

Ancient Indian Education: Relevance and Importance in Modern India

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ABSTRACT

India has a rich tradition of education and learning that dates back to ancient times, and it was particularly prominent during the Renaissance period, known as the Golden Age of Indian Culture. The three major achievements in education during this period were the decimal system, the great Sanskrit epics, and the contribution to the sciences of astronomy, mathematics, and metallurgy. The four Vedas, namely the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda, were formulated through ideals, practices, and conduct. The doctrine of action (Karma) occupies a very significant place in the Indian system of education and has evolved during the transition from ancient to modern education. Two procedure of teaching were being performed during the Vedic period. First, the verbal/oral method, and the second is based on thinking (Chintan). Current higher education has shown trends of multidisciplinary approaches along similar lines. NEP 2020 also suggests a multidisciplinary approach. Bloom's Taxonomy defines three domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. The ancient education structure is also based on the three spheres, to develop higher-order learning by building up the lower-level cognitive skills. The ancient Indian education system, centered on holistic development (physical, mental, spiritual) and values like humility and discipline, is highly relevant today. It emphasized student-centric learning, oral traditions, and environmental harmony. Its focus on character building, moral grounding, and critical thinking is crucial for modern education to create responsible, empathetic citizens. This research aims to contribute will be to discourse on ancient Indian education and its relevance and importance in modern India.

Keywords: *Ancient Education, Vedic Knowledge, Multidisciplinary, Holistic development*

The traditional education system is a customary form of education in which the main motive of the education system is to pass on knowledge to the future generation. The traditional education system is one in which information is acquired within the four walls of the classroom. The education system in ancient India was quite different from the rest of the world. The disciple or the learner had to leave the house and live with the teacher in a gurukul for the entire period of learning. The society or the kingdom couldn't interfere with the curriculum, teaching, and learning. In ancient India, both formal and informal ways of the education system existed. Education was imparted at home, in temples, in pathshalas, and gurukuls. In the traditional education structure, the students were taught about traditions,

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customs, rituals, and religion (Ghonge M, et al., 2020). The ancient Indian education system, 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 as the medium of instruction. The Vedas are the 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 this knowledge that has lived a life according to the four Ashramas- Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha, and Sannyas. The religious revolution was started in ancient India in 600 B.C., and a new doctrine or system developed, which is called the 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 the education system in ancient India (Mandal, 2024). It may be said that there was no major difference between Vedic and Buddhism as far as the basic principles were concerned. Lord Buddha's main concern was to eliminate human suffering, to find a cure for the pain of human life, and to attain salvation by renouncing worldly pleasures. The Vedas were the earliest documents of the human mind and are indeed the earliest portion of the human mind to come into existence. The Vedas reflect the growth and development of human thought over a span of centuries. The Vedic age can rightly be called the Knowledge Age or the Age of Knowledge. This shows that it was an era that gave unprecedented importance to education, knowledge spreading, master scholars, intellectual discussions, and other academic aspects. The laws of the Vedas manage the social, legal, domestic, and religious customs of the Hindus to the current time. 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 generations of thinkers and so contain within it the different strata of thought. In order to come across the self of Bharat, the probe 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 (Mandal, 2024). Over the last two centuries, the Western perception has been the leading influencing factor in our education. The Students have learned more about custom, religion, dharma, truthfulness, discipline, self-reliance, and more about nature and creation. As we progress, we see that the education system has evolved. With the introduction of the modern education system, learners are able to access current information and transition towards a knowledge-based society. Modern day education is more interdisciplinary and application-oriented. The Indian education structure is very well liked and diversified among other countries education structure due to its adaptation from the ancient education system. In the 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, Darshanas, Puranas, and Tarkashastra. The six Vedangas were Shiksha, Chhandas, Vyakarana, Nirukta, Jyotisha, and Kalpa. The other subjects of 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, the Vedas were also given importance at that time. The Hindu studying was a part of Buddhist learning, although more importance was given to Buddhist learning. Both systems were going hand in 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.

METHODOLOGY:

The present study is a nature-based study, based on secondary data collected from the published records, reports, and specifically, the secondary sources included in journals, books, and websites.

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Frame of Educational Institution

The Gurukul system was the home institution of the teacher where students came after completing their initiation ceremony and learn until the completion of their studies. 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. Viharas were the educational institutions founded by Buddhists where the students were educate the subjects related to Buddhism and philosophy (Khushnam, 2022). Takshashila was a famous centre of learning in religion and the teaching of Buddhism in ancient India. Nalanda, Vallabhi, Vikramshila, Ujjain, and Benaras were the famous educational institutions in ancient India for higher education.

Methods of Teaching in Ancient Times

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

- At that time, there was no print material, so the students were habituated to learn by memorizing all the things taught by the gurus, and they also helped to memorize.
- Listening, contemplation, and concentrated contemplation were some new methods of exploring the way of learning.
- Storytelling methods are also used by the gurus to teach their students.
- Students used to ask questions about the topic taught by the teachers, and this topic was discussed and then answered for the students.
- The education at that time mainly focused on practical knowledge of the topic taught at the gurukul.
- Seminar and debates were conducted by the gurus to discuss some critical topics, where the eminent gurus (Educationists) from other places were also present. Through these programmes, students were able to gain higher education.
- Meditation was an important method in the ancient education system. Through this method, students were able to develop high-level thinking and spiritual development.

Relevance of Ancient Education in the Modern Education System

Table 1: Comparison of the ancient education version with modern education

Issue	Ancient Education	Modern Education
Teaching	Instruction based	Discussion based
Learning	Passive learning Attitude	Active Learning attitude and high engagement
Role of the Teacher	Instructor	Mentor
Learning Activities	Text- books and text	Project-based learning
Learning Locations	Traditional classrooms or gurukuls	Large learning space, including the internet
Teacher Training	Degrees, credentials, and certificates	Continuous training and upskilling

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Issue	Ancient Education	Modern Education
Industry's Perception of Graduates	Assembly line workers	Co-creators and entrepreneurs
Employability	Qualified and major-focused	Prepared for multiple careers
Result	Limited career prospects	Equipped with a variety of skills & multiple career paths

Methods of learning

The teachers at that time paid particular focus to their students and educate them according to their knowledge and skill measure. The teaching was fundamentally via orals and debates, and the distinctive methods were as follows:

- At that time, books were not available, so students had the habit to learn and memorizing all the things taught in class, and teachers also helped them memorize.
- The students used to deep dive into the concepts taught by their teachers and explore new methods to learn them.
- Listening, contemplation, and concentrated contemplation were some new methods of exploring the way of learning.
- The teachers used storytelling methods to teach the students.
- Students used to ask questions about the topics taught by the teachers, and these topics were discussed and then answered for the students. The education of that time mostly focused on practical knowledge of the topics educate in the class.
- The students got plenty of knowledge through seminars and debates conducted at frequent intervals.

Educational Institutions

Gurukul was the hometown of teachers where students come after completing their initiation ceremony and learn until the completion of their studies. The parishads or academies were the places of higher learning and education where students learn through discussions and debates. The Goshti or conferences were the places where the kings of the states used to invite scholars from every institute to meet and exchange their views. Ashramas or hermitages were the other learning centers where students from various parts of the country used to come and learn from saints and sages. The Vidyapeeth was the place of spiritual learning founded by the great Acharya, Sri Shankara, in places like Sringeri, Kanchi, Dwarka, and Puri. The Agraharas were an institution of Brahmins in villages where they used to teach. The Viharas were the educational institutions founded by Buddhists where the students were taught the subjects related to Buddhism and philosophy.

Higher Educational Institutions

- ✓ **Takshashila or Taxila University:** Takshashila was a famous center of learning, including religion and the teaching of Buddhism in ancient times. It was well known for its higher education learning incorporate subjects like ancient scriptures, law,

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medicine, sociology, astronomy, military science, and 18 silpas, etc. The well-known scholars from the university were the great grammarian Panini, who was an expert in his subject of grammar and published his work on the Ashtadhyayi, and Chanakya, who is skilled in statecraft, both of whom studied here. The students from Kashi, Kosala, Magadha, and also from different countries flocked to the university despite a long and arduous journey. Takshashila University was an ancient Indian city, currently situated in north-western Pakistan, which was a well-known center of learning and was proclaimed an archeological area and world legacy by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) in 1980.

- ✓ **Nalanda University:** The students used to come here from different parts of the province and the world to study come to Nalanda University. In Nalanda University distinctive subjects were taught and also including the Vedas, fine arts, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy etc. The Xuan Zang became a student of the Yogashastra. The Nalanda University, which is presently situated in Rajgir, Bihar in India, was also declared a world heritage site by UNESCO.

Advantages

- The system focuses on the all-round development of students.
- More emphasis was given to practical knowledge rather than theoretical knowledge.
- During the Mughal emperor Humayun established in many big institutions of the astronomy and geography established in Delhi.
- In Agra: the Sikandar Lodi established many Madrasas and Maktabas in Agra and attracted more students from different countries to come and study in Bharat.
- Jaunpur: The great ruler Sher Shah Suri completed his education in one of the educational institutes of Jaunpur city teaching were political science, warfare, history, and philosophy.
- During this time period the practical education was given more importance, and students and teachers relationship were good.

Disadvantages

- The religious and Islamic education was given more importance.
- The student aimed to focus on leadership for ruling the country.

Modern Education System

The modern Indian education system is a multi-stage structure (pre-primary to higher education system) undergoing relevant transformation via the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It aims to shift from rote learning to skill-based, holistic development, leveraging digital education (ICT) for wider access, while facing challenges like ensuring quality, reducing costs, and balancing traditional values with global standards.

- ✓ **NEP 2020 Structure:** The new education system 5+3+3+4 structure covers ages 3 to 18, starting with 5 years of foundation (pre-school to Class 2), followed by 3 years of preparatory, 3 years of middle, and 4 years of secondary education

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- ✓ **Holistic Development:** There is a significant focus on holistic development, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and critical thinking rather than just passing exams.
- ✓ **Technology Integration:** The Modern classrooms use AI tools, smart boards, and digital platforms like DIKSHA and SWAYAM to foster a blended or hybrid learning environment.
- ✓ **Language and Flexibility:** The curriculum allows for increased flexibility in choosing subjects, breaking the strict separation between arts, science, and commerce. Emphasis is also placed on teaching in the mother tongue or regional language, particularly at the foundational level.
- ✓ **Teacher Training & Evaluation:** The curriculum focuses on teacher development and new assessment techniques, including student self-assessment and competency-based evaluation

Methods of learning

- The mostly students learn concepts through online platforms like YouTube, Coursera, and Udemy online courses and students refer to the notes given by the teacher side-by-side while learning online.
- During class hours, doubts are solved through discussions, debates, etc.
- The pupils were assessed based on midterm written exams and practical exams to check their practical knowledge.

Advantages

- With the use of technology in learning, students are learning freelancing and many other new technologies.
- Many programs and missions have started to increase employment in India.
- Top-class universities and colleges with good infrastructure and environment.

Disadvantages

- Sometimes, the government interferes in education, management, and the syllabus is a concern.
- Lack of quality teaching as well as the environment in government schools and colleges.
- Increase in fees of schools and colleges of private institutes.
- Lack of practical knowledge orientation.
- Due to the increase in fees, the family, which is below the poverty line, cannot afford education, and hence, there is an increase in the number of laborers in India.
- Lack of connectivity among the students who lived in rural areas.

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Modern Education System Based on the Ancient Education System

In response to the escalating academic demands in modern education, there's a growing recognition of the need to enhance learning methodologies. The different Asanas, mantra chanting, and meditation, integral components of ancient practices, are believed to contribute to a serene mind and improved learning outcomes. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), guided by regulatory bodies like UGC and AICTE, are advocating for the revival of ancient learning strategies. Practices such as logical learning, spaced learning, and rational memory, inherent in the ancient way of teaching, are being reintroduced with renewed significance. These strategies align with the Universal Human Value (UHV) framework, aiming at holistic personality development through an integrated approach to Yoga. As part of this initiative, a compulsory 10-day Universal Human Value (UHV) program during the orientation period ensures widespread implementation of these ancient-inspired practices in modern education.

Relevance of Ancient Education in the Modern Education System

The importance of ancient education system in the modern education is an important topic that has been widely discussed and debated. While there are so many differences in the methods, tools, and societal contexts between ancient and modern education, there are also important principles and insights from ancient educational systems that can be considered relevant present days. Here are some aspects to consider.

Holistic Education: Ancient education often focused on a holistic approach to learning, encompassing physical, moral, and intellectual development. Modern education systems are increasingly recognizing the importance of a well-rounded education that goes beyond academic achievements. (Lohani, Nirmla 2024). Integrating aspects of character development, ethics, and physical well-being can enhance the overall educational experience.

Critical Thinking and Philosophy: In Ancient period the educational systems was especially in Greece and India, placed a strong emphasis on philosophy and critical thinking. These skills are still highly relevant in the modern world, where the ability to analyze, question, and think independently is crucial. Integrating philosophical concepts into modern curricula can foster a deeper understanding of various subjects.

Individualized Learning: In some ancient educational systems, personalized and individualized learning was more common. Modern education is moving towards recognizing and accommodating diverse learning styles and preferences. Incorporating elements of individualized learning plans and adaptive teaching methods can enhance the effectiveness of education today.

Ethics and Morality: Many ancient educational systems included teachings on ethics, morality, and values. In the modern time, there is an increasing recognition of the relevance features of education system. It's integrating ethical considerations into the curriculum can help students develop a strong moral compass and a sense of social responsibility.

Practical Skills and 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 applications to academic knowledge. Internships, practical projects, and experiential learning opportunities can bridge the gap between theory and practice.

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Cultural and Historical Awareness: Ancient education often emphasized 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.

CONCLUSION

The Vedas are the 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. 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 the development of the constant omnipresence of Brahma, the Great Universal Being. The ultimate aim of education was the 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 Brahmans of India, who had purged and purified themselves through sincere penance. The influence of ancient education on the modern education system is tremendous. The emphasis on the 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. The ancient education system always focused on higher knowledge of self and knowledge of strength. Modern-day education emphasizes this concept of self-awareness and skill development through experiential and multidisciplinary learning. A holistic and multidisciplinary education will help develop well-rounded individuals who possess critical 21st century capacities in fields across the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences, and professional, technical, and vocational fields; an ethic of social engagement; soft skills, such as communication, discussion, and debate; and rigorous specialization in a chosen field or fields. Modern-day education emphasizes this concept of self-awareness and skill development through an experiential and multidisciplinary learning system.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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