

HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

**AN EXPLORATION THROUGH ANCIENT
INDIAN EDUCATION AND YOGA**

Edited by
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KUMAR BHASKAR VARMA SANSKRIT AND ANCIENT STUDIES UNIVERSITY

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Spiritual Pedagogy: Learning from Ancient Indian Pedagogy

Krishna Kalita

Education has yet to be in the world, and civilization—civilization has begun nowhere yet.

— Swami Vivekananda

INTRODUCTION

It is evident from the pages of history that the Indian society has always been a peace-seeking society. But the present society strives for an education system which develops values for making human beings more 'humane'. As Vivekananda has said, we are yet to be civilized. Education is a process which attempts towards making human beings civilized. It is an inevitable part of the human society. It is such a component of the society which can bring changes in all other components as well as in the society as a whole. Now, the question to ponder over is: What is lacking in the present education system that it is unable to create a healthy, constructive, peaceful human society? What are the prospects for bringing changes into the education system so that desirable changes can be brought in the society? If we conduct a root cause analysis of various social problems in the present context, both the root cause, and therefore the solution, would be found in the 'education system'. Education is the tool for construction of the society. So, the type of education will determine the face and the nature of the society.

The present Indian education system is tainted by the Western education system. One of the major aspects that differentiate the ancient

Indian education system from that of Western is its holistic and spiritual nature. On one hand, the Indian education system has gradually worn itself out of this basic characteristic and on the other hand, Western education system is struggling to fit itself in the Indian context. At present, our education system is neither Indian nor Western in true sense. The holistic and spiritual nature of the ancient Indian education system was based on the notion that human beings are holistic beings composed of body, mind and soul. None of these components can be isolated or ignored. Therefore, education should aim at the development of all the components equally. An imbalance would result in disorder. Psychologically, this can be related to the three domains of behavior—cognitive, affective and psycho-motor. Stating that method of teaching or pedagogy refers to the process of interpreting the world of knowledge of the learner's mind, Kaushal (2017) says "The world of knowledge includes knowledge, experiences, interests, attitudes, skills etc. i.e. it involves all the three domains of behavior viz. cognitive, affective and psychomotor". Idealistically, it is expected that education should be able to bring developmental changes in behavior of the individual which includes physical, mental, social, emotional, moral and spiritual aspects. Like physical exercise is essential for physical development and mental exercise for cognitive development, spiritual exercise is essential to bringing spiritual awakening in an individual, and thus in the society. Though moral and spiritual development has always been an important objective of education, and the curriculum also has been designed accordingly, even then, the objective is not fully attained. The transaction of moral or value education provided in the curriculum in a more effective way to the learners may help in achieving the objective.

Considering spiritual pedagogy as apt to fill up the gap in the existing education system, the present paper aims at identifying the spiritual elements in the pedagogy of ancient Indian education and studying the relevance of spiritual pedagogy in the present social context. As ancient education system is a vast concept, only the pedagogical aspect of Vedic education has been considered. A qualitative approach based on secondary sources of data has been adopted to conduct the study.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

At different times, researches have attempted to study spirituality in education from different perspectives.

Yasuno (2008) presents a compelling argument for the role of higher education in supporting a new leadership paradigm directed toward fostering positive social change based on spiritual elements, such as interconnectedness and collaboration.

Lingley (2016) stated spirituality has been identified as an important component of democratic education by Dewey, Freire, Hooks, and Noddings. Drawing from an analysis of their works and using a critical construct of spirituality that emphasizes inquiry, practical experience, meaning making, and awareness of interconnectedness, he argued that spiritually responsive pedagogy is a vital element of emancipatory, culturally responsive education in public schools.

Harlos (2000) focused on meaning, practice, and applications of spiritual pedagogy for management classrooms. The author argues in the study that spirituality is a valuable but neglected part of management theory, research, and education. The main focus here has been on its meaning, practice, and applications toward developing a spiritual pedagogy for management classrooms. The author shared personal experiences of how spiritual values guided his teaching of management. Following experimental approach, spirituality was included in the management curriculum and it was found that students need to get spirituality not only as a topic, but as an experience for further spiritual development.

Burton, Culham and Vu (2021) introduced the essential aspects of three different spiritual traditions—Daoist inner work, Buddhist mindful reflexivity and Quaker discernment. They also studied the relation between these essential aspects and management education pedagogy. The paper illustrates how these concepts are utilized in teaching business ethics in order to offer a foundational discussion for future elaboration. They found that teacher training is a key ingredient if such spiritual traditions are to be used in pedagogy instead of the dominant pedagogical paradigms.

Akhmetovaa, Shirinbaevaa, Axakalovaa, Tasilovab and Zhubaniyazovac (2016) highlighted that the basis of psychological and pedagogical training of the future teachers should be capability for conscious spiritual and professional growth, responsibility for activities in the formation of students' worldview and behavioral guidance through the prism of universal human values, development of their need for self-cognition and creative self-realization.

Syihabuddin (2017) raises the question what spiritual values guide the teachers in fulfilling their job as a teacher? This is the main question in describing the values that become the foundation, guidelines, and motivation for teachers in performing their profession; the values that are apparent in daily life behaviors as the educational principles that become the authentic character of the teachers.

It is seen from these studies that spirituality in education is useful for bringing social change through leadership, for culturally responsive education and for management teaching. The importance of spirituality in teacher training for effective integration of spirituality in education has also been studied.

SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY

Spiritual pedagogy is a field of study where education and instruction is implemented by teachers based on transcendental values. An education requires teachers who have spiritual insight in fostering education. Through spiritual pedagogy, learners become empowered to use their knowledge in social transformation. Thus, spiritual pedagogy plays a significant role in preserving and strengthening the moral foundation of society by creating an independent community that connects to the broader society.

Spiritual pedagogy is beneficial to learner's all round development. It offers spiritual values to the learners to be self controlled and self motivated. Spiritual values cover all aspects of human life activities which are useful for satisfaction of spiritual needs of human being. Neal (1997), outlines five spiritual principles that guide her life as self knowledge, authenticity, respect for others belief, trust and practicing one's spirituality (e.g prayer). In addition to this Harlos (2000) added three values to her list: humility, compassion and simplicity. According to Harlos (2000), along with spiritual values, student centred learning principles (i.e participation, collaboration, empowerment and exchange) should be followed as pedagogical foundation.

SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY IN ANCIENT INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

India has been a home for many diverse groups of people from all over the world from ancient times. Therefore Indian psyche is constituted of heterogeneous elements. It comprises of a mixture of beliefs and

cultures. In Indian tradition, the four *Vedas*; 108 principal *Upanishads*; the six orthodox systems such as *Pûrva-Mîmânsâ*, *Uttara Mîmânsâ* (*Vedânta*), *Sâmkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyâya*, and *Vaisesika*; the heterodox systems—Jainism and Buddhism; *Dharma Sastra*, *Puranas*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, *Samhitas* and others are the repertoire of indigenous knowledge and constitute indigenous psychologies.

Indian psychology regards mind to be very powerful. But difference lies among individuals in using the powers of mind. It is because some individuals are not aware of their power of mind. Some people are aware of it but are not able to express their power of mind, because of weak will power and disintegrated emotions. Thus, it relates mind with emotions. An idealistic civilization is possible only when the mind is focused on the permanent reality within us. Indian psychologists say that the primary objective of life is the ultimate realization of the divinity of man, or the manifestation of the divinity that is already in him (as said by Swami Vivekananda). The *Vedas* deal with the knowledge framework from a holistic perspective with universal application. They present different dimensions of knowledge encompassing *Jnana*, *Vijnana*, *Samjñana* and *Prajñana*.

One of the distinctive features of Vedic education system was its spiritual nature. So, spirituality can be found in the aims of education, curriculum and pedagogy of Vedic education system. The ancient Indian education is characterized by spirituality. So, pedagogy is not an exception. The ancient Indian pedagogy comprised of very scientific and systematic methods. In fact, many methods which we use profoundly at present were used during Vedic period. It is a vain attempt to study the whole ancient Indian system of pedagogy within the time and space constraint that prevails in the present study. Therefore, the author has limited the study to the basic pedagogy of Vedic education system—*Shravana*, *Manana* and *Nididhyasana*.

Spirituality in *Shravana*: *Shravana* refers to acquiring knowledge by hearing. It implies learning through hearing from the right source, especially from a person who has heard from the scriptures and spiritual master, who has understood what, was heard, and is living by it. Hearing from such a source develops faith in what is heard. *Shravana* also signifies hearing to one's own self—the inner being or the soul. It helps one to understand one's individual identity. So, it is a path to know one's own spiritual identity.

Spirituality in *Manana*: After learning through *shravana* (hearing), thoughtful meditation and reflection (*manana*) is done on what is learnt. The reflection is done through logic, reasoning, analysis and contemplation. The spiritual intellect is firmed by discerning reality from illusion, permanent from the impermanent. This whole process is done keeping in mind the spiritual being (*atma*) present in each living entity. *Shravana* (hearing) and *kirtana* (chanting) results in *smarana* (remembrance). *Smarana* becomes the ability for mental concentration (*manana*).

Spirituality in *Nididhyasana*: *Nididhyasana* implies profound and repeated meditation that results in realization and complete application of this realization in all aspects of one's life. The individual identifies oneself as a spiritual being and acts accordingly not only in meditation, thoughts but also in action. One has made spiritual knowledge one's own and personally experienced it. This is a deep, uninterrupted meditation and a rational, cognitive process in which one lives.

Thus, it is understood that *shravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* are ways to acquire knowledge—not only knowledge outside, but the knowledge inside too. These processes are metaphorical to the energy we gain through digestion process of food. *Shravana* is acceptance of knowledge (taking the food in the mouth), *Manana* represents deep reflection on the knowledge (chewing the food) and *Nididhyasana* represents thorough assimilation of knowledge (digestion of food). Like digested food gives energy to the body, the knowledge gained through these processes nourishes the individual self (*atma*) with spirituality. Like digestion process eliminates the waste products from the body, these processes also lead the individual self (*atma*) to eliminate the impurities, the mundane and the logical fallacies of the world.

RELEVANCE OF SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY IN PRESENT SOCIAL CONTEXT

The present time is a period of disintegration of faith and growing disillusionment about traditional values. The process of acculturation, industrialization and urbanization has led to remarkable changes everywhere. People are turning away from moral ideals. This has created terror in the entire environment of Indian society. The value crisis that is now endemic in the society is due to lack of spirituality especially among the young generation. In this situation, spirituality is becoming one of

the most crucial factors in ensuring social security. Ethical values and spirituality is important for guiding the individual in achieving self actualization.

So, education should focus on incorporating spirituality in its various aspects. Yadav (2018) emphasized that the present Indian curriculum must evolve a special form of education whereby harmony will be established between materialism and Spiritualism which will lead to greater perfection in human life. In case of pedagogy, it is not that the processes of *shravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* are forgotten. These are in practice even now. But the problem is that these processes are being used mechanically. These processes are being used to gain outer knowledge. But the inner knowledge remains unexplored. And that has, for sure, led to value crisis, identity deficiency, ethical issues and immorality in the society. The outer knowledge is based on the knowledge inside. As soon as people start understanding the self, they are spiritually enlightened.

So, the need now is to awaken spirituality in pedagogy. By incorporating spirituality into pedagogy learners get the opportunity of being connected with one's complete self, with others and with the entire universe in order to transform the society. It can also create logical relationship between different generations and provide integrity. But, of course, there are challenges in doing so, particularly in present context of techno-pedagogy. The teachers—the practitioners of spiritual pedagogy—must have the faith in it and be sure about why they are applying it. As Schiller (1999-2000) has mentioned, "If the teachers are drawn to pedagogy based in spirituality, they need a firm faith in its efficacy as well as courage to use practices that other teachers may question and challenge".

CONCLUSION

Spirituality is evident in various aspects of ancient Indian education system, including pedagogy. The pedagogy of ancient Indian education system was primarily oral which included the techniques—*Shravana*, *Manana* and *Nididhyasana*. The practice of the spiritual elements present in these processes is one way that results in spiritual pedagogy. Spiritual pedagogy can help in preserving and strengthening the moral foundation of society. Including value-based or moral contents in the curriculum is not adequate to face the value and moral crisis of the present society. The transaction of the curriculum, i.e. pedagogy has to be integrated with

spirituality. Spirituality cannot be taught in isolation or separately. Rather integrating spirituality in the pedagogy itself, which is spiritual pedagogy, is the key. Thus, it can be said that the crises that the present society is suffering from may be overcome, to a large extent, by the practice of spiritual pedagogy.

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