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## Significance of Vedic education system in present time

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### Abstract:

The Vedic civilization is the oldest civilization in the world and India was the first country which had developed better education system during Vedic era. Vedic education system is man making system which is very relevant in present time. This education system is based on simple living and smart thinking. Present time is called period of globalization, where money is the ultimate goal which results in corruption. Moral values and humanity are the main motif of the Vedic education system. If we adopt Vedic education system in our country then definitely we will become *Viśva guru*.

**Keyword:** *Guru-Śiṣya Paramparā, Gurukula, Jñāna, Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, Muṇḍakopaniṣad, Viśva guru*

### Introduction

Vedic civilization and culture is one of the oldest civilizations and cultures of the world. India was the first country of the world which had developed a very sound system of education during the Vedic period. This system of education is known as Vedic system of Education. Thousands of years ago our seers built an education system which is fully man making system. At the time of globalization money is the ultimate goal of all human beings and every educational institution promote their students to get handsome salary. That means present education system provide us only knowledge selfishness. Every sector forget their moral values and effects of valueless education systems are corruption, fanatic, starvation, nepotism etc etc. These are the remedies of our society. We have imported the class room style of education from Lord Macauley, who was specially sent by British to prepare a project for slavery of Indians permanently. When British came in India and do research found that so many invaders attacks India but they did not destroy the culture, because our guru's memorize everything, so if one book is burnt they have written another book again. So British came to a conclusion that merely by conquering Indians, there is no issue. They realized that they should destroy from inside the culture and Vedas because Indians believe in their culture, Vedas and *Jñāna*. So to destroy this British started this English Education where they pickup students as youngsters and make them cut their hair and put the shirts and pants like British people, and motivate to live like a westerner and they taught if you live like a western man you will be great. More money you have you are great. The result of this education is that even the Indians today have lost their values. So we can see how after 70 years of Independence we have lost our Gurukula education system and values.

We have neglected our ancient style of imparting Education used by the *Rṣis* in their *Āśramas* of Vedic times. We have copied the Western type of schooling—where, a mass of children are packed into a class and a teacher drives on and on, at the topics which have no relevance to their life; no relevance to their times, or the needs of country. We do not aim at Character building or making the boy into a good individual and a useful citizen to the country or a capable asset to his parents. We aim at passing an examination, by methods which have no morals.

We have not only copied the class room method of Victorian England but also made our classes and sections very big. Colleges Schools and Universities- even Governments go on sanctioning larger cases! This makes a class room an animal farm!

The teacher is not even a good shepherd but a helpless victim of this mass of unmanageable boys. All this should be forthwith scrapped. The strength of class should be cut down. Even class room style of teaching must go! The teacher must live with his pupils! They must not be more than six or seven boys, who eat sleep and live with him. The education is intertwined into their life style. The aim is not merely giving them information, or “General Knowledge” or make them into “Careers Guide books” The idea is to mould the Character, build his personality and make him a self-dependant individual, but not to make him a slave or a favour seeking subordinate; not even a voter worshipping at the feet of Governments, but a master who rules, if need be.

### Gurukula Education System in ancient India and its Contemporary Relevance in Theory and Practice

*Guru-Śiṣya Paramparā* (preceptor-disciple tradition) method has occupied an important place in Indian culture. The system of *Guru-Śiṣya Paramparā* has been in this nation since the ancient times. Simple definition of *Guru*: a religious teacher and spiritual guide in Hinduism; a teacher or guide that you trust; a person who has a lot of experience in or knowledge about a particular subject.

*Guru* is a Sanskrit term that connotes someone who is a “teacher, guide, expert or master” of certain knowledge or field. The word *Guru*, a noun, connotes “teacher” in Sanskrit, but in Indian traditions it has contextual meanings with significance beyond what teacher means in English. The *Guru* is more than someone who teaches specific type of knowledge, and includes in its scope someone who is also a “counselor, a sort of parent of mind and soul, who helps mold values and experiential source and who reveals the meaning of life

“*guśabdastvandhakāraḥ syāt ruśabdastannirodhakaḥ | andhakāranirodhivāt gururutyabhidhīyate*”

The syllable *gu* means darkness, the syllable *ru*, he who dispels them, because of the power to dispel darkness, the *guru* is thus named.

The oldest references to the concept of *guru* are found in the earliest Vedic texts. The *guru*, and *Gurukula*- a school run by *guru*, were an established tradition in India by the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE, and these helped compose and transmit the various Vedas, the *Upaniṣad*, texts of various schools of Hindu philosophy, and post-Vedic *Śāstras* ranging from spiritual knowledge to various arts. By about mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE, archaeological and epigraphically evidence suggest numerous larger institutions of *Gurus* existed in India, some near Hindu temples, where *Guru-Śiṣya* tradition helped preserve, create and transmit various fields of knowledge. These *Gurus* led broad ranges of studies including Hindu scriptures, Buddhist texts, grammar, philosophy, martial arts, music and painting.

The way all the subjects like literature, philosophy, Vedas were taught and made learned through face to face and verbalization or *mukhastha* in the same way music which is primarily a vocal and performing art, was also taught through *Gurumukha* and was assimilated. A *guru* is regarded as the metaphysical father of his disciple and is ranked higher than

biological parents. The *Gurukula* (*guru's* dynasty or family) system dates back to the Vedic period. In the *Gurukula* system of education, a pupil or *Śiṣya*, after his initiation (sacred thread ceremony), lived in the house of his *guru*, or teacher, and studied the Vedas and other subjects under his guidance, for a period of 12 years. *Gurus* were expected to teach everything they knew to the disciple. The institution was accessible only to the upper classes. The *Gurukulas* were well supported by kings who considered it their duty to make them financially viable. After the student proved to be deserving candidate, he would get the discipleship of the *guru*. A reverent master would bestow all his knowledge, skills to the fullest and make his student a perfect and a learned *Śiṣya*. The success of a *Śiṣya* was an image of the *Guru's* success.

In Indian culture and *guru* is given the highest place which can be seen in the following *Śloka*:

“*gururbrahmā gururviṣṇugururdevo maheśvaraḥ | gurureva param brahma tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ ||*”

*Muṇḍakopaniṣad* mentioned the importance of *guru* in this way”

“*tadvijñānārtha sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpāñih śrotriyam brahmaniṣṭham*”<sup>[1]</sup>

*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* elaborately discuss the significance of teaching *tattvajñāna* by gurus:

“*api cedasi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpakṛttamaḥ | sarva jñānaplavenaiva vṛjinam santaviṣyasi ||*”<sup>[2]</sup>

*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* mentioned *Jñāna* is pure in this way: “*na hi jñānena sadṛśam pavitramiha vidyate*”<sup>[3]</sup>

Bookish knowledge had the capacity to get destroyed. Alexandria's book library got destroyed in 300 BC due to which Greece and Rome had to suffer the loss of most of its written knowledge. But the Indian way of teaching: the *Guru Śiṣya Paramparā* was a secure way of teaching and learning. In spite of tolerating the gusts in the field of performing art it is still attainable in the culture and the society. There are several *granthas* that contain the records of *Nāṭya* and *Saṅgīta* that have been possible because of *Guru Śiṣya Paramparā's* oral and verbal teaching and learning forms. Teaching music in Institutional form and Collective or for mass was a gift by the 20th century AD. Before the 20th century AD this system was almost not present anywhere in the country.

### Gurukula: The Family of the Teacher

The word, *Gurukula*, literally means the ‘family’ (*kula*) of the teacher (*Guru*). *Gurukula* is an ancient Indian concept of education, wherein the student imbibed knowledge by residing with his *Guru* as part of his family. The word, *kula*, indicates the close relationship that existed between the teacher and students. Since *kula* means a ‘family’, *Gurukula* did not mean the ‘school’ of a teacher but the ‘family’ of a teacher. The *Guru* was more than merely a teacher; he was a parent, a guide and role model for all the students. The following text from the *Atharvaveda* captures the spirit of family in the *Gurukula*:

“*ācārya upanayamāno brahmacārinam kṛṇute garbhamaṁtaha.*”

That is, the *ācārya*, while accepting a child, protects her/him as a pregnant woman protects her child in her womb. The *Guru* used to take the place of their real father the moment the children joined the *Gurukula*. It is true that while getting

admission in the *Gurukula*, the students leave behind their parents who had given them birth, but their place is taken by the *Guru*, who is not only a teacher but also a parent to them. In some accounts, the *Guru's* wife – *Guru-Mā* – lived in the *āśrama* along with her husband, providing material care for the students. The *āśrama* was veritably *Gurukula*, where the students were loved and cared for as members of the *Guru's* family.

It is believed to be a modern discovery in the field of education that a child should at no stage feel cut off from the family or society. It may be pointed out that this very belief lay at the bottom of *Gurukula* System of Education. This system, as enunciated in the Vedas, clearly visualizes the entry of the child from a small family, comprising of the father, mother, brothers and sisters, to the bigger family, comprising of teachers and students, where all live together in a social milieu. This is such a revolutionary idea that, if implemented in modern education, can bring out good results by transforming the whole society. Swami Dayanand, for instance, visualized a scheme of education called '*Gurukula*' in which all children of the society – irrespective of their birth, caste or creed – would be admitted in these institutions, where each and every child would get the same kind of food, the same kind of cloths and the same kind of treatment. They would form a nucleus of a socialistic pattern of society in the making in which all would be treated on an equal footing. This *Gurukula* System of Education was responsible for giving birth to the great ideal, which, if put into practice, can usher in socialism without any Bloodshed.

### Merits of Vedic system of Education

If we look at the Vedic system of education from the point of view of the present conditions, needs, possibilities and aspirations of India we can delineate the following merits in it which should be adopted in some form or the other even today:

**1. Free education:** No fees were charged from students in *gurukulas* in the Vedic period. The boarding, food and clothing etc. for the students were arranged free in *gurukulas*. The expenditure on it was met through donations from kings and rich people, alms and *gurudakṣiṇā*. At present, education up to a certain level is free in almost every country of the world including India.

**2. Extensive meaning of education:** It was expected from the students that they would not laze about even after the completion of *gurukulas* education. Along with the performance of other tasks, people also kept gaining knowledge. Having entered *Vānaprasthāśrama* after *grhāsthāśrama*, people involved only in study and contemplation and benefitted society with their knowledge and experience. At present, almost all the countries of the world have made arrangement for continuing education and so too in our country, India.

**3. Extensive aims of education:** The aims of education in Vedic period were Very extensive. The main aims of education were preservation and enhancement of health, development of knowledge, acquaintance and observance of social and national duties, preservation and development of culture, moral and character development, education of livelihood, arts and skills and spiritual development.

**4. Extensive curriculum of education:** In the Vedic period emphasis was laid upon the development of all the three

aspects of people, namely natural, social and spiritual, and to achieve these aims *Parā* (spiritual) and *Aparā* (material) both types of subjects and activities were included in the curriculum. Of course, maximum emphasis was given on the education of literature, religion, philosophy and ethics, and these were the compulsory subjects in *gurukulas* education. At present, the curriculum of higher education in our country is very extensive, but it is not multifaceted; it does not develop all the three aspects of human being, namely natural, social and spiritual. The educationists and educational planners should now pay attention to this aspect.

**5. Specialization:** The beginning of specialization in the field of higher education, in our country, had taken place in the Vedic period. Of course, it is true that in the early Vedic period this specialization was based on the abilities of students but it became *Varna* based in the later Vedic period. At present, the field of specialization has become very extensive, not only in our country but in the whole world, and the students are provided opportunity to acquire special education and training according to their ability and capacity. The slogan of equality of educational opportunity is echoing in our country.

**6. Development of good teaching methods:** The teachers in the Vedic period had developed several good methods of teaching like imitation, lecture, question-answer, listening-learning-practice, logic, experiment and exercise, drama and storytelling. Special stress was laid to make teaching effective and interesting. At present, though several new and effective teaching techniques have been developed with the aid of inventions in science and knowledge of psychology, yet the Vedic period teaching methods still have relevance and will continue to have so. We should use them as and when needed.

**7. Disciplined life of teachers and students:** The rules of the *gurukulas* in Vedic period were very rigid and both the teachers and students abided by these. The teachers lived a very disciplined life and there was no difference between what they reached and what they practiced. The ideal conduct and manners of teachers had a direct bearing on the students and they too observed the same norms of good conduct and manners. The teachers and the students both lived a simple and disciplined life. It is true that manners can be taught through manners only. At present, the need of the hour in our country is that the teachers themselves should behave properly, then and then only students will follow their footsteps.

**8. Cordial relationship between teachers and students:** The relationship between teachers and students during Vedic period was very cordial. The teachers looked after the well beings of the students and made every effort for their all-round development. The students, in return, respected their teachers, abided by their orders and served them devotedly. It is true that unless a student has devotion for his teacher he cannot learn anything. Similarly, a teacher too cannot teach anything unless he is devoted to his students. In the present materialistic world the relationship between teachers and students, that existed in Vedic period, cannot be established, but at least it can be anticipated that the teachers should be devoted to their students and make efforts for their progress and students in return should revere their teachers.

**9. Suitable environment of the Gurukulas and Ritual oriented life pattern:** The *gurukulas* in the Vedic period

were situated in the calm and serene environment of the forests away from pollution. The second attribute of these *gurukulas* was their ritual oriented pattern. The *Upanayana samskāra* of the children was held at the time of admission. It had a telling effect on them, they accepted the celibate life with ease and lived a restrained life in *gurukulas*. Regular performance of religious activities (*yajña* etc) helped construct high traits in them. The *Samāvartan samāroha* (convocation ceremony) was held at the completion of education. The teacher instructed the students to enter *ghāsthāśrama* in this ceremony and asked them to observe their duty. Under the present circumstances atleast this much can be adopted from the Vedic system of education that schools should be located in pollution free places with greeneries surrounding there. If we can make the working pattern of school ritual oriented it would add to its quality <sup>[4]</sup>.

### **Contribution of Vedic system of Education in the development of modern Indian system of education**

The foundation of present lays in the past. The education system that developed in our country in Vedic period is the foundation stone of our modern system of education. Though the Vedic system of education was succeeded by Buddhist system of education, Muslim system of education and finally by British system of education, yet directly or indirectly Vedic system of education remained in currency and is still continuing. Numerous religious education centres, *gurukulas* and Sanskrit schools, based on Vedic system of education are still functioning. Though their nature and form is quite different from the Vedic period *R̥ṣi Āśramas* and *Gurukulas* but their fundamental basis is the same. They have a basic role in the development of modern Indian system of education and we may explain its contribution in the following way.

**1. Commencement of the Participation of state and society in the organization of Education:** Though the state was not responsible for the organization of education in Vedic period yet the teachers inspired the kings or state and the subjects (the rich) to organize education. Its result was that the kings and the rich people of society donated to *gurukulas* lavishly. The present situation is that the organization of education has become the responsibility of the state but it finds itself unable to accomplish this responsibility without the active cooperation of society. In our country the participation of state and society in the organization of education has its beginning in Vedic period itself.

**2. Commencement of the categorization of education at different levels:** It is true that in Vedic period education was organized only at two levels- primary education and higher education yet the foundation stone to divide education into various levels had been laid in Vedic period itself. It is on the basis of that foundation and the knowledge of psychology that education at present is divided into different levels- infant, primary, secondary and higher education.

**3. Narrower and wider meaning of education:** In the Vedic period the word 'education' was used in its narrower and wider meaning both. It is still used in both these senses. The only difference is that education then was considered a synonym to knowledge and skill and now it is considered to be a process of acquiring knowledge and skill.

**4. Formulation of Universal aims of education:** The aims of education in the Vedic period was very extensive. Education

was then used for physical, mental, social, cultural, moral and character, vocational and spiritual development of man. These are the universal aims of education. They still remain the main aims of education in our country. Looking at the exigencies of the time we have added only two more aims in them- first, national integration and development of internationalism and second, achievement of national goals. In this way, the aims of modern Indian education too are basically the gift of the education of Vedic period.

**5. Commencement of extensive curriculum and specialization:** The curriculum of education in the Vedic period was quite extensive and it included the whole gamut of knowledge and skills developed till then. It is on its basis that in the modern Indian education we have given place to all the knowledge, arts and skills and techniques developed so far. The only difference is that during Vedic period much emphasis was laid on language, literature, religion and ethics and at present, the emphasis has shifted to the study of mathematics, language, science and technology. Change becomes necessary with the passage of time.

**6. Paved the way for the construction of best teaching methods:** There is no dispute that when education had not even begun among other human races of the world, there had already developed many good techniques of teaching in India-like imitation, lecture, question and answer, discussion, logic, drama and storytelling, listening-learning and practice and emphasis was made on making teaching interesting and effective. Though at present, we have developed several good teaching methods on the basis of the knowledge of psychology and scientific and technological inventions, but if we observe them minutely, it becomes evident that they had their roots in the preaching of Vedic gurus. We must accept the significance of the foundation.

**7. Development of the correct concept of discipline:** In the early Vedic period discipline meant physical, mental and spiritual restraint and in the later Vedic period it came to mean observance of the orders of teachers and rules of *gurukulas*. Today we divide the Vedic concept of discipline into two parts- external discipline (moral conduct according to ethics) and internal discipline (acceptance of moral rules and internal motivation towards their observance). In the meantime several concepts of discipline in the world have been developed but in our country equal importance is given to the internal and external aspects of discipline, in the field of education. It is a special gift of the Vedic period education to our modern Indian education.

**8. Firm foundation of cordial relationship between teachers and students:** The teachers in Vedic period used to be very knowledgeable and restrained and students, used to be curious, devotional, humble and moderate. They had very cordial relationship. The foundation of this cordial relationship was laid so strong in the Vedic period that despite the occurrence of several turmoil this cordial relationship persists even to this day in India as compared to other countries of the world. If both teachers and students become fully devoted to each other, most of the problems in the field of education will automatically get solved.

**9. Construction of different educational institutions for different types of education:** Though in the Vedic period, primary education was organized at homes and higher

education in gurukulas; whereas at present different types of education is arranged in different types of schools, colleges and universities, but the reality remains that its foundation had also been laid in Vedic period. There were different gurukulas for imparting different types of higher education in that period. It is on this basis that different types of schools are established at present to cater to the needs of different age groups and different curriculum. If we establish modern schools in pollution free environment like the Vedic period gurukulas and establish high traditions in them and give place to *saṁskāra* oriented activities in them, then we would certainly succeed in organizing *saṁskāra* oriented education once again.

**10. Acceptance to the significance of Mass education:** It is true that the concept of mass education was not developed in Vedic period, yet the importance of education was accepted by regarding knowledge to be the third eye of man. It is due to this importance of education that the concept of mass education developed in modern age.

**11. Equal education to men and women:** No discrimination was made between the education of men and women during Vedic period though equal facilities were not available to women to acquire education. *Apalā, Viśvavārā, Lopāmūdrā, Ghoṣā* are the great example of women seers.

**12. Commencement of vocational education:** The present day vocational education used to be called '*Karma śikṣā*' in Vedic period. It was capacity and ability based in early Vedic period whereas it became Varṇa/caste based in later Vedic period.

**13. Emphasis upon religious and moral education:** It is true that maximum emphasis was laid upon religious and moral education in Vedic period, whereas in present times, we are shying away from any kind of religious education in the name of secularism. But in the absence of religious and moral education, the character and moral degradation that has taken place is no more a secret. Therefore, the need of religious and moral education is once again being felt in the country. In this respect too, we are indebted to the Vedic system of education.

**14. Lesson from bitter experiences:** We have learnt something even from the shortcomings of the Vedic system of education and consider it a contribution to the development of modern Indian system of education. Education during Vedic period was not under the state control as a result mass education in this country could not be organized during that period. Too much emphasis was laid on religious and moral development in Vedic period as a result our country lagged behind in the materialistic race. The medium of education in Vedic period was pure Sanskrit which prevented the children of common women could not receive education. We have now done away with all these shortcomings. This is an indirect contribution of the Vedic system of education to modern Indian system of education.

#### Educational Achievements of Vedic age were as follows

1. Education emphasized the development of spirituality the ashram system was adopted for paying of the individual's debt towards the Gods, his forefathers, his teacher and society.
2. The minds of the parents were first prepared to instill in them a desire for the education of their children. It has

been said that those parents are the enemy of the child who do not teach their children.

3. Great attention was paid to the development of child's character. Teachers laid stress on integral development of the individual's personality.
4. Social skill was evolved through training in fulfillment of duties
5. Efforts were made for the preservation and propagation of the national culture.
6. Education was free. Its expenses were borne by the society and the king
7. While living in a Gurukul the child imbibed education in a favourable environment
8. A student was compelled to obey the ideals of the Gurukul. He had to shoulder the burden of existence through begging for alms. This practice developed humility and tolerance in the student
9. In developing the student's character attention was paid to his nature, early experiences upbringing and circumstance
10. Self study (*Svādhyāya*) was considered more important.
11. The medium of education was divine pronouncement
12. The examination was oral one. The student was required to give oral answers in a congregation of scholars. If he satisfied them, he was given a degree or title. The consensus of the scholars opinion was essential for obtaining such a title.
13. During this period vocational education was also in vogue Military, Science, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Veterinary Science, Medicine etc were among the subjects taught. Chemistry was also taught. Arts and Handicrafts were highly respected. Education in Commerce was very popular.

The Vedic literature based on jñānaparaka. The *Bhagavata Gītā* mentioned jñāna *yajña* is the best *yajña* among all *yajñas*:

“śreyāṅdravyamayādyajñāyajñāḥ parantapa |  
sarvaṁ karmākhilam pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate ||”<sup>[5]</sup>

*Kaṭhapaniṣad* teach us:

“uttīṣṭhata Jāgrata prāpya varānnibodhata |  
kṣureasya dhārā niśītā duratyayā durgam pathastatkavayo  
vadanti ||”<sup>[6]</sup>

*Kaṭhapaniṣad* gives us the best example of relationship of *guru-śiṣya Paramparā*:

“om saha nāvavatu | saha nau bhunaktu | saha vīryam  
karavāvahai | tejasvi nāvadhītāmastu mā vidviṣāvahai ||”<sup>[7]</sup>  
Vedic education system teach truth always win: “*satyameva  
jayati nānṛtam*”<sup>[8]</sup>

*Taittirīyopaniṣad* states that we teacher and student (*guru* and *śiṣya*) will fame and *Brahmateja* with together: “*saha  
nau yaśaḥ | saha nau brahmavarcasam*”<sup>[9]</sup>

*Guru* teach to his students after *Vedādhyāyana* in this way: “*satyam vada | dharmam cara | svādhyāyānmā pramādaḥ*”<sup>[10]</sup>

Always speak truth, act with *dharma* and did not *Svādhyāya* with *pramādaḥ*.

*Ācārya* teach his students: “*māṛḍeḥ bhava | piṭṛdevo  
bhava | ācāryadevo bhava | atithidevo bhava*”<sup>[11]</sup>

Mother, father, teacher and guests are like god. This kinds of thinking present only in the Vedic literature.

In retrospect, it may be said that the Vedic system of education is the foundation stone of the modern Indian system of education. Even today the aims of our education are basically the same as they were in Vedic period. Like Vedic period, we include all the knowledge, skills and technology etc. in the curriculum, at present. Even today we want to establish cordial relationship between teachers and students. The difference that exists between the modern system of education and Vedic system of education is natural to emerge in the process of evolution. Vedic education system is a package of whole (*samaṣṭi*) characteristics which is fully value based. Simple living and smart thinking is the goal of Vedic education. In this way we conclude that if we adopt Vedic education system in our country then definitely we will become *Viśva guru*.

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