



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## Refocusing Indian education system in the perspective of ancient Indian education system

Gaurav Sehgal \*

*School of Management Studies, Baba Ghulam Shaha Badshah University, Rajouri, J&K (UT) – 185234, India.*

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### Abstract

Ancient or Traditional Indian Education System has always been a topic of interest among researchers as well as general educators. The New Education Policy rolled out by Government of India in 2020 has also focused upon this ancient Indian educational pedagogy. This article is an attempt to highlight the relevance of reorienting our present educational structure towards the ancient educational system, which was considered to be the best system of imparting value based and morally structured education among common masses. This article elaborates the relevance of knowledge acquisition, knowledge discrimination and knowledge mining from the ancient education system point of view as well as its relevance in the present day education system. This article is an attempt to elaborate the philosophy of Ancient Indian education system through the insight of the knowledge and use of this knowledge which helps in restoring and restructuring of human moral values for society and nation building rather than just gaining it without a defined purpose. In this article, it has been emphasized that for rejuvenating and restructuring the present Indian Education System and provide a national moral value to the education system, we need to understand the outstanding characteristics of Indian Ancient philosophy of life, that revolved around the concept of *Karma*. And as such it is need of the hour to have a holistic approach in the Present Education System based on our Ancient Education System of India, which provides both physical as well as spiritual solitariness. This article has emphasized on the fact that in order to bring back ancient glory that existed in terms of knowledge acquisition, knowledge discrimination and knowledge mining in our ancient education system we need to re-orient the present education system with Ancient Indian Value based Education.

**Keywords:** Ancient Indian Education System; Indian Education; NEP; Ancient Indian Educational Philosophy

### 1. Introduction

*“Education is the manifestation of perfection already within man”.*

– Swami Vivekananda Ji

As per epistemology, the word Education is derived from a Latin word EDU – CATIONE, where EDU means to bring-out and CATIONE means to bring-forth, in other words, education means from within to with-out (*Andar se Bahar*) and not just reading without understanding.

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 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 total configuration of ideals, practices and conduct is called Dharma (Religion, Virtue or Duty) in this Indian ancient tradition. Indian culture is suffused thoroughly by moral values. The approach of our forefathers to life, their subtle analysis and

\* Corresponding author: Gaurav Sehgal.

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 their civilization.

The philosophy of Indian education system from ancient times have been to gain thorough insight of the knowledge and use of this knowledge for restoring and restructuring of human moral values for society and nation building rather than just gaining it without a defined purpose. This philosophy of knowledge acquisition and discrimination with a societal and nation purpose is also reflected in the following Sanskrit vers from Vishnu Purana,

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tatkarma yanna bandhāya sā vidyā yā vimuktaye |  
āyāsāyāparam karma vidyā'nyā śilpanaipuṇam ||  
- viṣṇupurāṇa

**Meaning:** Action (Act) is that which doesn't lead to Binding; and Knowledge is that which leads to liberation. All other Actions (Act) are mere Chores of Arduousness; and all other Sciences are plain Craftsmanship.

The above vers clearly reflects the ideology that was being followed by our ancestors towards attainment of moral valued education. Elaboration of the above vers depicts that the knowledge gaining in ancient Indian education system followed a systematic approach towards liberation and autonomy of a human being.

In other words, the philosophy of Ancient Indian Education System had always advocated a shift in attitude. The same chores and skills can lead to the ultimate goal when the attitude towards the doing, as well as its result, are that of detachment. There is no pain, hatred or sadness where there is detachment. This creates a win-win situation. Thus defeat or impossible was not being practiced in our ancient education system.

For rejuvenating and restructuring the present Indian Education System and provide a national moral value to the education system, we need to understand the outstanding characteristics of Indian Ancient philosophy of life, that revolved around the concept of Karma. That means that, the Education System should take into consideration the doctrine of Karma, that is, no great significance should be attached towards the physical existence in the world, yet the importance of action in this material world should also not be overlooked. In other words, all fields of Vidya or Knowledge should be understood to be formed from two broad streams, viz, the Paravidya, that is, higher knowledge or spiritual wisdom; and the Aparavidya, that is, lower knowledge or 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 through this attained knowledge in a holistic manner.

In order to provide a holistic approach in the Present Education System, one needs to understand that the Ancient Education System of India was so versatile that it presented a complete outlook of human values and had its synergy with culture and traditions prevalent therein. This type of approach from our ancient education system provided worldwide fame and glory which is reflected from the facts that the largest knowledge hubs were founded in India in the name of Nalanda and Takshashila Universities, which were centers of knowledge discrimination not only for Indians but also for other intellectuals across the globe at that time. These knowledge centers of the ancient Indian system of education 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. Thus the ancient Indian system of education catered to both physical as well as spiritual solitariness.

Ancient Indian Education had been evolved strictly on the foundations of Indian epistemological and philosophical traditions. The ultimate aim of education emerged as the Chitti-Vrittinirodha (the control of mental activities connected with the so called concrete world). However, ancient education did not neglect the development of the pupil's powers for his all-sided advancement, which is relevant from the fact that during those days following (but not limited to) were being strictly followed in the ancient education system: Knowledge related to life; Close association between teacher and student resulted in all round development ; Development in social work ; and Vocational training. 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 fountain heads 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.

Thus, in order to bring back ancient glory that existed in terms of knowledge acquisition, knowledge discrimination and knowledge mining in our ancient education system we need to re-orient present Education system with Ancient Value based Education. This is very much clear from the following Sanskrit vers, which is based on the essence that “True knowledge does not stop at just making one knowledgeable, but it teaches him humility.”

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vidyā dadāti vinayaṃ vinayādyāti pātratām |  
pātratvāddhanamāpnoti dhanāddharmaṃ tatassukham ||  
- hitopadeśa

**Meaning:** Knowledge (vidyā) gives humility; with humility comes recognition; recognition brings wealth; through wealth (comes) virtue; and then follows happiness.

It is a researched fact that, education is a methodical effort toward learning basic facts about humanity, and the core idea behind value education is to cultivate essential values in students. Value education is important to help everyone in improving the value system they hold and put them to use. Ancient Indian education was value-based consisting of Gurukul system (where students used to live in their teachers’ home and study) and world-famous Nalanda and Takshashila Universities (Vidyapeeth) are glorious examples of our value based education system acclaimed worldwide during ancient times. The value-based education policy reforms were the basis for utilizing the knowledge for benefits of mankind. In ancient India, there were knowledgeable personalities like Sushrut, Aryabhatta, Panini and Chanakya who set examples in front of the world at that time. In other words, value education in India from the ancient times has held a prime place of importance. From the Gurukul stage, the child learnt not only skills of reading and archery but more the philosophy of life in relation to its impermanence. Hence, education in India was born of this vision to achieve one’s experience in the absolute as a spark of the divine and in this process practice of one’s duty accompanies the acquisition of knowledge. Values such as cultural values, universal values, personal values, social values, national integration and character building were imbibed in students. The present Education System in India requires a re-orientation that should be based on Ancient philosophy of life (Karma) and Value added education (human values). In order to achieve this, following objectives may be considered for providing an Indian holistic and glorified re-orientation to the present Education System with respect to its synergy in planning, teaching and learning process: to offer value-based instruction in order to help students develop their moral, spiritual, psychological and cultural values; to provide value-based education that will help communities thrive with a humanistic perspective alongside scientific viewpoints with the pure aim of improving the nation and the world ; to provide values-based education that will help people recognize the ethics of the activities they engage in and that will be connected to the implementation of education for critical thinking ; to deliver values-based education using a multidisciplinary approach that is essential for developing resilient, energetic people who can inspire others ; to deliver a value-based education that will be helpful in giving students the chance to reflect on, clarify, and compare their own values with those of others ; to implement educational measures to promote tolerance, cooperation and teamwork as social values.

From the discussions above, it is factually very clear that the Ancient Indian Education system was acclaimed worldwide due to its moral, ethical, value based and national constructs. The ancient education system ensured universal access at all levels of primary education. Hence, our present education system should include such a curricular and pedagogical structure that community bounding value is increased. Also a reorientation in present education is desired which have provisions for multilingualism, so that integrity and social bounding are increased. Furthermore, there should be decentralization of power in education system for its free delivery and horizontal growth. Apart from these, it should also be emphasized that our present education system is so re-oriented that it promotes for critical thinking among students, along with providing a space for students to increase their emotional intelligence along with intelligence. It is time, that our present education system should reorient itself from being teacher – administration oriented to student-centric.

In the end I would conclude this article with the Sanskrit vers which glorifies and defines the importance of Education (Vidya) with the complete essence of: “Share the knowledge, Spread the knowledge”

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annadānaṃ mahādānaṃ vidyādānamataḥ param ।

annena kṣaṇikā trptiḥ yāvajjīvaṅca vidyayā ॥

**Meaning:** Giving food to a person is a great deed, but giving vidyā (education) is even better. The satisfaction (obtained) from food is momentary, but that (obtained) from vidyā lasts a lifetime.

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## 2. Conclusion

In conclusion, refocusing the Indian education system in the perspective of the ancient Indian education system could present an opportunity to blend traditional wisdom with modern pedagogical methods. Revisioning education along these lines could serve to promote a holistic approach to learning, emphasizing the importance of character building, life values, and a deep understanding of the self, as was the practice in ancient Indian Gurukul system. Incorporating elements from the ancient education system should not imply a regressive step, but rather it should be seen as a strategic move to re-establish and foster a culturally tailored education system that meets the demands of the 21st century. By honoring its roots, the Indian education system can indeed promote an educational framework that nurtures not just academically proficient individuals, but also socially and morally responsible citizens, thereby contributing to the formation of a well-rounded society. In essence, a refocusing effort would mean imbibing the valuable aspects of the ancient system to enhance the overall academic and cultural experience within the contemporary Indian educational landscape.

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