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Effluxion of education and culture in ancient India

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Abstract

Education and culture substitute for each other. Education progresses a society and culture shapes it. Education enlightens with knowledge, skills and yields new ideas and attitudes among the young. The intimacy between culture and education is evident from the fact that one of the major aim of education is to instruct to the child cultural and social heritage. Both education and culture play vital role in the life of an individual. The ancient Indian education system was successful in preserving and spreading its culture. The Vedic education system achieved its aim to the fullest extent. Ancient education emerges from Vedas. Relationship between *Guru* and *Śiṣya* were very cordial during Vedic and Post Vedic age. By this scribe, I want to explore my opinion how in ancient India education and culture both fluxed which accomplished Indian civilization.

Keywords: Education, culture, society, ancient, civilization, Gurukula, *Śiṣya*, Caturāśrama

Introduction

Culture and education is interrelated. Without culture and education, human being is incomplete just like trees without roots. Culture progresses a society, a nation and ultimately a civilization. Education is that tool which completes human being with the enlightenment of knowledge in every field. Culture is actually social behavior. It is considered a central concept in anthropology, encompassing the range of phenomena that are transmitted through social learning in human societies. Various forms of culture such as art, music, dance, religion, social forms etc. existed in all human societies. In another way, education is a system of acquisition of knowledge, facilitating learning, skills, beliefs, values and habits. From ancient to present time, it is impossible to say whether culture influences education or education influences culture. In the system of education, History was being studied which was the main and basic record of culture hence it could not be ignored that culture was being nourished by education. In those days, pupils took education seriously. The aims of education were to provide good training to the learners in the performance of their social, economic, psychological or cultural duties. On the other hand culture is how people manage their life. A society cannot separate from its own culture. Because culture is the result of human thought, it can be seen as tradition that creates cohesion and continuity. The Pre-Vedic and Vedic culture influenced ancient education system. Thus ancient education and culture interdependently prolonged and both of them accomplished and enriched ancient civilization.

Education

The English word 'Education' is derived from the Latin word 'Educare' which means to bring up. So education means helping people to learn how to do things and encouraging them to think about what they learn. The history of education in India can be divided into several periods and each of them has a particular educational pattern by characteristic of its own. Ancient educational era is meant of the Vedic educational epoch that lies from 1500BC to 600BC. Two words śikṣā and adhyāpanā occur in Vedic Period. Śikṣā means to learn and adhyāpanā means 'to go near' implies the idea of pupils going to teacher for education. In Vedic Period, Education consisted of learning to recite the Holy text of Veda.

The Vedic Education system

The education practice which was introduced first in ancient India was based on the Vedas and therefore it is known as Vedic education system.

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The basis of Indian education and culture lies in the Vedas which is divided into four- R̥gveda, Sāmaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda.

“Rūpayauvanam sampannāḥ viśālakulasambhavāḥ /
Vidyāhīnāḥ na śobhante nirgandhāḥ iba kinśukāḥ //”

These types of verses were widely quoted in Indian society illustrates the importance of education. The uniqueness of Vedic education system was not found in any other civilization of the world history. Swami Vivekananda considered it as the ideal system of education. He said that, “The old system of education in India was very different from the modern system. The students had not to pay. It was thought that knowledge was so scared that no man ought to sell it; therefore, knowledge should be given freely and without any price.” During the Vedic epoch, there were various types of educational systems. In Gurukul system, the pupils who were known as Śiṣyāḥ had to spend with the family of Guru. They sat at the feet of the teacher and closely observed his instructions and listened to his advice. The Guru was a symbol of knowledge and moral values. In Ashrama educational system, pupils from different parts of the countries gathered together for learning around famous sages and saints. The Pariṣad was larger educational institution where several teachers used to teach different subjects. The students of advanced learning flocked and enriched themselves through discussion and discourse. The word Sammelana refers to getting together for a particular purpose. The scholars crowded at one place for discussion and competition generally on the invitation of the king.

The Teachers

The Vedic and Post-Vedic education was centered on Guru. The importance of the teachers is seen in the Kaṭhopeniṣad. The teachers were expected to be in possession of the essential qualities of education, correct vision and intellectual regeneration. They were regarded as friend, philosopher and guide. It was their duty to impart the knowledge they possessed to their disciples. They were also careful to give lesson of morality. They were careful to reveal the truth they discovered to the students, who had proven the ability and sincerity to understand and preserve the truth. The life of the teachers was spiritual and intellectual models for the learners. It was said in Bṛhadāraṇyakopeniṣad that-

Asato mā sadgamaya /Tamaso mā jyotirgamaya/
Mṛtyormā amṛitam gamaya // om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ //

There were several types of teachers-Ācārya, Kulpati, Upādhyāya, Guru, Caraka, Śikṣaka.

The Students

There were two types of students ‘Upakurvāṇa’ and ‘Naiṣṭhika’. ‘Upakurvāṇa’ entered to the second phase of āsrama after finishing their education at Gurukula. ‘Naiṣṭhika’ didn’t go their home and stayed permanently at Gurugṛha. Education was essential to the upper castes especially for Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya. After the Upanayana ceremony parents entrusted their male children to a teacher for education. Education was not denied to women. However women scholars i.e. Maitreyī, Gārgī are mentioned in Vedic literature. Students had to sacrifice passion of sex, unnecessary sleep, anger etc. Simple living and high thinking was the motto of their life. After the end of education, the

graduate students were honored as Snātaka by Samāvartana ceremony.

The syllabus

The study of the Vedas was an integral part of education. It was considered as the greatest gift and its ultimate aim was to enlighten the students about the celestial order. Vedas were transmitted from Guru to Śiṣya verbally. The methods of recitation and memorizing the text by repetition were very important. The Vedic knowledge was directly heard from the Guru’s lips and committed to memory. That is why Vedas are known as Śruti. The Mantra, Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka, Upaniṣad, Vedāṅga etc. were the main subjects for study. In the Chāndogyoṇiṣad, Nārada described his own knowledge to his Ācārya Sanata Kumāra. The lists are bellow:-

- Four Vedas
- Six vedangas
- Itihāsa Purāṇam
- Mathematics
- Tarkavidhyā
- Bhūtaavidhyā
- Bākobākyaṃ
- Astronomy
- Political and Administration
- Brahmavidhyā etc.

Method of Learning

During ancient India, there was a close relationship between teachers and students. Teachers always paid individual attention on his every student. They taught them various subjects through different method according to their capability. The methods are: Memorization, Critical Analysis, Introspection, Story Telling, Question and Answer, Hands-On, Seminar.

Relation between Guru and Śiṣya

Being residential, the Guru- Śiṣya relationship was most important factor during Vedic period. Students had to obey Guru not by force but spontaneously. They look after Guru as their father. They performed different domesticated duties for the sake of Guru. They were strictly guided by the prescribed disciplinary rules. Teachers were also careful to every student. They had tremendous sympathy and love for students. The main aim of teachers was the all round development of students. The teachers got remarkable respects from people. They were model of purity and respect for the students.

Culture

Culture refers to the patterns of thought and behavior of people of a nation. The diameter of culture spread in a huge area. It includes values, beliefs, rules of conduct and patterns of social, political and economic organization. These are passed on through descendants as formal as well as informal process. The food we eat, the clothes we wear, the language we communicate and the god we worship all are the aspects of culture. All the achievements of human being including dance, music, art, religion, architecture etc. can be seen as the aspects of culture. It is actually a man made environment of material and nonmaterial products.

Indian Vedic Culture

Vedic culture was one of the oldest cultures of the whole World. The basis of ancient Indian culture lies in Vedas. The impact of Vedic culture on modern culture is widely prevalent. According to Indologist, Indian culture stands not

only for a traditional social code but also for a spiritual foundation of life. On the basis of culture, we can experience the prosperity of its past and present exists in a nation. According to the scholars, the history of Indian culture is divided into three categories; ancient, medieval and modern. The ancient culture might be divided into two parts- Vedic culture and Post-Vedic culture. The Vedic culture is existed between 1500BC to 600BC.

Aspects of Vedic Culture

Vedic culture reformed on the basis of Vedas and their Vedangas. It has different aspects which we will describe shortly.

Social Life

The social structure lay on the basis of patriarchal family. The joint family system was the normal form. In the early Vedic age, there was no cast or varṇa among the humans. But, it was mentioned first in Ṛgveda's Puruṣa Sūkta.

“Brāhmaṇo asya mukhamāsīd bāhū rājanyaḥ kṛtaḥ /
Urū tadasya yadvaiśyaḥ padbhyāṃ śūdro ajāyata //”

According to traditional Indian interpretation, there is no doubt that there was a gradation of people in the civic life of the nation. The Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra are the major form of varṇa in Vedic society. Some scholar stated Niṣāda as fifth varṇa. Women occupied prominent place in Vedic society. Women had equal rights in every field. From the Samhitā to Upaniṣad, we can find so many references of women warriors, philosophers, poets. Ladies like Visvavārā, Apālā, Ghoṣā etc. are the extreme parable. They were respected not only in the form of mother, daughter or wife but also Rṣikā, warriors and philosophers. The custom of four Āśrama known as Caturāśrama-dharma persisted in Vedic society. All had to undergo the first stage that of Brahmācārya. Then they had to lead the domestic life that of Gṛhasthya and after that, Vānaprasthya, the life of retirement from sublunary responsibilities. Yava, wheat, barley were the main grain in Vedic society. Cakes, bread, milk product such as ghee, butter were also favorite dish of them. They also took fruits, vegetables as favorite commodities of food. The flesh of various animals including ox, sheep, and goat was normally eaten. In post Vedic age rice became popular food that was not mentioned in Ṛgveda. Milk, honey, water were the normal drinks. Surā and Soma were favorite drinks prepared from grain and Somalatā. Vedic people used Adhivasa, Vasa, Nivi etc. as garments. During marriage, the bride wore a special garment. Ornaments of gold and precious stone were used by them. In the Ṛgsamhitā, we get the information of musical instruments i.e. flute, drum, lute etc. which proved their fondness of festivals. The phenomena of nature were worshipped by them in various forms of gods. It has a purpose to establish a relation between god and human unconditionally. Among the thirty three gods mentioned in the Ṛgveda, Indra, Varuna, Agni, Soma etc. were prominent gods. They believed in hell and heaven. They prayed to gods through sacrificing various foods, animals to fulfill their mortal life with power, wealth and honor.

Political Life

Family and society was the main basis of society and state respectively. The king was the head of state and tribe. His primary duty was to protect lives, lead in war, punish guilty and extend his reign. His power limited by his own duties, by

the chief officers and popular assemblies. The kingship was hereditary though we find some example when the king was elected by the people. The priest was the chief officer who wielded good influence with the King. The other chief officers were the Senānī, the head of the army and the Grāmaṇī to look after the administration of the villages. The king and his priest was the main justice in Vedic society. Robbery, cattle lifting, theft were principal crime. The common punishment was to stake the criminal at ground and later set free. Charioteers and Pulton were the main element of army organization under the king. Bows, arrows, spears, lances were used as weapon in war. Sabhā and Samiti were the assemblies existed in that age. Historian stated that Sabhā was a body made with few selected peoples to help the king and Samiti was an assembly of larger group for the discharge of tribal business.

Economic Life

The economic life of Vedic society was progressive and prosperous. The developed cities were the solid proof of it. Irrigation and cattle rearing were principle occupation. Wheat, barley, cotton etc. were produced by them. People reared cow, ox, and sheep etc. as domesticated animals. Hunting, fishing, potting, weaving etc. were the source of good economic life. Inter-external trade was introduced to fulfill balanced economy.

Conclusion

After the destruction of Harappa civilization, Vedic civilization appeared. The expansion from 1500BC to 600BC is generally regarded as Vedic period. It is very difficult to conclude the above discussed topic. The system of education mentioned in Rig-Veda had influenced its society and culture. For that, Vedic civilization had got prominent place in the World history. With the flow of time, the evolution of education, culture has been changed. The education and culture has totally changed in modern age. Although the present education system is well furnished, the main basis was based upon the Vedic education system. As a result, the total development of human being fails to satisfy its fulfillment. The Sanskrit language, upon which the path of education depended, is now a dead language. According to critics, the limitation and restrictions is responsible, but indirectly we are responsible. Trying to follow the western language, we are ignoring our root language. In another way, our society and culture is gradually decreasing. Mass exploitation and lack of will are the barriers in the path of true education. On the basis of Vedic education system, we should take affirmative steps to save education and culture from the devolution. If we don't do that, our next generation will be in perils.

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