UNIT 12: HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives
12.2 Introduction
12.3 Concept of Education in Hindu Tradition:
12.3.1 Vedic Education System:
12.3.2 Structure of Vedic Education System
12.3.3 Education for women and marginalised section in Vedic education system:
12.4 Education in Buddhist tradition
12.5 Islamic Concept of Education
12.5.1 History of Muslim Education in India
12.5.2 Aim of Muslim Education in India
12.5.3 Organisation of Muslim Education in India
12.5.4 Curriculum in Muslim Education in India
12.5.5 Women Education in Muslim Education System
12.6 Let us sum up
12.7 Further reading
12.8 Answers to check your progress
12.9 Model Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to,

- understand the system of education that existed in Ancient India under Hindu tradition,
- understand the system of education that existed in Ancient India under Budhist tradition,
- understand the system of education that existed in Medieval India under the Muslim tradition.

12.2 INTRODUCTION:

Recent discovery of ancient artifacts from the archeological sites led to arrival at a consensus that the ancient Indian civilization dates back to nearly 7500 BC to 6200 BC. Thus the study of education dating back to so old a time is practically not feasible due to lack of sufficient evidences. Hence the scope of this particular chapter on 'History of Education in India' is only limited to the study of Vedic period up to the arrival of Islam in India. The intention was to highlight the prominent and still visible influence of ancient Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim traditional education system on the current educational system in India.

12.3 CONCEPT OF EDUCATION IN HINDU TRADITION:

When we look at the lexis of ancient Indo-Aryan literature, we come across few words, which closely corresponds to the modern word 'education'. The first of these words is 'Siksh' found in Vedic hymns meaning 'to learn to recite'. Another such word often referred in Brahmanic, Upanisadic and Sutra literature is 'Adhyayana' which literally means 'to go near' thus expressing the idea of pupils going to some teacher for education. The third such word is 'Vinaya' which proposes a root meaning 'to lead out in a particular way'. While the first word's meaning is identical to education, the second and third word collectively shows the way and mean to achieve it through focus on character building. Thus the idea of holistic development of a person was conceived by the Indo-Aryans.

Education was given utmost importance in Hinduism. It was considered to be the third eye of a person, which enables him/her to walk in the path of dharma. One who had not possessed education was considered no better than a blind person. It was said that a king is respected in his/her own kingdom while a learned person is worshiped everywhere. Education was considered to be a continuous process and it was rightly said in those time, "a Vipra (learned) person is always a student". Education was considered indispensable for liberation. It was firmly believed that to be

superior did not mean that one must have an extra eye or hand but education as, it sharpens one's mind, build his/her character, liberate his/her mind from superstition, strengthen his/her intellects, develops his/her faculties, enhance his/her prudence, strength and efficiency. Thus education enlightens once life and believed to lead to salvation.

In Hinduism one is considered to be a born debtor firstly to the Gurus, saints and sages who founded his religion and culture; secondly to the God and thirdly to his/her parents. Thus one is required to repay debts, first debt as a student learning Vedas, second by performing various sacrifices and third one by offering to the manes and himself becoming a parent. Only when he/she pays all his/her debts he/she becomes fit finally for the attainment of liberation from this material life to eternity. Hence the ancient Hindus regarded education as a life process and tend to divide the life of an individual into four stages and assigned different duties to each of it in such a way that each stage should successively prepare one for the next higher stage. The first stage was termed "Brahmacharya" or student phase, wherein one is required to attain education under a Guru which ideally open up one's mind making it disciplined and the body fit to carry out the orders of the mind. In the second stage called "Grihastha" individual put the principles he/she had learned in the first stage in to practise in life. In the third stage "Vanaprastha" an individual detach oneself from the worldly affairs and round of duties and becoming pure in mind and body leading to partial renunciation. In the final phase "Sanyasa" an individual turns his/her entire attention towards the recognition of the relation between individual and eternal self in the pursuit to find the explanation of the origin and the meaning of existence.

Thus education in those time was aimed at stirring man from everyday worldly affair to spirituality walking on the righteous path thus helping him attain liberation in true sense.

12.3.1 Vedic Education System:

The history of Ancient Indian education in Hindu traditional system may be broadly divided into the following four periods:

- Pre- Historic - 1000 BC: This period is referred to as Vedic period. During this period, most of the Vedic literature were composed.
- 1000 BC - 200 BC: this period is referred to as the age of Upanishadas, Sutras & Epics.
- 200 BC - 500 AD: This period is referred to as the age of Dharma Sutras.
- 500 AD - 1200 AD: This period is referred to as the age of the Puranas& digests (Nibandhas).

According to the ancient Indian philosophy, education, which leads to knowledge, may be gained by three steps, 'Shravana' or hearing, 'Manana' or meditation and 'Nididhyasan' or realisation. The learning was prescribed by way mean of transmission of sacred knowledge from generation to generation until it was stored in the forms of manuscripts. The syllabus was designed according to season in a year. It is to be noted that Vedic education was predominantly religious in nature. Also education was free from any external control from the state or any other agencies.

In his book *'Discovery of India'* Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru penned, "The Rigveda, the first of the Vedas is probably the earliest book that humanity possesses". The word 'Veda' was derived from the root word 'Vid' which mean 'to know'. Thus the literary meaning of the word Veda is source of knowledge. It is said, the Vedas were not written in ancient times and they were passed on from one generation to next through Gurus (teacher) to Sishyas (students) and were preserved orally.Much later during the age of Mahabharata, they were compiled by Krishna Dwaipayan, who was also known as 'Veda-Vyas'. He compiled four Vedas namely:

Rigveda Samhita- a collection of hymns.

Yajurveda Samhita- a collection of sacrificial formulas.

Samveda- a collection of songs mostly taken from Rigveda

Artharvaveda: a collection of spells and charms.

Traditionally, there were six major subjects considered necessary to read, understand and proper use of the knowledge gained from the Vedas. These subjects labelled collectively as 'Vedanga' which included Siksha (phonetics), Chhandas (metre), Vyakarana (grammar), Nirukta (etymology or explanation of the meaning of a word), Jyotisha (astronomy) and Kalpa (ceremonial or religious practice). The first two subjects were considered necessary for reading Vedas, the next two for understanding them and the last two for employing the knowledge gained into practice through sacrifices.Other subjects were considered to be developed later on from these four basic subjects only e.g., study of law evolved from Kalpa. Thus for the ancient Hindus, education had its origin and development in sacrifice, which occupied a prominent place in the evolution of Vedic religion.

The Vedic education system was found to be closely related to social life and the sole purpose of it was to gain knowledge through meditation and also by mean of penance for any wrong doing, which ultimately believed to lead the students into high standard of morality, spirituality and liberation. However, during later Vedic period, education came under greater influence of religion gradually. Rituals like sacrifices and oblations to god were given much importance so that the rituals may be performed in a proper and particular way. This lead to hierarchy and a particular section of the society started monopolising the whole education system. Thus education of the lower classes and of women was ignored.

12.3.2 Structure of Vedic Education System

- **The Gurukulas:**

  The unique ness about the ancient education system in India was the 'Gurukuala' system wherein a student needed to go to the place/ home of a teacher (Ashram) for his/her education.Gurukulas were like boarding or residential schools mostly away from crowded residential and commercial places. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, "A most wonderful thing we notice in India is that here the forest not the town is the foundation of all its culture". It was believed in those days that it was essential to begin education for children in

early age for all round inner and outer development of their talent. When a child attained the age of 5 ideally, a special ceremony called 'Upanayana' was held and a child was given a sacred thread to wear across chest. Then after the child was needed to leave homeand, go to the Gurukulas for education.Although there was no clear cut exact age for formal education to begin, it was considered that it should start in the early phase of a child when a child becomes self-capable to look after itself. A student was called Vidyarthi (one seeking knowledge), Shishyas or Chatra.

The Gurus or the teachers of ancient India were eminent persons of highest calibre. It is said that a Guru possess the influence like fire (Agni) and chivalry like the thunder (Indra). They emerged as the most knowledgeable and spiritual person of very high reputation. They treated and looked after their students like their offspring.

- **Life of a Student in Gurukulas:**

A student is expected to lead an ideal, simple yet disciplined life in a Gurukula. According to 'Matsya Purana', a student ought to be humble, polite, sweet natured, with full of control over his senses, observe strict celibacy in speech and thought, sleep on the ground and expected not to involve in lies and arguments and also should not be lazy and lethargic. A student was required to get up early in the morning before the birds began to stir and go to bed only after his teacher go of to sleep. It was considered to be the duty of a student to serve his teacher devotedly. They were required to do all the household work in Gurukula like tending cows, fetching milk and water, collecting fire woods etc.After attending the morning call, a student used to take early bath and offer prayers. A Vedic student used to spend a good amount of his morning time performing various rituals connected with fire sacrifices. The rest of the morning time were utilised for learning new lessons and revising the old ones. At around mid-day, they were break off for meal. It is interesting to note that all the students were required to go for begging for alms.

Begging was considered to be a noble part of student's life which was expected to inculcate humility and also to give realisation to the students that due to the sympathy and help from the society, they were able to learn the heritage of their race and this education was going to be able to enable them to follow a profession that would secure him a rightful livelihood. This also was expected to remove distinctions between rich and poor students. Further, begging also reminded the society their duty and responsibility to care for the education of their rising generation. Any households who were found to refuse offerings to the students were threatened with serious religious and spiritual sanctions. Students were expected to beg for cooked food only, which were just sufficient for their maintenance. If they happen to get alms other than cooked food like cloth, ornaments, cash etc., they were required to give it to their teacher as honorarium. A student was not permitted to recourse to begging once his education was complete. However, begging was a mere formality for the rich students and only option for the poor students.

There were no provision for any formal test and age of completion of education. It was at the discretion of the teacher who did collective evaluation of a student. Ideally a mediocre student complete his studies in around 12 years. After completion of his education, a ceremony called Samavartan (convocation) was arranged. A student used to take holy bath on that occasion and thereafter they were considered as graduates.

- **Vedic Curriculum:**

  Vedic literature primarily consisted of eight different forms namely four Vedas, six Vedangas, four Upvedas, four Brahmanas, one hundred and eighty Upanishads, six system of philosophy, Bhagwat Gita and three Smritis.In addition to these, students also studied history, grammar, phonetics, exegetics, metrics, logic, reasoning, dramatic, penal code,vartta (economics), dandaniti (science of

governance), rajnity (politics), astronomy, mathematics, biology, medicines etc.Military education was also a part for the caste Khatriyas. The medium of instruction was Sanskrit language.In addition to it, all 64 arts, prescribed by Vatsayan were also taught. These comprised subjects such as interior decoration, architects, cosmetics, cooking, games and knowledge of various crafts etc.

12.3.3 Education for women and marginalised section in Vedic Education System

It is very interesting to note that Vedic education was imparted to all who took part in Vedic sacrifices. Again, it was compulsory to undergo sacred thread ceremony before one undergo Vedic initiation. There are many hymns in Rigveda which were accepted to be composed by women. Thus from the above argument it appears that Vedic education was also opened for women. There were many such prominent women who were considered to be very famous Vedic scholar during those time. More than 20 women authors were credited with composition of hymns in Rigveda. Some of the most important among them were Lopamudra, Gargi, Atreyi and Paulomi. It must be noted that different scholars are of different opinion regarding women Rishis (learned person) though they accept presence of female authors and interlocutor during Vedic times but, the role of women in composition of hymns in Rigvedas are considered and a topic for further in depth research. But later women were not allowed to participate in the traditional education system.

Another striking feature of Vedic education was its caste based oddity. Although education in early Vedic period was universal and free for all without any restrictions, in the post Vedic period, gradually education on was made limited to a particular caste. During Vedic period caste system was based on one's ability and occupation thus four caste namely Brahmins (teaching/religious practises), Khatriyas (administration), Vaishyas (business) and Shudra (services) came into existence. However, during post Vedic period, caste got established with birth.Dominance of the caste Brahmins began to increase owing to their access to education while those

of caste Vaishyas' and Shudras' status gradually started falling down in social ladder. Later on position of Shudras further fell in the society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the probable age of Vedic education system in India?
2. Who was credited of compilation of Vedas?
3. What was the normal duration of education in Gurukulas?

Thus during post Vedic period, there was no provision of education for the caste like, Shudras, and Dalits. There was no mention at all of those who were out caste, not included into any of these categories e.g., the numerous tribal people of those time.

12.4 EDUCATION IN BUDDHIST TRADITION

Buddhism came into existence owing to revolt against the caste system and ritualization prevalent in those days in Hinduism. Gautam Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. It was rightly pointed out that Buddha born, lived and died Hindu. Hence one can find many resemblance in ancient Hindu and Buddhist education system. One most significant difference we see is that Buddhism rejected Varna or caste classification of society, while in Brahminical education, caste was the major concern while imparting education to anyone.Vihara or Sangha were identical to Gurukulas. Students were admitted into the Viharas only with full consent from their parents. Students were admitted after a ceremony called 'Pabbaja' similar to that Upanayana or sacred thread ceremony in Gurukulas. Age of initiation of education was eight years, students were known as 'Antevasin', one who lives out of home for education. At the age of 20, a student had to undergo another ceremony called 'Upasampada' and becomes a permanent member of the Sangha. It is slightly different from Samavartan such that, after Samavartan, a student ends celibacy vow and enter into family life while

after Upasampada, a student permanently becomes a monk observing lifelong celibacy having no concern for family life. Life of teacher and student in Vihara were same as those in Gurukulas. However, there was a great difference between the two. While Gurukulas were under one chief teacher or Guru, a Vihara was rather a big assembly of students, scholars and teachers. Famous universities like Nalanda etc., attracted thousands of disciples and scholars all over the known world of that time. Curriculum was religious in nature and were similar to those of the Gurukulas. The primary aim of Budhist education was to preach and spread teachings of Buddhism and also to train and prepare monks and nuns for this purpose. The medium of instruction were Sanskrit as well as local language of the masses i.e., Pali. It is to be noted that both ancient Hindu and Budhist education system were complementary rather than contradictory to each other.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. What is the name for the centre of education in Buddhism?
5. What is Upasampada?
6. Name a famous centre of higher education of the Buddhist tradition in India?

12.5 ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

"Suffa Navi" was the platform of the prophet from where the Muslims education system started. Prophet Muhammad himself taught there and also appointed other teachers who taught reading and writing to the followers. The teaching of prophet was totally different from those days normal education. Here education was imparted for the overall development of personality, the Suffa Navi was a residential institute where education was imparted round the clock. The teaching included the holy Quran and Hadith, sayings of the Prophet, to guide the followers in all religious as well as non-religious day to day life of a person. The companions of SuffaNavi, who later become teachers, were given the task to spread the teachings of Islam

all throughout the world. Some of the most famous of them were; Hazrat Abu Huraira, Hazrat Zaid bin Sabit and Abdulla bin Zubair. When Prophet Mohammad migrated from Mecca to Medina, the Masjid of Nabvi of Medina became the first seat of Muslim education.

Thus the mosques and religious circle became the centre for formal schooling in Islam. For the followers of Islam, Quran is the ultimate book for teaching morals, human virtues and spiritual and religious information. The holy Quran itself has several verses which highlights the importance of education.

Thus we can see how important education was in Islam. The main objective of education according to Islam was to attain piety and faith so as to bring the learner nearer to God and to create the 'good and righteous man'.

12.5.1 History of Muslim Education in India

After the defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan, Sultan Shahad-ud-Din Ghor, also known a Mohammad Ghori, laid the foundation of Muslim rule in India. He established some schools and seminaries at Ajmer for Muslim education for the first time. Qutb-ud-Din Aibak (1206 AD - 1210 AD) established many mosques and a Madarsa at Ajmer. Jalal-ud-Din Khilji (1290 AD - 1296) who was the founder of Khilji dynasty, was a great lover of education. He patronised and honoured eminent gene-de-littres. He established a library at Kilugurinear Delhi. Amir Khurso was the head of this library. Ghayas-ud-Din Tughlaq (1320 AD-1389 AD) was a great lover of education and patronised learned persons, established Madrasas and also rewarded the scholars with many scholarships. His successor Mohammad Bin Tughlaq (1325-1351) was himself a great writer and scholar. His whole royal court was the assembly of learned persons. He established many Maktabs and Madarsas and also encouraged scholars to create literary works. MaulanaMoinuddin was the great literary figure during his reign. The sultans of Lodi dynasty also promoted education and established many Madarsas and encouraged literary works. Sikandar Lodi was himself a great writer, poet and lover of arts. He composed Diwan of 9000 poems himself.

The Mughals were great patrons of education, arts and literature. Zaheer-ud-Din Mohammad Babur was the founder of Mughal dynasty in India (1526-1530). He was a great scholar of Turkish and Persian literature. He entrusted his public work department construction of new Maktabs and Madarsas in addition to other duties. He created a department called "Shuhrat-a-Aam" for producing literary works. He also composed his autobiography "Twzuk-a-Babure". His successor Humayun (1530-1555) was also greatly interested in education. He too established many Maktabs, Madarsas and libraries during his rule. After defeating Shershah Suri, Humayun converted the "Shermandal" into a great library.

Although Akbar (1556-1605) himself was illiterate, he had great respect for learned persons. His rule was regarded to be the golden period for the promotion of new literature. During his tenure Agra become a famous seat of learning where scholars from foreign countries use to visit. Akbar was very liberal and secular in his approach. The famous assembly of Nine Jewels, or Navaratnas decorated his royal court, were distinguished scholars of those time. Jahangir (1605-1627) was also a scholar and lover of arts and literary works. He composed an autobiography "Jahangirnama". The famous poets Surdas, Tulsidas and Keshavadas flourished under his patronage. Shahjahan (1627-1653) was the greatest lover of arts among all the Mughal emperors. He was more into architect and arts than in education, during whose reign the famous "TajMahal" was constructed. Aurangzeb (1657-1707), who was regarded notorious for his bigotry and cruelty who put an end to the liberal policy on education, did helped Muslim institutes of learning. The famous Madarsas "Firangi Mahal" and "Madarsa Rahimiya" were established during his time.

After Aurangzeb, the other Muslim rulers failed to give proper attention to the spread and contribution to education. Bahadur Shah, the last king of Mughal dynasty established two Madarsas. Ghazi-ud-Din was a highly respected distinguished scholar in Bhahadur Shah's court, who constructed one Madarsa known as Darululoom outside Ajmeri Gate in Delhi which is known as Delhi College in present day.

12.5.2 Aim of Muslim Education in India

The main aim and objective of Muslim education in India as elsewhere, was to extend and spread the knowledge and teachings of Islamic principles, laws and social conventions. Education for the girls were equally given importance. Special stress was laid on character building. Importance was given for proper coordination between religious values and material prosperity of man. Emphasis was laid on preservation of records, thus promotion of development of literature as well as writing of history.

12.5.3 Organisation of Muslim Education in India

The Islamic education was diffused in three folds by means of Muktabs, Madarsas and private houses. The education was in three stages; primary education imparting elementary education, secondary education mostly through grammar schools and high schools and higher education with under-graduation and post-graduation studies. These institutes were community institutes, funded by nobles, traders, Ulemas (learned elites) and also the rules. However, they were run by people without any interference by the government in power. These institutes were generally attached to a Mosque and were free of cost and open to all. Even residential and boarding facilities were provided to needy students. There were provision for scholarships for the poor students.

- Maktabs: They were normally attached with a mosque where both boys and girls of younger age were made to remember the Ayats of Quran. Reading, writing and elementary arithmetic were taught to all children. First of all, children were taught Arabic script and when they learn it properly, Persian language and script was taught. The child was taken to Maktab in new cloth on the very first day. He was required to repeat few verses of Quran, if he was not able to do that, his education starts with the pronunciation of the word "Bismillah", meaning his education begun with the name of Allah.
- Madarsas:On completion of elementary level, students were sent to Madarsas, which were the seat of higher education. Madarsas were the institutes of higher studies, where separate teachers were

appointed for different subjects. Special emphasis was given to the teaching of both religious and secular subjects.

- Private house teaching: The children of royal and affluent families were taught in the palace and in house under the strict supervision of Maulavis.

12.5.4 Curriculum in Muslim Education in India

The Indian Muslims also adopted the similar pattern of education as prevalent in the other Islamic countries during that time. Maktabs were specially aimed at giving religious education to the masses. The Quran and recitation of the Ayats of Quran, Arabic language and calligraphy followed by Persian language along with elementary arithmetic comprised the curriculum of Maktabs.The children were also taught grammar as well some romantic literature of Persian, e.g., Laila-Majnu, Yusuf-Julekha etc. Memorizing was the main method of learning.

As mentioned before, Madarsas were institute of higher education, like present day colleges and universities. Subject taught in Madarsas included grammar, poetry, traditions, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, accounts, economics, geography, astronomy, Fiqh or Islamic law, Isad or scrutiny of genealogy, biography,history, medicine, alchemy, Hadith, logic, philosophy, mysticism, rhetoric, Tafsir (commentary), scholasticism etc. The children of royal families were also imparted compulsory military training and also lessons on political science.

Eminent philosopher and educationist Imam Ghazali laid much emphasis on vocational education as well as on art and craft work such as weaving,wood curving and agriculture. The Mughal kings encouraged education in fine arts, music, paintings, dancing, handicrafts including embroidery, ivory work, exquisite ornaments, artesian etc.

12.5.5 Women Education in Muslim Education System

It is to be noted that education was considered to be free from all restrictions in Islam. Both young boys and girls were admitted and taught in the Maktabs. Although great respect was given to women during Muslim

rule, but not much was done for education for girls, especially in higher education. There were restrictions on girls going to Madarsas in those days. The 'Purdah' system was prevalent in the Muslim culture wherein girls and women were not allowed to go out in front of outsiders without the cover of a veil known as "Burkha". This imposed restrictions on girls thus hindering their education. In spite of these, there were many learned women during the times of the Muslim rulers in India, who contributed to the development of literature, arts as well as in state administration. The empress Nurjahan, Sultana Razia, Princess GulBadan, Aurangzeb's daughter Sultana Zubunnisa, Sultana Suleema, Mumtaz Mahal, Jahan Ara were among the most famous learned and highly educated royal ladies. Thus although education of royal princess and ladies and also daughters of very rich people could receive education, education for common girls in the society was much ignored.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

7. When did the Muslim system of Education come to India?

8. What was Madrasas?

9. What was the platform on which Prophet Mohammad started his teachings?



12.6 LET US SUM UP

- Journey of Vedic Education dates back to 7500 BC to 6200 BC.
- Vedas were the primary source of learning during Vedic period.
- Gurukulas were the seat of education during Vedic period.
- Sanskrit was the language of Vedic education.
- Education of a child started only after 'Upanayana' or sacred thread ceremony during Vedic period.

- Both boys and girls were allowed to gain Vedic education during first half of Vedic period.
- Education was found to be based on ones caste and gender during latter Vedic period.
- Lopamudra, Gargi, Atreyi and Paulomi were some of the renowned women scholar during Vedic period.
- Education in Buddhist tradition were both caste and gender neutral.
- Both Sanskrit and Pali were medium of instruction in Buddhist education system.
- Muslim education started in India around 1200 AD with the invasion of Mohammad Ghori.
- Girls were allowed to take primary education alongside boys in Maktabs however, there was no provision for higher education for girls.
- The empress Nurjahan, Sultana Razia, Princess GulBadan, Aurangzeb's daughter Sultana Zubunnisa, Sultana Suleema, MumtazMahal and JahanAra were some of the famous royal educated women during Muslim reign.



12.7 FURTHER READING

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