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Examining the Vedic Indian Education System as a Pillar of the Indian Knowledge System

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Abstract

This study examines the Vedic education system as the foundational pillar of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), valued for its holistic, value-based approach and contemporary relevance. A qualitative review of Vedic and Upanishadic texts, Gurukula practices, ancient universities, and pedagogical traditions such as rituals, curriculum, and oral learning was undertaken. The study finds that Vedic education system integrated knowledge, ethics, and spirituality, fostering intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual development. Rites and rituals like Upanayana and Samavartana reinforced discipline, while institutions such as Nalanda and Takshashila promoted global scholarship. Its interdisciplinary curriculum combined scriptures, sciences, arts, and statecraft, supported by experiential methods including recitation, debate, and reflection. Education was often free and community-based, though caste and gender-based restrictions limited inclusivity. Principles of Vedic education system such as holistic learning, mentorship, and sustainability remain relevant under the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). Reviving its best features with inclusivity can enrich modern education and support an ethical and transformative knowledge society.

Keywords: Vedic education system, Gurukula, Indian Knowledge System, Nalanda, Takshashila; Ancient Indian universities, Guru-ShishyaParampara, Vidya-Avidya, Value-based education, Holistic learning, NEP 2020, Educational rituals, Inclusivity in education

Introduction

The Indian Knowledge System is simply the intellectual, cultural, scientific, and spiritual heritage of India, nurtured and transmitted over thousands of years. Its primary part is the Vedic Education System, which not only served as a source of knowledge but also as one of the key ways to transmit it across the generations. The Vedic approach fostered the combined vision of education contrary to the modern concept, which leans towards focusing education on career-related objectives because the Vedic school approach prioritized intellectual, moral, physical and spiritual growth (Mishra and Aithal, 2023) ^[9]. Institutions like Vedic schools, *Gurukulas*, and renowned universities like Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vikramashila not only advanced India's scholarly tradition but also drew students from around the world. The Vedic Education System became the background of Indian intellectual and cultural history through oral (*śruti-smṛiti*) learning, experiential (*sadhya-dravya*) learning, and value-oriented learning (Mahesh *et al.*, 2023; Biswas, 2024) ^[7, 2]. This study explores the aims, mannerisms, practices, social structures, approaches to education, and the social aspects of the Vedic education system, along with its legacy over time. The research demonstrates the significance of integrating it into a comprehensive Indian knowledge framework and its potential to influence the future of education.

Objectives of the study

This research has been undertaken to discuss the Vedic system of education critically within the framework of the Indian System of Knowledge. The objectives are:

1. To explore the philosophical and epistemological foundations of Vedic education system, emphasizing its holistic aims.
2. To analyze its institutional and pedagogical structures, including the *Guru-Śiṣya Paramparā* (Teacher-pupil bonding) and other methods of learning.
3. To assess the strengths and limitations of the system in its historical context.

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4. To evaluate its role in shaping and sustaining Indian Knowledge System, as well as its continuity, relevance, and global influence.

The major objective of the work is to establish the usefulness of Vedic education system as one amongst the pillars of Indian Knowledge System for offering timeless and enduring ethical, intellectual, and spiritual knowledge to the contemporary educational system.

Study Approach

The study used a qualitative-analytical approach to study design, relying mainly on secondary sources of data. Journals, articles, and credible internet sources were used, using Google Scholar as the primary source for academic work. Ancient Vedic texts that are digitized were referred to for contextual understanding. Relevant literature was identified utilizing the key phrase, “*Vedic Education System as the Pillar of the Indian Knowledge System.*”

This mixed approach allowed for a holistic understanding of the Vedic education system-its objectives, practices, strengths, and limitations-while also situating it in the broader framework of the Indian Knowledge System.

The vedic education system: foundations and framework Philosophical Foundations

The Vedic education system was rooted in the Vedas and Upaniṣads, where knowledge (*vidyā*) and ethics (*dharma*) were inseparable. Learning combined meditation, chanting, reflection, and yoga, aiming to harmonize body, mind, and spirit (Sharma, 1996) [12]. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* declares “*Tat tvamasi*”, means “You are that ultimate reality,” affirming that the self (*ātman*) is one with the ultimate reality (*Brahman*), making self-realization the highest goal of education.

This framework shaped later philosophies such as *Nyāya*, *Vedānta*, Buddhism, and Jainism, which inherited its traditions of logic, debate, and inquiry. Vedic education system integrated intellectual training with moral responsibility, where knowledge was measured by wisdom and righteous conduct (Mishra & Aithal, 2023) [9]. Its spiritual dimension emphasized practices leading to *ātma-jñāna* or self-realization (Biswas, 2024) [2].

Truth-seeking lay at its core, expressed in “*Satyaeva jayate*”, mean “truth alone triumphs”, while education was viewed as liberating, “*Sa vidyā yā vimuktaye*”, meaning “knowledge is that which liberates” (*ViṣṇuPurāṇa*). Knowledge was celebrated as the highest wealth, unlike material possessions, growing when shared. The *Rig Veda* praises its power to purify society, and the *Bhagavad Gītā* declares, “*Na hi jñānena sadṛśam pavitrāmiha vidyate*”, means “Nothing in this world is as sacred as knowledge.”

Teachers (*Gurus*) were revered as custodians of this wealth, transmitting it orally across generations. Knowledge encompassed both spiritual wisdom and practical sciences, including mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and governance. In this way, Vedic Education System became the knowledge economy of ancient India, sustaining intellectual, social, and spiritual life.

Methods of Knowledge Transmission

Knowledge was preserved and transmitted through well-structured methods. Through oral traditions of *śruti*

(memorization) and *smṛti* (recitation), knowledge was transmitted with precision and preserved over time. Intellectual exchange took place in the form of *śāstrārtha*-dialogues and debates that sharpened logic, critical thinking, and inquiry. The “*Guru-Śiṣya Paramparā*” created a deeply personalized and ethical learning environment, where the teacher guided not only intellectual pursuits but also moral and spiritual growth. These pedagogical practices became the foundation for diverse disciplines such as *Ayurveda*, *Jyotiṣa* (astronomy), and *Arthashastra* (statecraft), all of which depended on the Vedic model for their transmission and preservation.

Institutional Structures

The *Gurukula* system formed the foundation of Vedic education, where students (*śiṣhyas*) lived with their teacher (*Guru*) in a residential setting. This close mentorship emphasized not only scriptural study but also discipline, moral conduct, and service (*guru-sevā*), making education holistic and value-oriented (Vyas & Vyas, 2024) [17]. Alongside Gurukulas, India developed great universities that became global centers of learning. Takshashila offered diverse subjects such as medicine, law, and military science, while Nalanda gained renown for Buddhist studies, astronomy, and medicine, attracting students from across Asia. Vikramashila specialized in Buddhist philosophy and Vallabhi in political science and administration (Liu, 2010) [6]. These institutions blended mentorship with cosmopolitan scholarship, shaping India’s lasting intellectual heritage.

Curriculum and Knowledge Framework

The Vedic education system was structured around the twin concepts of *Vidya* (higher knowledge) and *Avidya* (practical knowledge). *Vidya* emphasized the Vedas, Upanishads, and philosophy, aiming at wisdom, ethics, and liberation (*moksha*), while *Avidya* included applied sciences and vocational skills for social and economic life (Mishra & Aithal, 2023) [9]. Within this framework, students studied scriptures and Vedangas for spiritual grounding, mathematics and astronomy for scientific advancement (Joseph, 2011) [4], Ayurveda and surgery for medicine (Wujastyk, 2003) [20], and the arts for creativity. Texts like the *Arthashastra* offered lessons in governance and statecraft (Trautmann, 1968) [14]. This interdisciplinary blend reflected the Vedic ideal of harmonizing intellectual, practical, and spiritual growth.

Pedagogy and Evaluation

Teaching in the Vedic education system was interactive, experiential, and rooted in oral traditions. Recitation and memorization (*śrut'i* and *smṛti*) ensured the precise preservation of texts and strengthened concentration (Witzel, M. 2003) [19]. Advanced learning often took place through *Shastrartha* (debates), which fostered reasoning and dialogue, while storytelling and allegories conveyed complex ideas in accessible ways (Mishra & Aithal, 2023) [9]. Practical training in crafts and sciences prepared students for applied knowledge, and meditation with reflection nurtured self-awareness and spiritual growth (Biswas, 2024) [2]. Evaluation was continuous and personalized, with the Guru assessing not only intellectual progress but also discipline, conduct, and character development (Sharma & Sharma, 1996) [12].

Analysis, Findings, And Discussion

Critical Analysis

The Vedic education system was holistic, fostering intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual growth beyond mere vocational aims (Mishra & Aithal, 2023) ^[9]. It emphasized values like *satya* (truth) and *dharma* (righteousness), promoted interdisciplinarity across scriptures, sciences, arts, and governance (Joseph, 2011) ^[4], and gained global recognition through universities such as Nalanda and Takshashila (Liu, 2010) ^[6]. Its shortcomings were its accessibility to women and lower castes (Deshpande and Zacharias, 2013) ^[3] and over-reliance on memorization, limiting creativity (Witzel, 2003) ^[19].

Findings of the study

The research concludes that the Vedic education system has contributed to a major pillar of the Indian Knowledge System. It advocated the whole-person, intellectual, moral, physical and spiritual-based knowledge rooted in ethics and spirituality. These institutes included Gurukula, which offered close mentorship to the world's universities like Nalanda and Takshashila. Its cross-disciplinary curriculum was a combination of scriptures, sciences, arts and statecraft and was supported by experience, via recitation, debate, storytelling and meditation. It was caste and gender restricted, yet generally free and community-based, demonstrating its benefits and social limitations.

Applications of the Study

The Vedic education system offers insights relevant to NEP 2020 by fostering intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. Its *Guru-Shishya* tradition emphasizes mentorship, while its interdisciplinary approach balances sciences, arts, and ethics. Experiential methods like debate and storytelling nurture critical thinking over rote learning. However, its historical limitations highlight the need for inclusivity and equity. Vedic education system also holds potential for cultural diplomacy and international education.

Earlier studies highlight on mentorship, holistic growth, interdisciplinary, experiential learning, and inclusivity. The present study advances these insights by proposing actionable measures: guidance cells for mentorship, well-being modules, cross-disciplinary projects, digital experiential methods, and equity audits for inclusivity. It also underscores Vedic education system as a potential framework for India's educational soft power globally.

Discussion

Strengths and Limitations of the Vedic Education System

The Vedic education system was not merely a system of transmitting knowledge, but a complete system of human development. It was theoretical, ethical, physical, and religious, and it was relevant to the concerns of the day, including sustainability and life-long learning (Mishra and Aithal, 2023) ^[9]. It is two-fold in its legacy. On the one side Vedic education system, philosophically rich and pedagogically sophisticated was founded on the ways of experience, the approach of Vedic system of education and reflective practice to form entire learners (Sharma and Sharma, 1996) ^[12]. Conversely, it was socially restrictive, which entailed narrow access by caste and gender and inconsistent with the principles of equity and inclusiveness in modern education (Deshpande and Zacharias, 2013) ^[3].

Relevance in the Modern Context

Even with these limitations, the Vedic education system is still important today. It has concepts about how to combine the body, mind, and spirit, how to learn based on ideals, and how to perceive the environment, all of which may help with changes to education. This trend continues under NEP 2020, which includes yoga, Ayurveda, and native knowledge in the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2020) ^[8]. The Vedic Education System is based on the past, yet it still gives us important ideas that may change the way we learn in the future.

Suggestions for Integration

The important measures are the introduction of Indian Knowledge System-based modules in schools to teach the system and the rejuvenation of teacher training that focuses on mentorship and caste, class, and gender inclusivity. Interdisciplinary research and global comparisons can also be used to increase its relevance (Vyas & Vyas, 2024) ^[17]. This will help the Vedic education system create an inclusive, ethical and transformative education system by not only reconstructing its applications but also addressing the past limitations.

Conclusion

The Vedic form of education is known to have been a strong pillar of the Indian Knowledge Tradition. Its vision of integrating intellectual, physical, moral, and spiritual development offers a powerful alternative to the fragmented and career-centric tendencies of modern education. While the historical limitations of Vedic education system particularly its caste- and gender-based exclusions must be acknowledged, its enduring strengths continue to hold relevance. Features such as value-based instruction, the "*Guru-Shishya Parampara*" model of mentorship, and its capacity for global outreach illustrate how indigenous traditions can inform contemporary reforms. In line with NEP 2020, these principles provide a foundation for an education system that is inclusive and value-driven, equipping learners not only for careers but also for ethical citizenship and inner fulfillment in the 21st century. This study is distinctive in establishing the Vedic Education System as the foundational pillar of the Indian Knowledge System, bridging its historical depth with contemporary educational relevance.

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