

Ancient Indian Education and Delors

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Abstract

In this paper contemporary relevance of ancient Indian education has been highlighted. A parallel has been drawn with the Delors Report (1996). The Delors Report focused on the Four Pillars of education — Learning to Know, Learning to do, Learning to Be, Learning to Live Together. Ancient educators of the Vedic period regarded knowledge as the third eye of man. Emphasis on performance of various kinds of duties with loyalty and responsibility, the personal touch between teacher and taught helping in the development of different dimensions of student's personality deserve mention.

Keywords: Ancient Indian Education, Delors, Four Pillars.

Education systems in different parts of the world have changed over the years. This is largely due to change in culture and civilization. Development has often led to an evolution in education systems to incorporate new technologies and new ways of doing things. For instance technology has resulted in greater audience response systems, greater interaction and participation. Though modern education has given India the key to treasures of scientific and modern democratic thought, opened the doors for liberal and rational thinking, yet somewhere it swayed and took the wrong path. The present day system of education, to a large extent, from primary through secondary, right up to higher level makes the mind a store house of knowledge and reduces creativity. 'Factory model education', where schools become in some respects like factories, where the workplace and the schools pursue the same environment of efficiency, manipulation and mastery, are greatly responsible for making students forget their own cultures, enhancing new global markets and destroying local economies and local cultures. It is here that the Vedic period becomes

inspirational not only for India but for the whole world. It encouraged men, to assemble and come forward on a common platform, think and work together for achieving a common goal. This is what the fragmented world of today needs the most. It is essential for Modern India to remember its rich ancient Vedic heritage in order to achieve its full potential in economic development and in the conscience of its masses.

All seminars and conferences in ancient India focused on the existence and nature of God. Today scholars spend a lot of time on debates and discussions dealing with developments of new materials, machines and applications of energy. Science is leading to the improvement of several amenities of the humanity but these amenities are now being realized to be the ways of destruction of the environment leading to global calamity. Our ancient scholars did not just encourage research in science but also concentrated on the logical understanding of the existence of God. This would give rise to a balanced society giving immense happiness to humanity. We now realize that the ancient materials and technologies have great health benefits and help in maintaining the environmental balance of the world. Ancient education emphasized spiritual education. Tolerance, truth, ahimsa, peace and non-aggression are the hallmarks of Indian culture. Academic background, career and good earning is important in life for happiness, but more essential is leading a quality life, focusing on humanity, compassion and self-discipline. World is now a global village. An amalgamation of culture, science, research, technology would help us to evolve an ideal blueprint for education.

Typical curriculum and classroom designs enable a teacher to teach the same thing in the same way to every child. This has its disadvantages as we know every child is unique, has different strengths and interests. Whilst this approach makes life easier for a teacher, it destroys the student's genuine thirst for knowledge. Children get bored, lose interest in classrooms, are not able to do well in examinations. Schools and teachers need to make a radical shift. This requires a different kind of teacher. Learning needs to be individualized, classrooms need to be dismantled and curriculum needs to be constantly

evolving. It becomes imperative here to say a few words on the Gurukul system of education.

Gurukul or "home of the guru" is not a physical place. The home is a place where student teacher consciousness merges through mutual cooperation and love.

Gurus in ancient India were highly respected. The famous ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, termed teaching as "the world's greatest profession." Today's teacher is at one of the lowest rungs of the inspirational ladder. The profession is perceived to attract those who could not succeed elsewhere or those searching for a part time job. This has become a vicious cycle that needs to be stopped completely. Teaching needs to become a profession that attracts capable and passionate people with high levels of self-esteem, empathy, creativity, resilience, wisdom, optimism and desire to learn. Great teachers like the Gurus of ancient India need to rise possess excellence and emerge as role models. In ancient India are finds that both kinds of knowledge—material and spiritual were essential. Education pertained to two kinds of knowledge—worldly and other worldly. The worldly education dealt with the social aspect, whereas, the other worldly education was related to intellectual pursuits for achieving salvation. It is here that one can draw a parallel with the Delors Report, created by the Delors Commission in 1996, "Learning: the treasure within; report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century."

The Delors Report focused on the four pillars of education—*learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be*. The Vedas have also laid down the four levels of existence, viz. of knowledge of action, of devotion and of wisdom. A brief mention of the four pillars of education as given in the Delors Report needs to be specified in order to understand this aspect further.

Delors Report (1996) gives an insight into the concept of lifelong learning. In the emerging knowledge society, an educated person will be the one who is willing to consider learning as a lifelong process and the key objective of

lifelong learning is to enable people to improve themselves and to keep up with socio-economic, political, scientific and technological changes. The concept of lifelong learning has a three dimensional framework: life-long, life-wide and life-deep dimensions. The lifelong dimension represents what the individual learns throughout the whole life-span, i.e. from 'birth to death'. The life-wide dimension refers to learning that takes place in a variety of different environments and situations. It is not restricted to the formal educational system. It encompasses formal, informal and non-formal learning. Life deep dimension refers to all aspects of a student's life—belief, values, ideologies and orientations to life. Therefore lifelong learning is an organizing principle for all education lifelong learning is life long, life wide and life deep and an ongoing, voluntary, self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. It embraces social inclusion, active citizenship, personal development, competitiveness and employability. Learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom but takes place throughout life and in a range of situations. Supporting this concept of lifelong learning, the UNESCO Commission for Education under Delors (1996) in its Report "Learning the Treasure Within", established the four pillars of learning:

- 1) *Learning to Know*— which concerns developing one's concentration, memory skills and ability to think and possessing a broad general education with in-depth knowledge on a selected number of subjects and thus laying the foundation for learning throughout life.
- 2) *Learning to Do*— which emphasizes personal competence in the field of occupational training, becoming involved in work experience schemes or social work, learning to work in teams, learning to do their jobs as well as deal with a variety of situations.
- 3) *Learning to Be*— that education should bring about every person's complete development. Talents which lie hidden in each individual must be tapped. These talents—memory, reasoning power, imagination, physical ability, aesthetic sense, aptitude to

communicate with others and the natural charisma to be a good leader—all pointing to the need for greater self-knowledge.

- 4) *Learning to Live Together*— raising awareness of the similarities and interdependence of all people, understanding of others, their history, traditions, spiritual values and thus managing conflicts in peaceful ways and in an intelligent manner leading to reduction of world violence.

One finds that the four levels of existence, viz. of knowledge, of action, of devotion and of wisdom as given in the Vedas had already emphasized these four pillars of Delors Report long back. Ancient educators of the Vedic period regarded knowledge as the third eye of man that gives him insight into all worldly and other worldly matters. This, therefore, points to the pillar "Learning to Know" as given in Delors Report (1996). Knowledge of Vedic literature consisted of eight different forms; viz., "Four Vedas, Six Vedangas, Four Upavedas, Four Brahmanas, One hundred and eight Upanishads, Six systems of Philosophy, Bhagwad Gita and Three Smritis". (Aggrawal, J.C. 2008, p. 35). The Vedas deal with every branch of knowledge and provide basic material of all arts and science. They are the first source of wisdom. Vedas are considered to be main source of Indian philosophy of life. Among the four vedas, the Rig Veda is regarded as most important from point of view of education. It is in this Veda that knowledge aspect is being interpreted and four stages of human life are touched upon.

The subjects of the Ancient Indian Education were fundamentally Philosophy, Grammar and Logic. The system of education was not only theoretical but also had a practical content referring to meditation, seminars and religious practices. The student developed healthy civic and aesthetic sense. After receiving education from Gurukuls, students could get married and lead a family life and performed various kinds of duties towards their family and society which they regarded as their main responsibility. This points to the pillar "Learning to do". In ancient times people led a simple, pious life, performing their duties and responsibilities with care and devotion. Everyone had certain moral values and

they considered following religious norms as their duty. They used to live in close contact with saints, which made their life religious. (Gupta, Manju. 2007, p. 41).

The atmosphere of educational institutions in ancient period in India reverberated with feelings of love and devotion. An important objective of ancient educational system was to preserve and transmit ancient Indian culture. The credit goes to those devoted teachers of ancient times who were engaged continuously in developing the all-round personality of the students. This refers to the pillar "Learning to Be". Gurus would select those activities that helped to develop different dimensions of student's personality.

The aims and ideals emphasized in ancient Indian education gave due consideration to the following—infusion of a spirit of piety and righteousness, formation of high character, development of personality, inculcation of civic and social values, promotion of social efficiency and preservation and spread of national culture. (Gupta, Manju. 2007, p. 42)

Though the Indian society was divided into four different Varnas, on the basis of their work, yet the society of ancient India was maintained by every individual. Every member of the society performed his duties with loyalty and responsibility. This in a way explains how the pillar "Learning to Live Together" was already given importance in the past in ancient India.

Ancient Indian Education aimed at transforming the personality of the individual by equipping him not only with information but also inculcating a proper way of life that gave importance to the four pillars of Delors Report—*Learning to know, Learning to do, Learning to Be and Learning to live together* and transforming him into a good human being.

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