

Revival and Resurgence of Our Lost GEM - The Ancient Indian Education System

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Abstract

After witnessing the unruly and disruptive behaviour amongst college students on trivial topics, a study was conducted to find the reason behind it. The study consisted of students discussing topics like politics, situational problems etc. and it was observed that students lacked the concept of perception.

Studying this even further, it was found that the cause for this was because our modern-day education focused more on literally manufacturing people for jobs and less on value systems and critical thinking. The present education system is finding it very difficult in ensuring the required quality that every student must possess. This also gives rise to students being confused about their career paths and life in general. They don't realise their true potential and abilities and thus start developing a "follow the crowd" mentality.

To improve this situation, a radical change has to be brought into the education system and this change can only be supported by retrospection of India's ancient education system. The focus must now divert towards developing skills rather than just concentrating on academics. These ancient practices cannot be applied as it is in this modern era. Hence, their application calls for reinvention and resurgence to benefit today's students.

Keywords: Education, student, Reinvention, Value System, Ancient India, Skill development

Introduction

As quoted by the great Swami Vivekanand - “Each nation like each individual has a theme in this life, which is its centre, the principle note, around which every other note comes to form the harmony. If any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality, the direction, which has become it's own through the transmission of centuries, nation dies.”

India is a country famed for its diverse and rich culture as well as heritage. But it was truly celebrated for its ancient education system, which focused on the development of an individual on all levels, be it physical, emotional and psychological. Moral education was a perennial aim of Vedic education. The principles of Vedic education have been a source of inspiration to all the educational systems of the world. This was the primary reason why India produced great scholars like Chanakya, Aryabhatta, Pingala, Sushurta, Charaka etc.

But, during recent times, the quality of education has witnessed a drastic deterioration. The reason being the immense infatuation that the Indians have for the western culture. The situation worsened when India became a British colony and was ruled over for almost 200 years. Over this period, the British successfully eradicated the Indian education system and replaced it with a textbook-based methodology of learning which curbed the interaction students had with nature and its elements and restricted the scope of learning and teaching for students and teachers, respectively.

The students nowadays study for the sake of studying and not to learn and become a better person. In fact, the very concept that school and college education is meant to build their value system is alien to them.

Although the saying is that “Education begins at home” is true yet we cannot ignore the fact that a student spends almost 7-8 hours in school. For them, especially in their formative years, school is a second home and teacher a parental figure. But, schools and colleges are preparing students for rat races which in the end leaves students not only confused but also devoid of values and character. There’s unhealthy competition everywhere you look. People are willing to cheat, bribe, and use any means just to stay on the top.

It’s because of this lack of values that our modern-day education system fails to provide that people are becoming horrendously materialistic. They believe that money can buy anything. And thus, exploit both people and resources for their gains.

Back in ancient times, when India was called the golden bird, people believed in leading a simple lifestyle not because they lacked money and resources but because their ethics and value system was strong. Such people were naturally less materialistic. This mentality amongst us has led to all man-induced disasters, so much so that the lives and well-being of our future generations are at stake. To understand and tackle this situation before it becomes an epidemic, the following study has been undertaken.

Review of Literature

- India’s current population is more than 1.3 billion and is projected to surpass 1.5 billion by

2030 and 1.6 billion by 2050. It is now estimated that India will soon surpass China in terms of population in less than a decade. This poses great challenges for the near future. The saving grace in such a situation is Education. We need to understand the implications of our day-to-day actions on people’s lives and the planet in the future. Education is a prospective facilitator for sustainable development. A lot of efforts need to be made by policymakers as well as educational institutions. The actions at the ground level by institutes is of utmost importance as students need to develop new perspectives to be able to understand the rapidly changing world.

- The modern education system in India is established by the British, primarily introduced by Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay in the 1830s and later by Wood’s Magna Carta of Indian education in 1854. Teaching was confined to the classrooms and connection with nature was broken, and also the close relationship between student and teacher was lost. Modern education is based on the western system of textbooks and examination. There are primarily two motives of introducing textbooks culture in India; a) to stop producing new knowledge and make students think that they are mere consumers of the knowledge the textbook writer wants to convey, b) reducing teacher’s authority on knowledge. Teachers lost the right of deciding what to teach and how to teach. They also follow the matter given in textbooks. The examination was introduced to our education system so that students are limited to learn only those things which are supposed to be covered in the exam, not the complete things. This practice eventually narrows the area of knowledge. To pass the exam, students just memorise the content without understanding, just to clear the exam.
- Education in ancient India was quite different from the rest of the world back then. Society and state couldn’t interfere with the curriculum or the administration. To get an education, a child had to leave home and live with a teacher in a gurukul for the entire duration of his studies. No fee was charged for education; in fact, the

teacher took care of everything, including food, clothing and housing. According to this system, physical labour was of utmost importance. So, even if a child were interested in acquiring philosophical knowledge, he would still have to do some manual work every day. Debates and discussions were a part of education, even in ancient days.

- Oral recitation was the basic medium of imparting knowledge. It was practised through various methods like introspection (listening, contemplation and concentrated contemplation), storytelling, memorisation, critical analysis, practical study and seminars. At present, we have lost the root of morality in modern education. There is no sense of discipline; behaviour is irresponsible, less decision-making ability and too much influence of materialistic mode of life among the students and teachers of our time. Alienation of modern generations from their roots and culture alarmed Gandhiji and he said, "My real education began after I had forgotten all that I had learned at school". There is no doubt that modern education has given India the key to the treasures of scientific and modern democratic thought. It is the west that has led the world in advancement in technology and science. It also opened the doors for liberal and rational thinking. It widened the mental horizons of the Indian intelligentsia during the last two centuries. But somehow, it got derailed and makes the mind just a storehouse of knowledge and discourages creative thinking. For building an ideal education system for today, we need an amalgamation of eastern culture and western methods which promotes liberal thinking and advancement in science and technology for the future.

Limitations of Study

As always, there exist some limitations in all the studies that are conducted. Following are the three limitations that might be contained in this research paper:

Time – There is never enough time to conduct flawless research as there exist inherent limitations such as time deadlines.

Primary Data – Major findings of the research study relies on the primary data collected by the authors. The drawbacks of primary data are that the information collected might be incorrect or incomplete. There might exist a communication gap in which the person conducting the experiment might not be able to convey their questions in a clear way which gives rise to receiving incorrect information.

Secondary Data – The data available on the Internet used for this paper might be false or not from trusted sources. Hence, its reliability is generally low.

Objectives

The objectives of this research paper are as under:

1. To determine the effectiveness of the present education system.
2. To observe whether the present education system contributes to the overall development of a student.
3. Explore ways to integrate ancient Indian education with the modern education system.

Hypothesis – The modern education system is not appropriate to recognise the ability, skill and interest of the students.

Using this hypothesis as the basis, we will test whether the undertaken hypothesis is true or false.

Research Study

The findings of this study are based on the primary and secondary data collected by the authors.

Sample Space The study was conducted in St. Aloysius College, Jabalpur (M.P.). The targeted population consisted of students pursuing masters across various fields in the same college. The study was done on 86 students who comprised the majority of the postgraduate students of the college.

The Experiment

During a class lecture, a professor and her student (the paper's authors) observed the way students interact with their teachers and their fellow companions. The need for writing this paper was felt when they witnessed a chaotic situation that arised due to differences of opinion on a topic of discussion

in the class. The discussion was about political parties. Instead of thinking about it rationally, students rode roughshod over each other's opinions and started a fight which got to a point where they started using inappropriate language.

When the lecturer tried resolving the problem, the students turned a deaf ear and only stopped when the higher authorities intervened.

Upsetting as the situation was, the authors, instead of lamenting about the mishap, viewed this as an opportunity to find out the reason behind the incident and what drove the students to react in such a manner.

The following week, a workshop was conducted within the college premises for the students pursuing masters. A total of 86 students participated. The objective of this workshop was to test whether such behaviour was prevalent amongst the students.

The workshop was organised to prepare students for the upcoming placement drive and extensively focused on group discussions, one-on-one interactions between students and mock personal interviews.

The first activity was a group discussion. Students were divided into groups of 12-15 members each. They were given to discuss tricky topics like atheism, politics, religion to judge the existing level of intellect amongst the students. The teachers closely observed them, keeping in mind the level of knowledge and response expected from a post-graduation student.

The students started great where each individual put forth their views. But, then came the turn of group discussions, a similar problem arose as observed by the authors during the lecture. Instead of discussing, the activity became more about proving that they know better while disregarding anything the other group members had to say.

After this session, mock personal interviews were conducted by the senior teachers of the college. The students were asked varied questions ranging from basic personal questions as well as technical questions.

During the personal questions such as "Why did you choose M.Com /M.A., most of the students were blank. For those who answered, their reply seemed like it was taken straight off someone

else's interview. One of the students openly stated that he joined the course without thinking because everybody else seemed to be doing the same. While in the technical session round, students were able to answer direct questions but struggled to answer situational/application-based questions.

Hence, the Authors Came to the following Conclusion Post-Experiment

1. Students lacked the concept of Perception.
2. They failed to maintain the prescribed decorum required for the activity.
3. Students were unable to express their views on tricky topics which resulted in losing their cool.
4. Students failed to exhibit the level of knowledge expected from them.

With these observations in hand, the authors tried to trace back the root cause of this problem. And all the paths led to just one answer – The Existing Education System.

Exploring the Underlying Problem

No problem is a problem right from the start. It turns into a problem if not curbed or accounted for. The quality of students that graduate from institutions nowadays might be human minting machines with an enormous capacity of earning money. Yet, they lack the basic values that are required of an educated person.

The biggest problem is that almost every one of us do not know the actual meaning of education. Education, in its literal sense, can be defined as, ***“Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits.”***

Our definition of education is limited to the first two words of the actual definition: learning and knowledge. What's overlooked by all of us are SKILLS, VALUES, BELIEFS and HABITS. All the problems in the world today primarily exist because we collectively ignore the four things given above.

These words of Mahatma Gandhi beautifully depict the essence of each word included within the definition of education:

**“Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,**

**Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny.”**

There is a need to bring about a radical change in education from the grassroots level, i.e. your schools.

Let's now understand the problems that exist today due to this classifying under these heads:

1) Skills

Skills can be defined as “the ability to do something well.” A person becomes skilled when they acquire the required knowledge followed by training and execution. Skill is followed by interest. To do something well, there is a need to develop a liking for it first. Without that, a person cannot give his 100%.

Today, people experience cutthroat competition and face scenarios where the world demands survival of the fittest. Amidst this chaos, the majority of the people roam, dazed and confused, wondering how to make it to the top. Yet, they fail to realise that the answer lies within them. Every successful person in this world is successful because they have tapped into their interests and moulded them for their benefit. But these people are less in number, and the reason behind this is that from an early age, we have been conditioned to be taught in the same manner without encouraging us to identify and explore our interests and skills. Being ahead in academics seems the only parameter by which people identify achievers while others with other skills are side-tracked or even looked down upon. Thus, such people develop an inferiority complex and remain confused about their life paths.

Albert Einstein rightly said,

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

Every person possesses different skills. One simply cannot expect everyone to perform at the same level when your only parameter for assessing a student is academics! Rest all other skills are not even taken into account.

In the olden times, people were more skilful. They practised various businesses and professions because they were more introspective and knew about their interests simply because their curriculum

aided by the teachers supported this. Although in ancient times, the prevalent caste system was full of flaws and shouldn't have been created, the rate of unemployment was extremely low because each person at each level of the system knew what they were doing! The knowledge was passed on from father to son. The son watched his father working and applying his skills from an early age. Hence, even the son turned into a skilled worker and flourished under his father's guidance. This was exactly the reason why even without technology and other aids that we have today, the people of the olden times were successful in creating world-class monuments which still leave us gasping. The iron pillar of Delhi is one such example. Even after so many years, it has not yet rusted.

2) Values

The crown jewel of our nation that sets us apart from all other countries in the world is our value system. No country has a value system like ours. Yet, due to our fascination with western culture, we have started to find these values more of a bane than a boon.

Students nowadays have been observed mistreating their teachers and even doubting the knowledge they impart. Back in the olden days, a guru was everything to their student.

**गुरुरबरहमागुरुरवषिणुरगुरुरदेवोमहेशवरः।
गुरुरेवपरंबरहमतस्मैश्रीगुरुरेनमः॥१॥**

Meaning: Guru-the spiritual guide- is Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh! Guru is supreme consciousness; thus, salutations to the sacred teacher.

Teacher or Guru was believed to be our guide towards higher consciousness. They contributed towards our overall development and focused on making their students not only knowledgeable but also better human beings. This was only possible. Their students treated them no less than a god. Which is rarely seen in today's scenario.

Where everything is just a click away, students believe that they know better than their teachers. They're overreliance on sources like google makes them think that they can self-treat themselves and don't even need a doctor!

3) Beliefs

We are what we believe in. Once people settle into their value system, they start developing beliefs that pave a roadmap towards their development and success. One of the reasons why India was successful in producing great scholars in the early times was because they believed that they had something to offer to the world. A belief is developed when a person recognises their abilities and interests.

But today, students are unable to generate constructive beliefs in the first place. In a world where information is just a click away, people have become less innovative simply because they feel everything is already discovered. And this is primarily because the existing education system doesn't promote believing in students who have skills other than excelling in academics. Hence, the students are left feeling that what they believe in is not what's desirable by the world.

Also, in ancient times, each profession was important. The problem of concentration, thus leading to saturation in a particular field (e.g., Engineering, Medical sciences), wasn't a problem.

A student in today's times becomes a holder of various degrees yet does not know what he truly wants in life and what skills he possesses.

4) Habits

A habit may be defined as *"a settled or regular tendency or practice of doing an act."*

In the early times, the students, crossing the age of 9, left their homes and stayed with their gurus in Gurukul. The guru took care of every need of his student. But nothing was spoon-fed to the students. They were not only provided wisdom but also taught daily chores like cooking, cleaning, gardening, repairing etc. This helped them in becoming self-sufficient because they were now habitual of doing everything by themselves. This also helped in building their character as during the performance of these daily activities, they realised the importance of the work as well as the person who does it. They thus understood the need for even the smallest of things in life and how it affects our success.

Today, the curriculum doesn't even consider teaching these basic skills that a person must acquire. This makes the person dependent on

others and, in most cases, despise doing such activities, regarding them as "menial".

Impact of Education on the Economy

Because the system fails on so many levels, the students are unable to develop the required skills, which in turn contributes to the rising unemployment in the nation.

Due to the focus on just academics by institutions and parents, the student is forced to opt for streams that fetch them money whether or not they possess both skill and interest for their prospective jobs.

Due to a lack of values, people are increasingly becoming materialistic. This overtly focuses on money is making them shallow. They believe that money can buy anything. They are not judicious when using resources hence leading to their scarcity and crisis.

A perfect example is that today, people are unwilling to use public transport as they wish to own their vehicles to exhibit how privileged they are. This not only leads to depletion of resources but also creates the problem of huge traffic jams and hazardous air pollution. Delhi is a sad victim of this mentality. Sustainable development wasn't even a concern in ancient times because people were less materialistic. All this could have been avoided had students been instilled correct values through our education system.

Suggestions

Following are the suggestions of the authors that can be put into action:

1. Widening the ambit of skills recognised in schools and encouraging the kids to identify their interests from the very beginning.
2. Rewarding experts in every skill in the same manner as we reward the academically gifted.
3. Implementation of Skill India development programme at the grassroots level to encourage and guide each student towards turning their interests into skills.
4. The government must conduct workshops and counselling sessions for parents on how to encourage their kids for developing skills other than academics.
5. The government must create jobs for these other skills to earn a living out of it.

6. The market demand for vocational and certificate courses must be increased so that people are encouraged to develop their skills.
7. They are bringing about a radical change in the existing education system by introducing basic skills that every person must develop, taking inspiration from the ancient Indian education system and the present Japanese schooling system. Both these systems focus on teaching daily chores such as cooking, cleaning, gardening etc., to make students self-sufficient by the time they reach college or start earning.
8. Focus on providing wisdom to students so that they become less materialistic and more knowledge-driven. Merely introducing the subject of Moral Science wouldn't suffice.
9. Students must be encouraged to develop their knowledge of Perception. What may seem like a 6 to them might be a 9 for somebody else. They must see that every situation has two sides and that they might not be right every time.

Conclusion

In today's ever dynamic world, where competition is cut-throat, developing skills is the only way to sail through the storm. And that is only possible when are students, right from a very young age, are made to develop these skills.

The ancient education system was eradicated by the Britishers to weaken our value system, making it easier for them to rule over us.

It is time now to revive and reinvent the ancient practices of imparting education, which suits our modern-day needs.

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