Ancient Indian Gurukuls and Modern Trends: Building the Education of Tomorrow

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Abstract:

The ancient Indian education system was diverse and rich, aiming at the intellectual , physical, and spiritual advancement of individuals. It was well-structured and holistic approach to learning that aimed to cultivate knowledge, character, and wisdom. It played a significant role in shaping Indian culture and influencing educational philosophies worldwide. It made a close-knit environment to ensure personalized attention and practical learning between guru-shishya. The medium of instruction in Gurukul was Sanskrit, and education was imparted orally, focusing on memorization, comprehension, and application.

The curriculum included a wide array of subjects and Spiritual or moral education was deeply integrated, emphasizing values like discipline, respect, and self-realization. Texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Dharmashastras were central to learning, along with works of grammar, logic, and literature.

Education was accessible to those willing to learn, but societal hierarchies often influenced the extent of access. Like Women, in some contexts, notable examples include figures like Gargi, Maitreyi and lopamudra, who were prominent philosophers mentioned in Vedic texts. Women often studied subjects like philosophy, arts, and scriptures in privileged households or specific learning centers.

Centers of higher learning, such as Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vikramashila, attracted students and scholars from around the world. Nalanda attracted students and scholars from countries like China, Korea, and Central Asia. Subjects taught included Buddhist philosophy, grammar, logic, medicine, and the fine arts. The university had a vast library, often referred to as "Dharmaganja." And takshila one of the earliest universities in the world (dating back to around 600 BCE),one of the earliest universities in the world (dating back to around 600 BCE). Scholars such as Panini (author of the first Sanskrit grammar) and Chanakya (author of Arthashastra) were associated with this institution. These institutions were known for their comprehensive curricular, rigorous teaching methods, and academic freedom.

Overall, the ancient Indian education system was a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical wisdom aimed at the holistic development of individuals and the betterment of society. But today we all know, children spend 7-8 hrs in school/ College, 2-3hrs in homework/ assignment, 2hrs of tuition, 1hr of travel. Totally 13-14 hrs, students waste their time doing things that don't have any significant role in their lives and lose their precious childhood instead of their personal growth.

Youth are foundation of a country so we should have more focused to make them skilled and productive which contributes directly in country's overall development. But unfortunately mostly high educated, high skilled and billionaire population started shifting in abroad from back few years due to lack of awareness and opportunities in our country. So we should have some revolutions on modern education system and teach our kids about their history, tradition, glory and culture that make them proud and comfortable in themselves. Which motivate them to stay in country and contribute their skills and knowledge in development of india. Every individual citizen of country should connected to their roots, tradition and culture to understand their real worth. We all have to understand that "Without stairs of past, y ou cannot arrive at the future!".

Keywords: *Gurukul system, Indian education system, ethics, Indian scholar, skill and knowledge, holistic development, country's development*

Challenges:
- Stress and mental health issues among students.
- Lack of morals, value-based learning in modern systems.
- Increase in several crime and suicide cases due to mental and societal pressure.

The current education system struggles to balance technological advancements with personal and ethical development. While ancient practices focused on character building and practical knowledge, modern systems emphasize academic success, often overlooking emotional and social skills. There is a need for a model that integrates the best of both worlds.

I. INTRODUCTION

Everyone says that education is key to success but people also forget that education is the foundation of a person which shows their knowledge, ethics, core values and way of logical analysis etc. If we go back in time we see that India is a Fully literate country in the world known as "Vishwaguru". Because of the ancient education system of 'Gurukul', Gurukul was residential schools where students used to live with teachers and take knowledge. Gurukul first introduced the hostel system and encouraged students to stay out of materialistic life, making them more Discipline, self-control, self-independent, courageous, and knowledgeable also help in strong character development. With the strong bonding of guru-shishya, they experience more spiritual connectivity.

But nowadays We see an increasing number of narrow minded people and crimes in society because the reason is pressure on students for higher grades in exams instead of knowledge, and high fees structure of institutions cause financial burden for poor and middle class families due to which most of poor families can not afford their complete studies of their children which cause students to went on wrong direction. Less emphasis on morals and core values since childhood led to anger, depression, anxiety, trust issues, and whatnot of children. We also see that most of the population suffers from unemployment due to a lack of skills and correct knowledge.

The National Education Policy has placed special emphasis on the rich heritage of ancient Indian culture, taking Yoga, Ayurveda and Spiritualism as the guiding path and this has translated India today into a global power.

This paper is based on a **systematic literature review** of the ancient education system and the education system after English education act,1835.

II. METHODOLOGY

Systematic Research Approach- nComparative analysis of ancient Indian education practices. Sources-Ancient texts (e.g., Vedas, Upanishads).

Objective of paper
- Why to study ancient Indian education?
- Teaching methods of the Gurukul education system.
- Glory of ancient Indian scholar.
- Reason and consequences of modern education.
- To Suggest strategies for progressive education in modern times.

Ancient education system:

The traditional Indian education system of "Gurukul" was the basic root of our knowledge existing 10,000 years back in the Sanskrit language. The education was mostly imparted in ashrams, gurukuls, temples, and houses. Sometimes pujaris of the temples are used to teach students. This is the process by which India's education helped to fuel a knowledge revolution around the world with manuscripts.

The concept of education in India today can only be understood clearly when, one views the development of education within the context of India's history, the relationship between education and India's cultural, spiritual philosophy, and the impact on social–political-cultural influences. Ancient India was based directly on Vedic

philosophical verses and scriptures compiled in an archaic form of Sanskrit as early as 2000 BC. The Vedic school of thought prescribes the Gurukul (sacred rite of passage) to all individuals. From initiation until the age of 25 all individuals are prescribed to be students and to remain unmarried. The Upanishads mention multiple Gurukul, including that of Guru Drona. Rama and Krishna also studied in Gurukuls under Vashishtha and Sandeepani respectively. According to the report, in the 1830s there existed more than 100,000 schools in the Indian states of Bengal and Bihar alone, in fact almost every village had its school. Gurukul has produced many saints/ sages and educated scholars with scientific knowledge. Our ancient Vedas are known as the scientific explanation of the universe. Gurukul education has spread not only in India and Nepal but also in overseas countries, too.

Teaching methods of gurukul:
Gurukul system was based on experimental learning and practice and covered a wide range of 18 subjects including- Vedic scriptures, language, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, economics, religion (yoga), polity, governance, warfare and physical education (martial arts) etc. subject inspires by Vedas and also known as 'Upvedas'. Studies done at 2 level. In the starting Guru's taught every subject compulsorily to children and later, students started learning according to their interest and preferences.
Guru's primarily focused on experimental learning and combining theories with practice through yoga, meditation, agriculture work and community service. Guru organised classes far from cities which helps Students to get Direct interaction with nature.

Alongside techniques are:
- Preaching (updesh)
- Teaching through example (Drishtant)
- Meditation and yoga
- Attentive listening (Sravana),
- Reflecting information (manana),
- Internalizing knowledge (Nididhyasana)
- Questioning, debates, and discussions
- Mantra chantings and storytelling.

Glory of Indian scholars :
The timeless contributions of Indian sage/saint to human knowledge, innovation, and spiritual thought and shaping the intellectual heritage of the world. From ancient times to the modern era, Indian scholars have excelled in diverse fields such as mathematics, science, medicine, philosophy, literature, and art. There is no doubt that Indians scholars made remarkable progress in a variety of fields.

Mathematics:
Aryabhata and Brahmagupta laid the foundation of modern mathematics with concepts like zero, algebra, geometry, decimal system and astronomy, aryabhatt also calculated the value of pi (π) (approx. 3.1416).
-At the age of 23 Aryabhatt authorized "Aryabhattiya" which was a collection of the advanced concepts of mathematics.
-Arabs learned concepts of the Indian mathematics system through "Brahm sputa Siddhantikka" authorized by Brahmagupta.
Bhaskracharya author "Siddhant Shiromani" is masterpiece of arithmetic, algebra, spheres and maths of planet completes in parts of 'lilavati', 'bijgadit', 'loladhyay'.
- In the 19th century James Taylor translated Lilavati's section and renowned Bhaskaracharya's brilliance.
Srinivasa Ramanujan, a self-taught mathematical genius, made groundbreaking contributions to number theory and infinite series.

Science:

Sage Kanada related to the Vaisheshika school of philosophy interested in small particles and gave atomic theory 2000 years before Dalton (UK).

Varahmihira the scholar of hydrology, geology, ecology and astrology. Also identifies types of flora and fauna to help locate groundwater. He authorized 'Brihadsamhita' in which there is a detailed chapter on earthquake prediction. Also authorised book 'panchSiddhantika' describes 5 astronomical systems.

Medicine and Surgery:

Sushruta, often regarded as the father of surgery, pioneered surgical techniques and 1000+ diseases and 700 medical plants detailed in the 'Sushruta Samhita'.

Charaka, the author of 'Charaka Samhita', established the principles of Ayurveda, an ancient system of medicine.

Philosophy and Spirituality:

Philosophers like Adi Shankaracharya best known for his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta and Swami Vivekananda introduced India's profound spiritual insights to the world, emphasizing unity and universal consciousness. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada: Founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). He wrote over 70 books on the Krishna tradition, which are considered authoritative and clear by scholars. His books have been published in 87 languages and have sold over a billion copies.

The ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita have provided philosophical guidance to seekers worldwide.

More recently Amartya Sen, who developed complex philosophical concepts deeply rooted in Indian culture, often influencing global thought and shaping the nation's intellectual landscape; their teachings on non-violence, self-realization, and social justice continue to resonate today.

Literature and Linguistics:

Kalidasa, India's greatest poet and playwright, enriched Sanskrit literature with works like Shakuntala and Meghaduta.

Panini, the father of linguistics, codified Sanskrit grammar in the Ashtadhyayi, a masterpiece of linguistic precision.

Modern Innovations:

Nobel prize winner like Rabindranath Tagore and Amartya Sen brought global recognition to Indian thought in literature and economics.

Scientists like C.V. Raman and Homi Bhabha revolutionized physics and nuclear science.

Reason and consequences of modern education:

In the year 1822, a British conducted survey on Indian education system and found that the education system was widespread and decentralized, with schools in almost every village William Adam estimated that there were around 100,000 schools in Bengal and Bihar, which was roughly one school per village. British also commissioned a survey by Colonel Thomas Munro, which found that the education system in India was more decentralized and egalitarian than the one in Britain.

The British goal for education in India was to produce a class of Indians who would act as their obedient servants and mediators between the government and the general public. In 1833, at House of Commons, London members of parliament Thomas Babington Marcley proposed the English language education system in India. At that time the GDP of the US is 3% and India's GDP is 18% of the world's total GDP.

When In 1835, They established English-medium schools, known as "Anglo-vernacular" schools and Lord Macaulay introduced the English Education Act. This emphasized the promotion of English education in India for the next 100 then in 1947 when India was librated it was one of the poorest countries in the world with a GDP of 2-3% of the world and the UK's GDP rose to 12%.

If you look at today's Indian education system there are lots of people who will do very well in exams but at time for choosing career they prefer to choose doing job under some foreign millionaire companies over making their own billionaire company and being owner of it. That's not the fault of the concept of the book, the problem lies in the bad executive examination system, evaluation. Because of material which doesn't encourage students to go deep into topics. Infact Books itself nudging to remain superficial.

According to recent data, the unemployment rate of India in 2024, significantly impacted by poor education, is around 9.2% with a particularly high rate among those with higher education levels, highlighting a "skill gap" where graduates lack the necessary skills for available jobs and only about 50% of Indian graduates are considered "employable.".

Suggestion of strategies for progressive education in modern times:

Progression- in Gurukul, if the teacher feels that a student is a smart, genius and has acquired knowledge at his level then he lets him go at next level this has two benefits:

- Smart students don't waste his time practicing the same. So he would move forward quickly to learn more.
- Children who were slow needed special guidance from teachers. Then the Teacher starts teaching them in different ways.

But in modern times each student spends time of the year in the same class and teachers get confused by their teaching methods for slow learner students.

Maybe this is not possible today but Students get pressurized to gain high-grade from parents, teachers and society in each exam which force them to repeat and memorise their syllabus like parrots. But we have to change this and focus on children's interest growth and help them to work on their goals. So, the strategies for progressive education in modern times :

- We should promote knowledge of entrepreneurship, finance, taxes and practical skills.
- Also Update classrooms with Modern technology for a real and good understanding of subjects.
- Promote some academic skills that emphasize students' creativity, critical thinking and practical life skills.
- Exam should only be taken as theoretical knowledge and emphasized more on project-based assignments.
- Value-Based Education: Teach moral values through stories and discussions, inspired by ancient practices.
- Incorporating Mindfulness and Meditation:

Introduce meditation programs in schools for mental well-being. Starting the day with prayer or meditation and yoga makes students physically and mentally fit. This helps students to remain calm and focused on their studies due lack of its importance in modern life causes mental diseases like anxiety, depression and stress. Which causes generation gaps between parents and children and suicides of young generation due to society pressure for not being perfect.

Last but not the least we could have a dedicated department of career counseling in each and every school that helps students to analyze their skills. Also suggesting and encouraging internship and skill development programs.

II. CONCLUSION

At last I have to say that we couldn't change any system but only by awareness and proper knowledge we can make our country developed by giving clear vision to today's youth . We request parents and teachers to understand that every student is different in their own way so don't expect perfection everytime. Everyone is unique gave your children a proper guidance and support for their growth to make them successful in their life.

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