



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2017; 3(7): 410-413
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 17-01-2017
Accepted: 19-02-2017

Arun Kumar
Associate Professor,
Department of History, Mahila
College Khagaul, Magadh
University, Bodh Gaya, Bihar,
India

The aims and ideals of education in early India

Arun Kumar

Abstract

The main concept of education of Early India has been that it is a source of illumination that gives a correct lead in various spheres of life. Knowledge is thus the third eye of man, which provides insight into all affairs and teaches him how to act. As per classical tradition "sa vidya ya vimuktaye" (that which liberates us is education). He, who is possessed of supreme knowledge by concentration of mind, must have his senses under control, like spirited steeds controlled by a charioteer. Infusion of spirit of a piety and religiousness, formation of character, development of personality, and inculcation of civic and social duties, promotion of social efficiency and preservation and spread of national culture were the basic aims and ideals of Early Indian Educational system. The ideal of education has been grand, noble and high in early India. Its purpose according to Herbert Spencer is the proper training of completeness of life and the mouldering of character of man and woman for the battle of life. The history of educational institution in Early India shows how old is her cultural history. It points to a long historical tradition, the early age being rural not urban. The realization of the ultimate reality was the ideal of India. Material progress was never the end in itself but was considered as a mean to the realization of the end. Apara vidya dealing with material progress could never bring peace. It appears that the aim of education in Early India was not only 'material progress but also spiritual growth' (Para vidya).

Keywords: Education, aims, ideals, character, material progress

Introduction

"He, who is possessed of supreme knowledge by concentration of mind, must have his senses under control, like spirited steeds controlled by a charioteer" says the Katha Upanishad. The main concept of Education of Early India has been that it is a source of illumination giving us a correct lead in the various spheres of life. Knowledge gives insight into all affairs and teaches how to act. India has a rich tradition of learning and education right from Vedic period onwards. The making of Man was regarded as an artistic and true purpose of education. The ideal of education in Early India was grand, noble and high. Material progress was never the end in itself but was considered as a mean to the realization of the end. The history of education in Early India and its aims are very interesting. The aim of education is to understand the ideals of society. The main objective of education in any society requires these prevalent characteristic and ideal which in turn shape the very process of education. Moreover, the status of the Society whether open or close backward or progressive is to be adjudged by the quantum of education of their pupil.

Infusion of spirit of a piety and religiousness, formation of character, development of personality, and inculcation of civic and social duties, promotion of social efficiency and preservation and spread of national culture were the basic aims and ideals of Early Indian educational system.

Religion played a large part in life in Early India and teachers were usually priests. It is, therefore, no wonder that infusion of a spirit of piety and religiousness in the mind of the rising generation should have been regarded as the first and foremost aim of education. The rituals which were performed at the beginning of both the literary and professional education-primary as well as higher-the religious observances (*vratas*), which the student had to observe during the educational course, the daily prayers which he offered morning and evening, the religious festivals that were celebrated with éclat in the school or the preceptor's house almost every month-all these tended to foster piety and religiousness in the mind of the young student. It was the spiritual background that was, thus, provided which was expected to help the student to withstand the temptations of life.

Correspondence
Arun Kumar
Associate Professor,
Department of History, Mahila
College Khagaul, Magadh
University, Bodh Gaya, Bihar,
India

The very atmosphere, in which he lived and breathed, impressed upon him the reality of the spiritual world made him realize that though his body may be a product of nature, his mind, intellect and soul belonged to the world of spirit, the laws of which ought to govern his conduct, mould his character and determine the ideals of his life.

Though the educational system provided the background of piety and religiousness, its aim was not to induce the student to renounce the world and become a wanderer in the quest of God like the Buddha or Tulsidas. Even in the case of Vedic students, who intended to follow a religious career, only a microscopic minority used to remain life-long *Brahmacharins*, pursuing the spiritual quest; the vast majority was expected to become and did become householders. The direct aim of all education, whether literary or professional was to make the student fit to become a useful and pious member of society.

The illumination and power which men and women received from education was primarily intended to transform and enable their nature. The formation of character by the proper development of the moral feeling was, therefore, the second aim of education. Like Lock, Early Indian thinkers held that mere intellectual attainments were of less consequence than the development of proper moral feeling and character. The *Vedas* being held as revealed, educationalists naturally regarded their preservation as of utmost national importance; yet they unhesitatingly declare that a person of good character with mere smattering of the Vedic knowledge is to be preferred to a scholar, who though well versed in *Vedas*, is impure in his life, thought and habits. Montaigne has observed, "Cry out, 'there is a learned man' and people will flock round him;" cry out 'there is a good man and people will not look at him'. Indian thinkers were aware of this natural human tendency and wanted to counteract it by pointing out that character was more important than learning. One thinker goes to the extent of saying that he alone is learned who is righteous. This opinion tallies remarkably with that of Socrates, who held that virtue is knowledge. Evil effects of divorcing power from virtue, intellectual and scientific progress from moral and spiritual values, which are being so vividly illustrated in the modern age, were, well realized by early Indians. They have, therefore insisted that while a man is being educated, his regard for morality ought to be developed, his feeling of goodwill towards human beings ought to be nourished and his control over his mind ought to be strengthened, so that he can follow the beacon light of his conscience. In other words education ought to develop man's ideal nature by giving him a sure moral feeling and by enabling him to control his original animal nature. The tree of education ought to flower in wisdom as well as in virtue, in knowledge as well as in manners. A pupil shall be intent on doing what is pleasing and serviceable to the teacher and he shall behave towards his wives, and sons as towards him. A student shall remain obedient to his teacher until his end. In the time of remaining after he has attended to the business of his *Guru*, he shall recite the *Veda*. If the *Guru* dies, he shall serve his son or an elder fellow-student or the fire.

According to Gautama a student on returning from a journey should embrace the feet of the wives of his teacher. But according to some scholars, it is not advisable to do so, in case, the student has attained his age or maturity. Generally, he should not gaze at and touch women. He should not eat the leavings of his wives and sons. He shall not attend them

while bathing. He shall not assist them at their toilet. He shall not wash their feet and shampoo them. Character was thus built up partly by the influence of direct injunctions, partly by the effect of continued discipline and partly by the glorification of national heroes, held in the highest reverence by society.

There is a general impression that Hindu educationists suppressed personality by prescribing a uniform course of education and enforcing it with an iron discipline. Such, however was not the case. The caste system had not become hidebound down to c. 500 B.C. and till that time a free choice of profession or career was possible both in theory and practice. Later on when the system became rigid, the theory no doubt was that everybody should follow his hereditary profession but the practice permitted considerable freedom to enterprising individuals. It is wrong to conclude from some stray passages that the whole of the Brahmana fraternity, if not the whole of the Aryan community was compelled to devote twelve years to the task of memorizing the Vedic text. Kshatriyas and Vaishyas never took seriously to the Vedic learning only a small number of the Brahmanas dedicated themselves to the Vedic studies, while the rest of the community learnt only a few Vedic hymns necessary for their daily use, and devoted their main energy to the study of the subjects of their own choice like logic, philosophy, literature, poetics or law. The educational curriculum of the *Smritis* represents the utopian idealism of the Brahmana theologian and not the actual reality in society.

The development of personality was in fact the third aim of the educational system. This was sought to be realized by eulogizing the feeling of self-respect, by encouraging the sense of self-confidence, by inculcating the virtue of self-restraint and by fostering the power of discrimination and judgement. The student was always to remember that he was the custodian and the torch-bearer of the culture of the race. Its welfare depended upon his proper discharge of his duties. If the warrior shines on the battle-field, or if the king is successful as an administrator, it is all due to their proper training and education. To support the poor student was the sacred duty of society, the non-performance of which would lead to dire spiritual calamities. A well trained youth, who had finished his education, was to be honoured more than the king himself. It is but natural that such an atmosphere should develop the student's self-respect in a remarkable manner. Self-confidence was also fostered equally well. The *Upanayana* ritual, used to foster self-confidence by pointing out that divine powers would co-operate with the student and help him on to the achievement of his goal, if he on his part did his duty well. Poverty need not depress him; he was the ideal student who would subsist by begging his daily food. If he was willing to work in his spare time he could demand and get free education from any teacher of institution. Self-reliance is the mother of self-confidence and the Hindu educational system sought to develop it in a variety of ways. Uncertainty of the future prospect did not damp the student's self-confidence. If he was following a professional course, his career was already determined. There was no overcrowding of cut-throat competition in professions. If he was taking religious and liberal education, poverty was to be the ideal of his life. He needs ought to be and as a matter of fact were, few, and the state and society supplied them well.

The element of self-restraint that was emphasized by the educational system further served to enrich the student's personality. Self-restraint that was emphasized was distinctly different from self-repression. Simplicity in life and habit was all that was insisted upon. The student was to have a full meal, only it was to be a simple one. It may be further pointed out that the powers of discrimination and judgement, so necessary for the development of proper personality, were well developed in students taking liberal education and specializing in logic, law, philosophy, poetics or literature. These branches of study bristled with controversies and the student had to understand both the sides, from his own judgment and defend his position in literary debates. It was only with the Vedic students that education became mechanical training of memory. This became inevitable in later times when the literature to be preserved became very extensive and the modern means for its preservation in the form of paper and printing were unavailable. In earlier days even Vedic students were trained in interpreting the hymns they used to commit to memory.

The inculcation of civic and social duties, which was the fourth aim of the educational system, was particularly emphasized. The graduate was not to lead a self-centered life. He must teach his lore to the rising generation. He was enjoined perpetuation of race and culture by raising and educating progeny. He was to perform his duties as a son, a husband and a father conscientiously and efficiently. His wealth was not to be utilized solely for his own or his family's wants; he must be hospitable and charitable. Particularly emphatic are the words in the convocation address, emphasizing these duties. Professions had their own codes of honour which laid stress on the civic responsibilities of their members. The physician was required to relieve disease and distress even at the cost of his life. The warrior had his own high code of honour, and could attack his opponent only when the latter was ready. Social structure in Early India was to a great extent independent of government. Governments rose and fell, but social and village life and national culture were not much affected by these changes. It was probably this circumstance that was responsible for the non-inclusion of patriotism among the civic duties, inculcated by the educational system.

The promotion of social efficiency and happiness was the fifth aim of the Educational system. It was sought to be realized by the proper training of the rising generation in the different branches of knowledge, professions and industries. Education was not imparted merely for the sake of culture or for the purpose of developing mental and intellectual powers and faculties. Indirectly though effectively, it no doubt promoted these aims, but primarily it was imparted for the purpose of training every individual in the calling which he was expected to follow. Society had accepted the theory of division of work, which was mainly governed in later times by the principle of heredity. Exceptional talent could always select the profession it liked, Brahmanas and Vaishyas as kings and fighters, Kshatriyas and even Shudras as philosophers and religious teachers, make their appearance throughout the Indian history. It was however deemed to be in the interest of the average man that he should follow his family's calling. The educational system sought to qualify the members of the rising generation for their more or less predetermined spheres of life. Each trade guild and family

trained its children in its own profession. This system might have sacrificed the individual inclinations of a few, but it was undoubtedly in the interest of many. Differentiation of function and their specialization in hereditary families naturally heightened the efficiency of trades and professions, and thus contributed to social efficiency. By thus promoting the progress of the different branches of knowledge, arts and profession, and by emphasizing civic duties and responsibilities on the mind of the rising generation, the educational system contributed materially to the general progress and happiness of society.

The preservation and spread of national heritage and culture was the sixth and one of the most important aims of the Early Indian system of education. It is well recognized that education is the chief means of social and cultural continuity and that it will fail in its purpose if it did not teach the rising generation to accept and maintain the best traditions of thought and action and transmit the heritage of the past to the future generations. Anyone who takes even a cursory view of early writings on the subject is impressed by the deep concern that was felt for the preservation and transmission of the entire literary, cultural and professional heritage of the race. Members of the profession were to train their children in their own lines, rendering available to the rising generation at the outset of its career all the skill and processes that were acquired after painful efforts of the bygone generations. The services of the whole Aryan community were conscripted for the purpose of the preservation of the Vedic literature. Every Aryan had to learn at least a portion of his sacred literary heritage. It was an incumbent duty on the priestly class to commit the whole of the Vedic literature to memory in order to ensure its transmission to unborn generation. It is true that not all the Brahmanas followed this injunction, but that was because they had the commonsense to realize that the services of their entire class were not necessary for the task. A section of the Brahmana community, however, was always available to sacrifice its life and talents in order to ensure the preservation of the sacred texts. Theirs was a lifelong and almost a tragic devotion to the cause of learning. For, they consented to spend their life in committing to memory what others and not they could interpret. Secular benefits that they could expect were few and not at all commensurate with the labour involved. Remaining sections of the Brahmana community were fostering the studies of the different branches of liberal education like grammar, literature, poetics, law, philosophy and logic. They were not only preserving the knowledge of the ancient in these branches, but constantly increasing its boundaries by their own contributions which were being made down to the medieval times. Specialisation became a natural consequence of this tendency and it tended to make education deep rather than broad.

The interesting theory of three debts, which has been propounded since the Vedic age, has effectively served the purpose of inducing the rising generation to accept and maintain the best traditions of thought and action of the past generations. The theory maintains that the moment an individual is born in this world, he incurs three debts, which he can discharge only by performing certain duties. First of all, he owes a debt to gods, and he can liquidate it only by learning how to perform proper sacrifices and by regularly offering them. Religious traditions of the race were thus preserved. Secondly, he owes a debt to *rishis* or savants of

the bygone ages and can discharge it only by studying their works and continuing their literary and professional traditions. The rising generation was thus enabled to master and maintain the best literary and professional traditions. The third debt was the debt to ancestors, which can be repaid only by raising progeny and imparting proper education to it. Steps were thus taken to see that the rising generation became an efficient torchbearer of the culture and traditions of the past. The emphasis laid on obedience to parents, respect to elders and gratitude to the savants of the bygone ages also helped to preserve the traditions of the past. Body, mind, intellect and spirit constitute a human being; the aims and ideals of early Indian education were to promote their simultaneous and harmonious development. Men are social beings; early Indian education not only emphasized social duties but also promoted social happiness. No nation can be called educated which cannot preserve and expand its cultural heritage. It would be interesting to compare the aims and ideals of early Indian education with those of some other systems, both ancient and modern, both Eastern and Western. In ancient China, Confucius preached that the purpose of education should be to train each individual in his path of duty, wherein is to be prescribed most minutely every detail of life's occupations and relationships. If we understand duty in a sufficiently wide sense, this definition of the aim of education would appear to be very similar to that of early Indian educationists. In ancient Greece as well as in Reformation Europe, the ideal of personal culture loomed large in the educational system. Early Indians held that the individual exists more for society than vice versa; it was, therefore, the function of education was to acquaint the individual with the culture of the race. Personal culture was promoted by the educational system only to the extent it was possible to do so by imparting national culture Music, painting and fine arts thus did not become subjects of general education in ancient India as they become in ancient Greece. American educationists hold that moral character and social efficiency, and not mere erudition and culture, should be the aims of education. Early Indians accepted this view; but they added that the preservation of the ancient national culture which naturally does not look large before a young nation like America, must also figure prominently as an aim of education.

To conclude education was regarded as a source of illumination of power which transforms and enables our nature by the progressive and harmonious development of our physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual power. It enables us to live a decent and useful citizens of society and indirectly help us to make progress in the spiritual sphere, both in this life and in the life to come. From all these it appears that the aim of education in Early India was not only 'material progress but also spiritual growth' (Para vidya).

References

1. Manu, 118.
2. Mbh., XII, 321, 78.
3. Great Educationists, 176-77.
4. Gautama Dharmasutra, 2/37-38.
5. Ibid, 2/24-35.
6. Ibid, 3-41.
7. Vasistha Dharmasutra, 7/3-4/13/22; 7/5-6; 20/4-6.
8. Baudhayana Dharmasutra, 1/2/24, 28/37, 20.
9. Apastamba Dharmasutra, 1/1/2/18-21, 26, 31-32, 1/1/3/14, 16-24.
10. Ibid, 1/1/4 13/14, 23.
11. Rhys Davids CAF. The Psalms of the Early Buddhist (London), 1951, 1.
12. Mookerji RK. Ancient Indian Education (Indian Reprint, Delhi, 1970).
13. Altekar AS. Education in ancient Indian, 1934.