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Foundations of education in Ancient Indian system and ancient Greeko-Roman system- some comparisons

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A B S T R A C T

Indian system of education is one of the oldest systems of the world. Both secular and sacred education was handed over systematically by formalizing the system of education. We found significant growth in the system of education in our country since ancient times. Greeks and Romans have contributed a lot for the growth and development of education system in ancient period in the west. We can draw as many comparisons as possible as far as foundations of education are concerned in both Indian systems and Greeko-Romans systems of education. The scholar has made an attempt to compare some of the aspects. Unless a prospective teacher knows about the basic philosophical foundations of education laid down he cannot discharge his/her duties as a responsible educator of the country. There is a need for all the prospective teachers, teacher educators to well acquaint with the foundations of education laid down in ancient India and the west. This would enhance the horizon of thinking to all the students of education.

Introduction

Indian system of education is one of the oldest systems of the world. Both secular and sacred education was handed over systematically by formalizing the system of education. We found significant growth in the system of education in our country since ancient times. Greeks and Romans have contributed a lot for the growth and development of education system in ancient

period in the west. Gradually we witnessed tremendous growth in education in the west. In this paper the scholar made an attempt to draw some comparisons of the foundations of education laid down both in ancient India and ancient Greece and Rome. We begin with the Vedic age, which marks the beginning of the Indian culture, religion, literature, philosophy, science and

education. The Vedic people, just as the Greeks, had a keen desire for knowledge of nature and man. The Vedic and Greek educationists and philosophers have realized the basic truth that though all men are born equally and appear outwardly to be the same in their innermost core of their being, they differ widely and they tried to explain the causes for these differences and sought to locate the place of education in shaping the destiny of men. Importance of education was sought to be emphasized by pointing out that the educated would be revered everywhere. ‘Vidwan sarvatra pujiyate’ – is the famous Vedic saying “He who is learned will be respected everywhere”.

What then were the steps taken by the society, men of learning and wise men to ensure that proper education was imparted to the rising of people from the state of non-learning to the state of learning and knowledge? To ensure that people move forward “from mortality to immortality, from darkness to light, from becoming to being” the Vedic people laid down it as a condition that every citizen should undergo a period of training and discipline (siksha) during the childhood and by the time he has attained the adolescence he must have been instructed in the sacred literature and trained in the family profession (Vrthividya or kula vidya). The Vedic people believed that no person could become a great scholar, or a successful administrator, or a skilful mechanic or a prosperous merchant, who had not received proper education. Accordingly they laid down certain aims and objectives to be achieved through education. The following are some of the important ideals of Vedic education also found in the Greeko-Roman education.

1. They thought that all educational institutions and systems of education

should reflect the ideals of the nation and enable its people to understand the spirit of its civilization.

2. They thought it was the duty of all learned people to rise the generations from ignorance and the children should be imbued with the traditions of the race and induced to adopt them into their own life.
3. This is so with the Vedic Indians and Greeks.
4. The Vedic and Greek civilizations have preserved propagated and modified their systems of education according to the needs of the time and citizens.
5. The development of education in ancient India underwent many vicissitudes (changes). Thus, for example, in the context of Indian education reason (Tarka) prevailed over the means of knowledge. While it is the same with Plato, Parmenides, and Pythagoras, the case is different with sophists, Aristotle and the British empiricists like John Locke who preferred experience, observation and induction, as methods of education, rather than reason. But when we come to German idealists like Immanuel Kant and G.W. Hegel, again reason prevails over experience.
6. Similarly at one time Indian society favored female education, particularly in performing arts, domestic rituals, interior decoration, house-keeping, garland and perfume making, story-telling and so on, but at a later date the Indian society began to discourage female education, the reasons are both religious and sociological, but not economical as some have put it. In the context of Greeks also it is Plato who said that “education is the same for men and women” (Plato’s Dialogues, “Laws”, VII, and 804e, Tr. P.1376). Let

us see what Plato has said on this. He says

“A boy is not to attend to school if his father so desires.” This is exactly the practice prevailing in India even now. Should the parents, particularly the father, not desire the boy to go to school, there is any chance of him going to the school?

“Education is, if possible, to be, as the phrase goes, compulsory for every mother’s son, on the ground that the child is even more the property of the state than of his parents. And, mind you, my Law will apply in all respects to girls as much as to boys; the girls must be trained exactly like the boys. And there should be no reservations or exceptions on any point of training – may be horsemanship the use of bow and the other weapons.” With the advent of slavery, women-education has disappeared in the Greece. And with the invasion of the Huns, the Arabs, the Muslims, French, the Dutch, the Protégées, and the British, women-education disappeared in India and in the post-independent India only a negligible percentage of girls are being sent to be educated in schools and colleges.

Ideals, which the ancient Indian and greek-roman educational systems represented

Education leads to illumination

The Indians and Greeks, both believed in certain ideals of education. The basic conception of education is that it is a source of illumination, a vehicle of transformation of the individual, psychologically, intellectually and even morally. In the Indian context education leads to immortality also. Plato also believed in the immortality of the soul and purging of all evils and irrational and ignoble elements from the soul attains this immortality. Pure

reason leads to enlightenment. Knowledge and wisdom are the culminating points of education. Knowledge gives illumination, and wisdom leads to enlightenment. These two were the cherished goals of education both in India and Greece.

“Knowledge is virtue – said Socrates.

“Knowledge is power – said Lord Bacon.

“Knowledge is science”–said A.N. Whitehead.

“Science is nothing but discovery and invention”

“Knowledge increases intelligence, power and efficiency”.

Thus the uses of education are too many to be exhaustively enumerated; it nourishes us like the mother; directs us to the proper path like father, and gives us delight and comfort like the wife. It increases our fame, destroys our difficulties and makes us pure and more cultured. (Education as a process of acculturation and socialization; Emile Durkheim—who says that all education should culminate in providing a refined culture to man) Education is at the root of all human happiness. Education promotes the material growth and as well as spiritual advancement. Education works as an agency of transformation and improvement of personality. According to Plato, education ‘begins before birth’ and ‘brings victory’. It removes all discordant notes and helps for the concordance of the soul. Education should be properly instructed and directed in right way. If it is not directed properly or ill directed it leads to dangerous results. One wonders whether the education in atomic science or Nuclear Physics is properly directed or not. If it is properly directed, our scientists would not have invented atom bombs which could destroy the entire civilization of the world. It would be apt to quote the words of Dr.S.Radhakrishnan ‘If we fail to adjust our

conscious with the growing scientific and technological revolutions, the whole human race will put to an end'. Proper direction and ill direction depends upon finding out a good researcher; of course, as to the nature of a good teacher, we have said considerably in the main body of our dissertation. Proper education is the highest blessings that a man can receive from his teacher and it is for this reason that in Indian context a teacher is elevated to that of a God. 'Acharya devo bhava' Let thy teacher be a God unto thyself – has its own intellectual and spiritual significance.

Alexander, the great, has considered Aristotle, nothing short of a God and there are also several instances of this kind. Imparting of education to children should be in conformity with the laws of the nation. There should be some scope for amusement in education and it should have a refining influence on our manners and customs and it should be neither negative nor rebellious. It on the other hand should be innovative, but not dangerous. It is obligation on the part of the parents to educate their children because it promotes virtue in children and it trains in a skilful way the instincts of children.

Ancient Indian and Greek education aimed also at physical development

Aristotle rightly says – "A strong mind in a strong body". Ancient Indians, therefore, wisely emphasized the development of mind and body culture (Sariramadyam khalu dharma sadhanam). Swamy Vivekananda emphasized the need for development of good body in order to develop sound mind. Only those who are strong by both body and mind alone can contribute their mite for the growth and development of mankind. It is interesting to note the words of Swamy Vivekananda –

'If you play football well you understand Geeta better'. A good physique, the Yoga-education says, is a sine qua non of success not only in mundane but also in religious matters. (Kumarasambhava of Kalidasa, V.30) The student was given both a work-schedule and work ethics, and is expected to practice in both without any exception.

Infusion of piety and righteousness: Greek education compared: (Virtue as the aim of education)

Since religion played a large part in life in ancient India and teachers are mainly from priestly class and there is no wonder that the infusion of piety and righteousness is considered to be the aim of education. The same can be said about Greek-education. Socrates and Plato regarded that virtue is to be cultivated through education. Several rituals were invented and the student was supposed to perform all these rituals at the beginning of both the literary and professional education – primary and higher education. The daily prayers, the participation in the religious ceremonies and festivals, living in the house of the teacher and observing the code of behavior of the teacher – and many such other factors have helped to foster piety and righteousness coupled with discipline in the mind of the young student. This religious environment and spiritual life enabled the students to withstand the temptations of life and provided a healthy academic environment, which ultimately produced an 'educated gentleman' in the words of Kilpatrick. The modern education does not believe in putting certain restraints on the sense pleasures of the students. Restrained behavior, control over the senses is not a part of modern education. At the higher level of education students are suffered from many vices, but of course, what is a

vice and what is not a vice is an open question.

Plato's views on education compared with Indian idealism

Education not acquisition, but use of vision within us

While explaining the function of education Plato draws our attention to the basic fact how our senses will be disturbed by two causes:

1. The shift from light to darkness,
2. The shift from darkness to light.

Both the above mentioned disturbances unable the soul to discern something that is coming from a brighter life of its vision. The darkness again is of two kinds: (a) the familiar darkness, and (b) unfamiliar darkness. In both the cases the soul will be disturbed. Then "the function of the education is not in reality what some people proclaim it to be in their professions. What they ever is that they can put true knowledge into a soul that does not possess it, as if they were inserting vision into blind eyes". The organ of knowledge, says Plato, must be turned around from the world of becoming together with the entire soul, like the scene being shifted in a theatre, until the soul is able to endure the contemplation of essence and the brightest region of being. Education is the art, the speediest art and the most effective art of shifting the soul from darkness to light. It is not an art that produces vision, but it is an art, which rightly directs the vision. The other virtues of the soul are created by habit and practice. But the virtues that are produced in the soul by education are not the same as those produced by habit and practice. Excellence of thought, which can never lose its potency, is the result of education. It is neither useless nor harmful.

It on the other hand, is useful and beneficent.

Education of soldiers

What kind of studies will have the power to produce the 'guardians of the city'? Basically these guardians must be youthful and be athletes of war. They must also have the additional qualifications of being educated in gymnastics. It is a subject to be studied for the understanding of the growth and strength of the body. Of course, study of body is not the final one, because body grows and decays and finally perishes. Even in Indian system of education particularly during the period of Ramayana and Mahabharata education for soldiers were given with the same objectives.

Music was the counterpart of gymnastics

Music educates the guardians through habits, imparting by the melody a certain harmony of spirit that is not science, and by the rhythm, measure and grace and also qualities akin to these in the words of tales what are fables and those that are more nearly true.

"All arts, in the opinion of Plato, are base and mechanical".

Subjects of study suggested by Plato:

1. Gymnastics.
2. Athletics.
3. Music
4. Number theory.

The true education is that which makes man good at any time and practice nothing but good from early childhood. An educated child is one who plays well in games and also plays with earnestness. Thus, if a boy is to be a good farmer, or again a good builder, he should play in the one case at building toy houses, in the other

at farming, and both should be provided by their tutors, with miniature tools on the pattern of real ones. In particular, all necessary preliminary instruction should be acquired in this way. Today we have been teaching the students to learn through simulation. This learning through simulation is known to ancient Indians and Greeks. Thus, for example, the carpenter should be taught by his play to use the rule and plumb line, and the soldier to sit at horse, and so on. We should seek to use games as a means of directing children's tastes and inclinations towards the station they are themselves to fill when they become adults, so we may say, in fact, the sum and substance of education is the right training which effectually leads the soul of the child at play on to the love of the calling in which he will have to perfect, after its kind, when he is a man.

When we talk of one as educated and the other as uneducated, what does this mean? This needs to be clarified simply because there is no unanimity of opinion among philosophers, says Plato. Some hold the view that education is nothing but schooling from boy-hood in goodness which inspires the recipient with passionate and ardent desire to become a perfect citizen, knowing both how to wield and how to submit to righteous rule. Any training which has as its end wealth or perhaps bodily strength, or some other accomplishment unattended by intelligence and righteousness, it counts vulgar, illiberal and wholly unworthy to be called education. A rightly educated person is one who proves what is good and that no aspect of education is to be disparaged. Education is the highest blessings bestowed on mankind and it is the best of them on whom it is most fully bestowed. When it takes a false turn, which permits of correction, one

and all should devote their energy to amend it.

Education begins before birth: 7.789 (Laws)

The discussion of the nature of children and education is given a paramount importance by Plato, both in Republic and Laws. The privacy of home has its own limitations to deal with this subject. Children, if unchecked, will develop a tendency to transgress and commit misdeeds. Neither legislation, nor silence would help the children to make better. It is possible to mend the ways of children through right education. The right system of education and nurture must be that which can be shown to produce the highest possible perfection and excellence of body and soul, perfection of the body is possible to attain in children if they grow straight from their earliest days. And, furthermore, it is a fact of observation that in all living things growth is most conspicuous and rapid in its initial springing – so much so – indeed, that many people have believed in that the stature reached by human being in its first five years is that what makes him even at the age of twenty. All impositions on the child should be laid while the child is being nursed in the womb. Such kind of ideas of Plato to nourish the child while it is still in the womb of the mother could be found in the Indian content also. Vamadeva, a great saint, is said to have learned everything, while he is still in his mother's womb. A proper regimen is to be administered even to the embryo. It is evident that Abhimanyu learnt chasing 'padmavyuha' taught by his father Arjun while he was in the womb of his mother. Even today many musicians are doing research about the grasping of the child while he was inside the womb of its mother.

Education brings victory

What considerable advantage the boy or the city derives from the education and again from the educated? The answer is easy, says Plato. Education is the way to produce goodmen, (It is this idea of Plato that has remarkably influenced Kilpatrick to say that the sole aims of education is to produce an 'educated gentleman') and, once produced, such men will live nobly, and vanquish their enemies in the field. In ancient Indian system education not only brings victory but also liberates the human soul from the earthly bondages.

We can draw as many comparisons as possible as far as foundations of education are concerned in both Indian systems and Greeko-Romans systems of education. The scholar has made an attempt to compare some of the aspects. Unless a prospective teacher knows about the basic philosophical foundations of education laid down he cannot discharge his/her duties as a responsible educator of the country. There is a need for all the prospective teaches, teacher educators to well acquaint with the foundations of education laid down in ancient India and the west. This would enhance the horizon of thinking to all the students of education.

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