



SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIETY

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Abstract:

In ancient times, India was a global center of learning, attracting students from various countries seeking knowledge. The ancient Indian education system was not solely focused on providing knowledge for earning a livelihood but was ingeniously divided into different stages and categories to impart scientific, social, cultural, and spiritual wisdom. This system instilled a profound sense of responsibility towards society, family, nature, and the environment in all students. Character building and scientific thinking were the cornerstones of this education system. This paper explores the various fields of education during the Vedic era of the ancient Indian education system (AIES), which is considered to be before 600 B.C. according to modern calendars. The ancient Indian education system was one of the most well-organized in the world, with knowledge being acquired either through 'PARA' (intuitive knowledge) or 'APARA' (through regular practices). The different components of this system have been compiled here, with a focus on how these fields were classified and what was taught under each category. The positive aspects of the AIES are discussed, along with their relevance to the modern education system. Given India's multilingual nature, the use of regional languages can play a crucial role in fostering interest in higher studies. Removing language barriers could be a transformative step in restoring the glory of the Indian education system. The paper highlights the benefits of incorporating multiple languages in higher education.

Keywords: Ancient India, education system, Scientific, Vedic, Regional languages, society

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ancient Indian Education System (AIES) is recognized as the oldest education system in the world. Education was a vital aspect of life, and methods for creating, preserving, and transmitting knowledge to future generations were well established. Although much of the knowledge was passed down orally through storytelling, singing, and theatrical performances, this reliance on oral traditions led to a greater focus on the stories themselves, often at the expense of the underlying logic.¹

Unfortunately, many original handwritten scripts were lost during various invasions, and since there were no duplicate copies, a meticulously designed and well-regulated education system was largely destroyed. Today, fully restoring this system seems nearly impossible, but ongoing efforts to recover and study ancient texts can provide valuable insights.

Before delving into the classification of various components of knowledge, it is essential to understand the three stages defined in AIES for acquiring knowledge imparted by teachers: Sravana, Manana, and Nidhyaasana. In contrast, modern education systems rarely emphasize these stages, where the process of truly grasping knowledge was given paramount importance.²

Sravana: Sravana is the first crucial step in acquiring knowledge. It involves active listening, which is more than just hearing. Sravana requires full attention, making it the foundational aspect of learning. Students are expected to be attentive in class and listen carefully to their teacher or Guru.

Manana: The second step is Manana, which involves deep contemplation. After listening to the teacher, students are encouraged to reflect on what they have learned repeatedly to grasp its true meaning. This step is essential for memorizing and internalizing the knowledge imparted. The ability to analyse and understand the material independently is key to fulfilling the purpose of education, making analysis the central focus of Manana.

Nidhyaasana: The third step is Nidhyaasana, which involves a complete understanding of the knowledge and delving into its deeper meaning. This phase emphasizes applying the understood concepts in real life. Every student was trained to practice these three steps early in their education. While these stages may seem simple, each one holds significant importance and is highly effective in the learning process.³

Just as knowledge was divided into stages, students were also categorized based on their ability to grasp concepts. These categories were Uttam, Madhyam, and Adham Adhikari. This classification helped teachers understand each student's needs and provide the appropriate level of attention. Students were then guided to specialize in fields that matched their capabilities. The purpose of this categorization was not to discriminate but to equip students with the skills needed to earn a living and contribute to society. However, the ultimate goal of education was to lead everyone toward self-realization and renunciation.

Over time, and with the influence of people from other parts of the world, these educational values were lost. In modern times, education is primarily focused on preparing individuals to earn a living and establish their influence in society. Despite this shift, the categorization of knowledge was originally done in a systematic way, as mentioned in Figure 1.

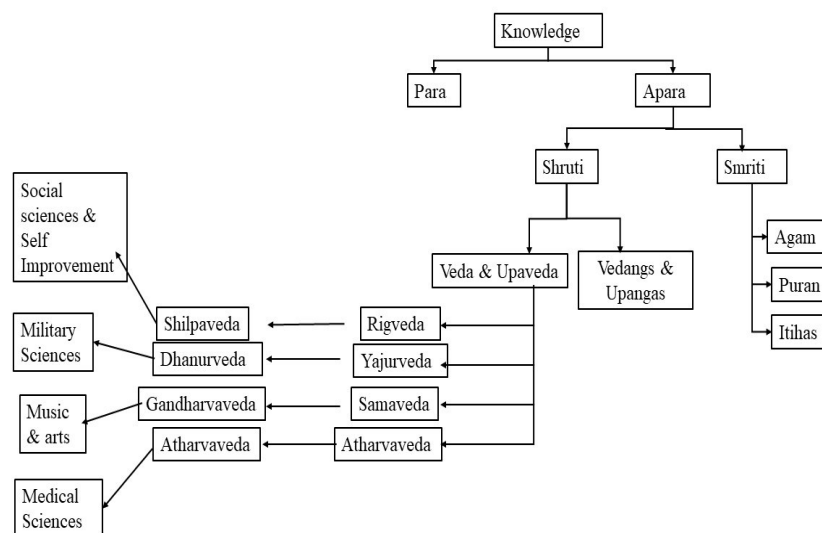


Figure 1: Classification of knowledge system as per the ancient Indian education system

In the Ancient Indian Education System (AIES), knowledge was categorized into two types: Para and Aparā, based on how it was acquired.

(i) **Para:** Para knowledge was considered to be intuitive, granted through divine grace. Those who attained this knowledge reached the ultimate goal of life—self-realization.

(ii) **Aparā:** Aparā knowledge was acquired through regular practice under the guidance of a competent teacher, known as a Guru. This type of knowledge was further divided into two categories: *Shruti* and *Smriti*. Despite the different methods of acquisition, the ultimate aim of Aparā knowledge was also self-realization.

- **Shruti:** Shruti refers to knowledge transmitted orally through storytelling, singing, reciting poems, and other verbal means. This knowledge, believed to be eternal truths or the words of the gods, was passed down from generation to generation without any direct witness. Shruti is further divided into four categories: Veda, Up-Veda, Vedangas, and Upangas.⁴
- **Veda and Upavedas:** The Vedas are among the most important texts in ancient India. They served as the ultimate guide for all aspects of life. The authors of the Vedas are unknown, which is why they are considered the words of God. There are four Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. In addition to these, there are four Upavedas, which are considered extensions of the Vedas and provide guidance on specific aspects of life. The Upavedas are Shilpaveda, Dhanurveda, Gandharvaveda, and Ayurveda.⁵
- **Rigveda:** This Veda focuses on purifying the mind and human consciousness. Its Upaveda, Shilpaveda (also known as Satyapata Veda), deals with creation, construction, and manufacturing.
- **Yajurveda:** Yajurveda is concerned with the procedures of sacrifice and rituals. Its corresponding Upaveda, Dhanurveda, is known as the science of warfare or military science.
- **Samaveda:** Samaveda is the smallest of the four Vedas. Its Upaveda, Gandharvaveda, teaches music and the arts. It covers a wide range of artistic activities, including ragas, musical instruments, and various forms of dance.
- **Atharvaveda:** Atharvaveda includes Ayurveda, the ancient Indian medical science. It also discusses techniques for natural farming.

These four Vedas are further divided into four sections: Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka, and Upanishads. The Upanishads, also known as Vedānta, appear at the end of the Vedas and are considered their philosophical essence.

The other two parts of *Shruti* are *Vedangas* and *Upangas*.

Vedangas: The Vedangas consist of six components, as illustrated in Figure 2.

1. **Nirukta:** This is the study of etymology, which provides meaning to sounds by explaining various pronunciations and their significance.
2. **Vyakarana:** Referring to grammar, Vyakarana is essential for understanding the correct usage of language. Together, Nirukta and Vyakarana are crucial for meaningful speech.
3. **Chhandas:** This aspect deals with the meters and rhythms for chanting hymns and mantras. Chhandas explains the optimal frequency and melody for chanting a mantra to achieve its maximum effect. This practice is deeply scientific, based on the principles of cymatics.
4. **Jyotisha:** Jyotisha is the science of astronomy and astrology. It explores how our lives and activities in the universe are influenced by the movements of planets, stars, and galaxies. In modern times, Jyotisha is often reduced to a tool for predicting personal futures, but its significance in ancient times was much broader, encompassing a deep understanding of cosmic influences.⁶



Figure 2: Various parts of Vedangas

Upangas: Upangas are divided into orthodox and unorthodox systems.

Unorthodox Systems: These systems do not recognize the authority of the Vedas and have their own religious beliefs. The main unorthodox systems include Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Charvaka. Each of these traditions has its own views on various aspects of life and does not follow Vedic rituals.

Orthodox Systems: These systems accept the authority of the Vedas and adhere to them for all life rituals. The orthodox systems are categorized into six schools, known as Shat Darshanas. They are:

- **Nyaya:** Founded by Sage Gautama, Nyaya focuses on logical reasoning and analytical philosophy.
- **Vaisheshika:** Established by Sage Kanada, this school introduces the concept of atomic theory, dealing with the fundamental building blocks of the universe and explaining the concept of energy in terms of consciousness.
- **Sankhya:** Founded by Sage Kapila, Sankhya explores the relationship between the material world (Prakriti) and pure consciousness (Purusha).
- **Yoga:** Introduced by Sage Patanjali, this system is centered on yoga and meditation, guiding individuals toward the ultimate goal of life—self-realization.
- **Purva Mimamsa:** Given by Sage Jaimini, this school offers a critical interpretation of rituals and the philosophical aspects of the Vedas.
- **Uttara Mimamsa (Vedanta):** Founded by Sage Badarayana (or Sage Vyasa), Vedanta delves into the essence and deeper meanings of the Vedas.^{7,8}

After *Shruti* comes the *Smriti* part of knowledge.

- **Smriti:** Like *Shruti*, *Smriti* knowledge was also passed down through oral traditions. However, *Smriti* is derived from past events and can be understood as memories from the past. In some cases, this knowledge represents the

interpretations or analyses of *Shruti* by sages. *Smriti* is classified into three main categories: Agama, Purana, and Itihasa.

- **Agama:** Agamas reflect the various beliefs of people, each centered around different deities. In these texts, the chosen deity is regarded as the supreme power governing the universe. There are five Agamas: Ganapatya Agama, Vaishnava Agama, Pancharatra Agama, Shaiva Agama, and Shakta Agama.
- **Purana:** There are 18 Puranas, though they are not discussed in detail here as they fall outside the scope of this paper.
- **Itihasa:** Itihasa refers to the epic narratives of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. These texts have inspired numerous other works in India and are considered foundational teachings on how to live a meaningful life. They cover various aspects of life, including social, familial, and educational values.
- This classification of knowledge was significant in providing individuals with the freedom to master the art of their choosing. In modern times, we should draw upon these ancient teachings and offer students the freedom to pursue fields that align with their interests.

2. Focus on Skills and local languages.

The Ancient Indian education system emphasized skill development rather than just theoretical knowledge. The goal was to prepare individuals for a successful and practical life. At a certain age, students would move to ashrams, where they followed a strict timetable. Their education covered everything from basic life skills to advanced professional skills.

During the early years, all students followed a uniform schedule, learning essential life skills such as cooking, washing, cleaning, caring for cattle, and tending to the environment. As they progressed to higher levels, students were grouped and trained in specific skills relevant to their future professions, such as farming, swimming, apparel making, construction, and architecture. All the subjects were taught in their local languages. This practice developed a sense of pride towards their own language and made it easier to understand deep concepts without any hassle.

This system ensured that each segment of society excelled in its respective skills. Villages became self-sufficient, with skilled individuals available locally, eliminating the need to travel long distances for such services.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The ancient education system was thoughtfully crafted by our ancestors, placing a strong emphasis on skill development. Native languages used to be the medium of transferring knowledge. So students were not distracted by difficulties of a new language but could grasp knowledge in their own language. Students received training in a wide range of skills, from basic life skills to advanced professional abilities. Education was accessible to all children, regardless of their financial or social backgrounds, on a shared platform. This system fostered a sense of community and care for one another and the environment, while also ensuring a healthy balance between social and personal lives. Students had the freedom to pursue the skills that interested them most, with knowledge passed down through oral traditions such as storytelling, discussions, and conversations. Society was organized based on expertise in particular skills, and each village functioned independently in all aspects. However, this skill-based system was later dismantled, leading to the division of society into caste systems, creating divisions among people.

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