fees in any form either cash or manual labour, were educated as a charity.
4. **Scholarships-** The meritorious students who did not have means to support themselves were given scholarship by the government of the time.
5. **Residence of Students-** Generally the students lived in the centers with their teacher but some married people and students residing in private lodges, were also not prohibited from gaining education.
6. **Teaching arrangements-** One head teacher, with the help of his assistants arranged for the education of about 500 students. More students could not be put under him. Efficient and experienced students were appointed as assistant teachers and meritorious students used to teach the students of lower classes. According to convenience, the teaching work was done during daytime as well as night hours, but the students who paid fees, were taught during the day.
7. **Higher Education-** In higher education, students were taught Literary, scientific and Vocational education. In literary education, religious teachings were also included. Beside Atharvaveda, all the Vedas formed the foundation stone of this education. The following subjects have been mentioned in the Jatakas.

- Medicine
- Vashikaran Kam-Tantra
- Tantra-Mantra
- Archery
- Elephant taming
- Hunting
- Giving life to the dead
- The knowledge of the voices of various animals

8. **Search of truth and nirvana-** Some students who could not get mentally satisfied even through higher studies used to go to the isolated place of some monk and spent their lives in search of truth and Nirvana. Gradually gaining spiritual knowledge they became ascetics in their future life.

Comparative Study of Brahmanic and Buddhist System of Education

Buddhist education was to a great extent influenced by Brahmanic education, so their basic principles were similar in many respects. The daily life of Bhikshus was more or less improved form of Brahman Brahmacharis. Their mode of living, food arrangements and clothing etc. were almost similar. Most of the Brahmanic Rishis and Buddhists were spending their lives in similar manner in isolated cottages in the forests or on the hills practicing self- realization, devoting the rest of their lives in higher studies.

Inspite of the similarities there were many remarkable differences in both the system of education.

1. Buddhist education was meant for religious expansion, whereas Brahmanic education was for life- Brahmanic education was aimed at the usefulness for life. After Samavartana ritual the Rishis had to enter the family life and if possible they could again leave in the last quarter of their lives as Sanysis. But Buddhist education aimed at the study and Nirvana and spread of Buddhism and so the Buddhist monks were not allowed to enter the marital and worldly life.

2. Buddhist education was democratic while Brahmanic education was monocratic- In Brahmanic system; the disciple always remained disciple for his teacher though he might gain even higher knowledge. But in Buddhist system, as it was based on democratic principles the Bhikshu after becoming Shraman was kept in the category of the Upadhaya and was respected equally. Thus, Bhikshu on one side respected his Upadhaya and on the other hand he himself was respected.

3. Buddhist education was collective and Brahmanic education was individual- In Brahmanic system Gurukula system was prevalent. Here the teacher taught the students under his direct guardianship. But in Buddhist system, education was given in monasteries and Vihars and greater importance was attached to collective education.

4. Brahmanic system imposed more restriction on the students than Buddhist system- In Brahmanic system, luxuries were strictly prohibited, but in Buddhist system the rules were not so rigid.

5. Buddhist education was free from restrictions, whereas Brahmanic education maintained it- In Buddhist Sangh anyone might enter it, without consideration of caste, creed etc and gain education to improve his capability. In Brahmanic system, it was not so, great importance was attached to the Varna of the student.

6. Under the Brahmanical system of education the pupil had to observe strict physical and mental discipline. He was to treat pleasure and its agencies as taboo. Student life was fraught with austerities. But according to Buddhist system, *“the body is to be decently draped, cleansed and massaged, regularly fed, sheltered in the rainy season, rested during the noon and medically treated when ailing by the best physician of the country.”*

A Critical Assessment

Buddhist education was not altogether immune from defects. Not unlike Vedic education it was also dominated by religion, so much so that Arts and Crafts, in the last phase of it, came to be looked down upon by the members of higher classes and ultimately they gave them up completely. Military art and science, art of manufacturing arms and weapons and the art of warfare could not develop much under the Buddhist system of education as it was based on the principles of non- violence and renunciation of the world. According to Buddhist religion the world is full of sorrow. Therefore, the sole aim of life was considered to be the attainment of Salvation (Nirvana) by renouncing the world. The meaning of struggle of life was confined to mere metaphysical speculation. This dealt a serious blow to all round progress and development of life. Still it is acknowledged that merits of Buddhist system of education far outweigh the defects and flaws, though it was through its shortcomings that its downfall was so sudden and sure and in its stead the Brahmanical system of education was re-established in the country.

Conclusion

In short it can be said that Buddhist education laid the foundation stone of a high culture. Though Indian attitude towards life had always tended to be characterized by piety and sanctity, yet the Buddhist education intensified and elevated it still more. The foreign students made a very

profound study of Indian religion, literature and system of education and disseminated the seeds of Indian culture in their own lands. The sacred portals of the Buddhist institutions were open to all where all the students without differences were provided with equal opportunities for the development of their character according to their capacity and aptitudes.

Along with religious and philosophical aspects of the Buddhist education, secular education formed an essential part of it. This system gave birth to such international institutions as Nalanda, Taxila and Vikramshila, which were the centers of both religious and secular learning. Education was closely wedded to the various problems of life and it aimed at finding out concrete solutions thereof. Thus, in the sphere of morals and discipline the Buddhist system of education enriched human life considerably. It is largely through the long-standing traditional background of Buddhist education that we are still able to continue our harmonious, cultural, political and economic relations with the far Eastern countries of Asia.

Main Educational Centers and Universities in Ancient India

The study of the Education system in Vedic period and Brahmanical Educational system makes it clear that in those days the residence of the teachers (Gurus) were the educational institutions called Gurukulas. There the teacher and the taught lived together as the members of the single family. For the spiritual and philosophical development of taught, the external objects of education were not much emphasized, but the main emphasis was laid on inner and spiritual uplift. In Ancient India, in Vedic and Buddhist periods, well organized educational institutions like that of modern age had not come into being. In those days, some monasteries and huge sacred places had been established. It is said that the learned persons from different places used to assemble there and debates

and discussions took place. Inspired by the Buddhist system, in Hindu temples and monasteries too, the educational institutions were started.

Lord Buddha was the person who had realized the necessity of education for devotees at large and so he established the monasteries and Vihars, where education was also imparted. Later on, these monasteries were turned into full-fledged centers of education; where Bhikshus, Bhikshunis and even common people were given chance to acquire education. Besides, the foreigners also came here to study Buddhist religion. Consequently Nalanda and Takshila developed into Universities of International importance.

Generally the educational institutions of the Buddhist period were managed on the basis of democratic principles. The appointments were made purely on the basis of learning qualification. Educational expansion was fully carried out by these educational centers. Cultural relations with many Asian countries are mainly due to these educational institutions and their working system that existed hundreds of years back.

Now we shall describe some important centers of learning of the Buddhist period. Of these institutions, Taxila, Nalanda, Valabhi, Vikramshila, Odantapuri, Nadia, Mithila and Jagaddala require special mention.

1. Taxila

From times immemorial 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 there 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.

There was no organized institution or university, but education was imparted on family system. Takshshila was also not an organized university. It may be called 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. Perhaps the fees were also realized in the beginning. Here 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. Taxila had been influenced by Greek culture also. Some preceptors taught Greek there. Taxila was very famous as a centre of training in Indian Military science.

Thus, for several centuries, Taxila served as the beacon light to the country in educational sphere. This light of learning continued to burn in spite of vicissitudes of fortune and stormy changes. At length, it was overwhelmed by the barbaric Huns who extinguished this flame forever never to shine anew.

2. 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. In the beginning it was a small village but by and by its importance grew in magnitude. It enjoyed a considerable degree of fame and importance for Buddhist monks owing to its being the birth place of Sariputta, a favourite disciple of Lord Buddha. 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.

Upto 5th century, Nalanda had not achieved paramount educational importance in India. Its real importance begins with the year 450 A.D. For the next three centuries, it remained at the zenith of its fame and importance, which is evident by the writings of Hiuen-Tsang who came here in 7th century A.D. and gave a vivid description of the glory and magnitude of this ancient seat of culture and learning.

Nalanda reached its zenith of progress at the hands of the kings of Gupta dynasty. Kumaragupta I (414-445 A.D.) built a monastery there. A big and strong enclosing wall having only one gateway marked off the entire university area. At this gate, there lived a teacher designated as *Dwar Pandit* who was incharge of the test for admission to the university. The gate opened into eight big halls, where students were delivered addresses en masse. These halls stood in the middle of *Samgharama* that comprised the main building of the Vihara. Besides, these, there were three hundred study chambers where students were taught by the preceptors.

In Nalanda higher studies were carried on. Meritorious students from far and wide came to this university to quench their thirst of knowledge. It was considered to be a great center of learning throughout the whole of Asia. The admittance examination in Nalanada 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.

The *Kulpati* or Chancellor of the University was Shilbadra. He had studied all Sutras and Shastras books and may explain them fully well. The scope of study in Nalanda was very vast. 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.

There were three methods of teaching, namely 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. It had nine storeys. The library had three departments known as 'Ratna Sagar'. It had a collection of rare works about all religions, subjects arts, sciences and crafts.

It is evident that Nalanda was an eminent center of learning and illuminated our country for centuries to come with his undimmed light of knowledge. It has made unique contributions to the evolution, expansion and refinement of Indian culture. Nalanda, the unique symbol of Indian philosophy, arts and civilization after a glorious career of 800 years, fell a prey to barbarism of the Mohammedan conqueror named Bakhtiar Khilzi towards the end of the 12th century A.D. He destroyed the University and put the library on fire and the innocent monks and students were ruthlessly massacred. Thus, the light of learning which had been kept aglow through ages with the fuel of all that is spiritual, pious and noble in human life was extinguished never to shine again.

A historian writes, *“The University of Nalanda was the educational center of international moral comparable in the universalism of its thought, the wide range of its studies, the international character of its community to the greatest universities of modern time like Oxford, Cambridge, Paris and Harvard.”*

3. 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. Like Hiuen-Tsang, I-Tsing too had found Valabhi in the western side of India as glorious as Nalanda and students from every part of India would flock there for education. 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 center for Mahayana branch of Buddhist religion, Valabhi was the center for Hinayana.

The center 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.

The city of Valabhi was very prosperous and there were many millionaires who gave financial help to Valabhi. It was running in good financial position till 755 A.D. Due to the invasion of the Arabs some portions of Valabhi was destroyed but even then the university was running

as an important educational and cultural center of western India till 12th century.

4. Vikramshila

The Vihara of Vikramshila was established by the famous Emperor Dharampala of Pal dynasty in the 8th 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. In all there were 144 permanent scholars in the University. 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.

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.

Mahasthvir 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.

Vikramshila University was destroyed by Bhaktiyar Khilji in 1203 A.D. It is said that the Muslims took the Vihar as a fort and they killed

most of the monks. Thus fell a mighty educational center under the barbarism of the Mohammedans.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. Mithila

In the Upanishadic age Mithila became a prominent seat of Brahmanical system of education. It was named as *Videha*. Raja Janak used to hold religious conferences, wherein learned Rishis and pandits took part in religious discussions. Even in the Buddhist period, it continued its glorious task and remained an important center of learning and culture. Later on this place produced devotees of Lord Krishna. Famous poet Vidyapati, who had written in Hindi and Jaideo who was a prominent poet of Sanskrit literature were born here.

From 12th century to 15th 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). It was here that his epoch- making work named Tattva Chintamani had been written. Mithila produced a number of other scholars and literary celebrities. Even upto 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.

8. 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. The lyrics of Gita Govind by Jaideva still reverberate in the ears of the people. Even during the Mohammedan rules, Nadia enjoyed popularity and fame as an important center of education, especially for such branches of learning as Logic, Vyakaran, Politics and Law.

The importance of Nadia grew still more as a result of the downfall of Nalanda and Vikramshila and it began to be regarded as an eminent center of Hindu culture and education. A school of Logic owed its existence to Raghunatha Shiromani. Not only learning but also the efficiency in discussions was considered to be the essential qualification of a teacher of this university. Those qualities were considered at the time of appointment. Discussion method was employed in teaching also. The

students attentively heard the discussions of the pandits and they themselves took interest in discussions. Education in Nadia University was imparted at three centers namely- Navadweep, Shantipur and Gopaalpura. 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.

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