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## A Study on the Ancient Indian Education System and the Contemporary World

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**Abstract:** “The present is embedded in the Past” is a well known truism. The glory of ancient India, while illuminating the present, makes her future fascinating. The unique feature of ancient India was that the formation of her civilization was influenced, not so much by political, economic or social factors as by spiritualism. The educational evolution in ancient India was also founded upon this very ideal. 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 part of religion. It was sought as the means of salvation or self-realization.

Ancient Indian Education had been evolved strictly on the foundation 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 pleasure, had provided them with a special angle of vision. In fact the entire educational tradition originated in these principles. That is why the Indian sages devoted themselves to the study of a Supra-sensible world and spiritual powers. Therefore the ultimate aim of education in ancient India is the Salvation or Emancipation from the materialistic world. Thus the ancient Indian Educational System based on the principles of inculcation of the spirit of plain living high thinking, universal brotherhood, equality, universal kinship etc. and development of the sense of constant omnipresence of Brahma, the great Universal being, which have great relevance in the contemporary world.

**Key Words:** Spiritualism, Salvation, Ultimate aim, Brahma, Contemporary etc

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### 1.00 Introduction

Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represent a timeless and holistic approach to understand the world. From its ancient roots in the Vedic era to its integration in to modern education and global culture. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises the integration of Indian Knowledge System in to the education system, aiming to revitalize and incorporate Indias’ rich cultural heritage into modern education, fostering a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to learning. IKS encompasses a vast body of knowledge, beliefs and practices developed over centuries in the Indian subcontinent, including field like science, philosophy arts, literature and social norms. The foundation of IKS lies in the ancient texts of the Vedas, Upanishads and other classical literature which contain knowledge on various subjects like medicine, astronomy, mathematics and spirituality.

Ancient Indian education, broadly classified as Vedic and Buddhist, focused on character development, self-control and preserving culture, with the Vedic system using Sanskrit and the Buddhist system using Pali languages as the medium of instruction. The Vedas are the original source of the philosophy of life and the system of education in ancient India. The knowledge derived from the Vedas alone can give real happiness to an individual. Only he can

acquire these knowledge who has lived a life according to the four Ashramas- Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanapras and Sannyas.

Religious revolution was started in ancient India in 600 B.C. and the new doctrine or system developed which is called Buddhist doctrine or Buddhist philosophy. This new doctrine in India was started by the great monk and philosopher named Siddhartha Gautama or Gautama Buddha. Buddhism made a tremendous movement which played a valuable role in the development of education system in ancient India. It may be said that there was no major difference between Vedic and Buddhism as far as the basic principles were concerned. Lord Buddhas' main concern was to eliminate human suffering, to find a cure for the pain of human life, to attain salvation by renouncing worldly pleasure.

### 2.00 Theoretical Background of the Study

India has a rich tradition of learning and education right from the antiquity. These were handed over generation to generation either through oral or written medium. A single feature of ancient India 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 in this ancient tradition. Indian culture is suffused thoroughly by religious values. The approach of our forefather 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 of life was characterized by width a 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 behavior. Life had a definite aim, an ideal and the attainment of which was thought to transcend all material achievement. The educational evolution in ancient India was also founded upon this very ideal. The sources of all these ideals and principles are derived from the Vedas. The Vedas are considered as the earliest literary records of the India-Aryan Civilization and the most sacred books in India. They are the original scriptures of the Hindu teachings and contain spiritual knowledge encompassing all aspects of life.

It is believed that human did not compose the revered composition of the Vedas, which were handed down through generation by the word of mouth from time to immemorial. The general assumption is that the Vedic hymns were either taught by Gods to the sages or that were revealed themselves to the sages, who were the seers or 'mantradrasta' of the hymns. The Vedas were compiled by Vyasa, Krishna, Swaipayana around the time of Lord Krishna.

### 3.00 Significance of the Study

Vedas were the earliest documents of the human minds and is indeed to say when the earliest portion of the come into existence. The Vedas reflect the growth and development of the human thought over a span of number of centuries. The Vedic age can rightly be called Knowledge Age or Age of Knowledge. This shows that it was an era which gave unprecedented importance to education, knowledge spreading, master scholars, intellectual discussions and other academic aspect. The laws of the Vedas regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs of the Hindus to the present day. All the obligatory duties of the Hindus birth marriage, death etc. owe their allegiance to

the Vedic rituals. They draw forth the thought of successive generation of thinkers and so contain within it the different strata of thought.

In order to discover the self of Bharat, the exploration of Indian wisdom is the only key. Since the inception of NEP 2020 in Indian Education, the Indian Knowledge System has been a focal point of discussion. From the last two centuries, the western perception has been the leading influencing factor in our education. The Indian origin Knowledge is either rejected or ignored in mainstream of education. Indian World View is totally missing in the society, “Living’ with ‘full of means’ has become the lone objective of current education; whereas the “meaningful life” is the goal of Indian Education. This of0 direction remains a challenging job until complete integration of Indian Knowledge System takes place in nation’s Education. Therefore the investigator has selected the topic of study is “The Ancient Indian Education System and The Contemporary World.”

#### 4.00 Objectives of the Study

The investigator has determine the following objectives of study-

- a) To study about the ancient Indian education system.
- b) To study about the relevance of ancient Indian education system to the contemporary world.
- c) To study the implementation of Indian Knowledge System in modern education.

#### 5.00 Methodology of the study

In the present study, the investigator has applied Descriptive method of research in order to study the Ancient Indian Education System and the Contemporary World. The investigator will collect the primary data by discussing with the educationist and experts in the field of Indian education system. Secondary data have collected from the Library, Books, News Paper, and Internet etc.

#### 6.00 Discussion and Analysis

##### 6.10 Ancient Indian Education System

During the ancient period, two system educations were developed, Vedic and Buddhist. The medium of language during the Vedic system was Sanskrit, while those in the Buddhist system were Pali. During those times the education was of Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishad and Dharmasutras. From the Rigveda onwards, our ancient education was started with the objective of developing the students not only in the outer body but also on the inner body. The ancient education focused on imparting education ethics like humanity, truthfulness, discipline, self-reliance, and respecting all creations to the students. The features of ancient education system are highlighted as below-

##### 6.11 Aims of Education

Education during ancient India mostly focused on the enrichment of culture, character and personality development and cultivation of noble ideals. The objective was gaining the mental, physical and intellectual quality of the students, which will prepare them for future life and survive in any situation.

##### 6.12 Characteristics of Education

In ancient period, the government and people did not interfere in designing curriculum, payments of fees, pedagogies etc. Every students was allotted under the teacher and more emphasis was given to the students-teachers relationship, each students was used to meet teachers personally to learn and gain instruction from them. The

syllabus was design in accordance with the demand of the era. During that time the students used to leave their houses and went to live with their gurus until their education was completed. The duration of the course was about 10-12 years, as there were no books so students used to memorise all things.

#### 6.13 Curriculum

In ancient period the fundamental goal of building a good curriculum was to develop students physically, mentally and spiritually. The curriculum consists of four Vedas, six Vedangas, Upanishads, Darsanas, Puranas, Tarkashastra. The six Vedangas were Shiksha, Chhandas, Vyakarana, Nirukta, Jyotisha and Kalpa. Algebra, Geometry, Grammar etc. were also given more importance at that time.

The curriculum of the Buddhist system consists of Pitakas, Abhidharma and Sutras. Besides this medicine, Vedas were also provided importance at that time. Hindu learning was a part of Buddhist learning, although more emphasis was given to Buddhist learning. Both the system was going hand to hand at that time. The education was totally through orals and debates, and the exam was conducted every year. The education system of ancient India also focused on subjects like warfare, military, politics, religion etc.

#### 6.13 Methods of Teaching

The teaching was basically via orals and debates, and the different methods were as follows:

- a) At that time there was no print material, so the students are habit to learn memorizing all the things taught by the gurus and they also help to memorising.
- b) Listening, contemplation, and concentrated contemplation were some new methods of exploring the way of learning.
- c) Story telling methods also used by the gurus to teach their students.
- d) Students used to ask questions about the topic taught by the teachers and this topic were discussed and then answered to the students.
- e) The education that time mainly focused on practical knowledge of the topic taught at gurukul.
- f) Seminar and debates were conducted by the gurus to discuss the some critical topics where the eminent gurus (Educationist) from other places were also present, by these programme students were able to gained higher education.
- g) Meditation was an important method during the ancient education system. Through this method students were able developed high thinking and spiritual development.

#### 6.14 Educational Institution

Gurukul was the home institution of the teacher where students were come after the completing their initiation ceremony and learn until the completion of their study. The Parishads or Academies were the place of higher education and learning where students learn through discussion and debates. Vidyapith was the place of spiritual learning founded by the great Acharya, Sri Shankara in places like Sringeri, Kanchi, Dwarka and Puri, etc. Viharas were the educational institutions founded by Buddhists where the students were taught the subjects related to Buddhism and philosophy. Takshashila was the famous centre of learning including religion and teaching of Buddhism in ancient India. Nalanda, Vallabhi, Vikramshila, Ujjain and Benaras were the famous educational institutions in ancient India for higher education.

#### 6.20 Relevance of Ancient Education to Contemporary world

The relevance of ancient education in the modern education system is a topic that has been widely discussed and debated. While there are differences in the methods, tools and the societal contexts between ancient and modern education, there also valuable principles and insights from ancient educational system that can be considered relevant today, which are as pointed below-

A. Holistic Education

The principle of ancient education system in India focussed on the holistic approach to learning ,encompassing physical moral and intellectual development. Modern education system are increasingly recognising the importance of well-rounded education that goes beyond academic achievements. Integrating aspects of character development, ethics and physical well-being can enhance the overall educational experience.

B. Critical Thinking and Philosophy

Ancient educational system in India strongly emphasis on philosophy and critical thinking. These skills are still highly relevant in the modern world, where the ability to analyse, question and think independently is crucial.

C. Individualised Learning

In ancient education systems personalised or individualised learning was more common .Each students during that period allotted under the Guru, and the guru also took their responsibility for the all round development of the students. Contemporary education system also highly emphasised on the individualised instruction or learning because of the differential mental and physical behaviour of the learner.

D. Ethics and Morality

Ancient education system included teaching on ethics, and values. In modern era, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of character education. Integrating ethical consideration into the curriculum can help students develops a strong moral compass and a sense of social responsibility.

E. Practical Skills Apprenticeship

Ancient education often included practical skills training and apprenticeships, providing students with hands-on experience. Modern education can benefit from incorporating more practical, real world application to academic knowledge. Internship, practical, project and experiential learning opportunities can bridge the gap between theory and practice.

F. Cultural and Historical Awareness

Ancient education often emphasised the study of cultural and historical texts. Incorporating a strong focus on cultural literacy and historical awareness in the modern curriculum can help students better understand the roots of contemporary issues and foster a global perspective.

G. Extracting Wisdom from Ancient Practices

Modern education stands to gain valuable insights from ancient pedagogies, particularly through the incorporation of multidisciplinary and holistic approaches.

H. Fostering Holistic Development through Universal Human Values

The integration of Universal Human Values (UHV) emerges as a crucial facet of contemporary education, contributing significantly to the holistic development of individuals.

### 6.30 Implementation of Indian Knowledge System.

The NEP 2020 recognises this rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought as a guiding principle. The Indian Knowledge System comprise of Jnan,Vignan, and Jeevan Darshan that evolved out of experience, observation, experimentation and rigorous analysis. This tradition of validating and putting into practice has impacted our education, art, administration, laws, justice, health, manufacturing and commerce. This has influenced classical and other languages of Bharat, That were transmitted through textual, oral, and artistic tradition. “Knowledge of India” in this sense include knowledge from ancient Indian and its successes and challenges, and a sense of India’s future aspirations specific to education, health, environment and indeed all aspect of life.

### 7.00 Summery and Conclusion

The Vedas are the original source of the philosophy of life and system of education in ancient India. The knowledge derived from the Vedas alone can give real happiness to an individual. Therefore the educational system of ancient India was focused on the inculcation of the spirit of plain living and high thinking, equality, universal kinship, social and public weal and development of constant omnipresence of Brahma, the Great Universal Being. The ultimate aim of education was attainment of Salvation. The human being of ancient India gained knowledge of the principles of life and of education for self-development at the holy feet of the Brahmins of India who had purged and purified themselves through sincere penance.

The influence of ancient education in the modern education system is tremendous. The emphasis on Indian Knowledge System, Value Education, Yoga, and Skill-based education is to develop psychological well-being through grit. The perceived grit in a person is highly influenced by psychological well being, hence the focus on holistic education. Ancient education system always focuses on higher knowledge of self and knowledge of strength. Modern day education emphasises this concept of self awareness and skill development through experiential and multidisciplinary learning.

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