

## ETHICS IN ANCIENT INDIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM – A STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

The Brahmanical system of education is mainly a domestic system of education. A student undergoes very rigid physical, mental and moral discipline. It aims to convert the student into a ‘full human being’ and train him efficiently to shoulder the responsibilities of the society. The Buddhist education concentrates, more, on spiritual training. It is mainly a monastic system of education. It is binding on the pupil to become monks after completing education. But, both the systems moulded the moral and spiritual personality of the students not only by teaching moral ethics but also trains them to practice those ethics.

**KEYWORDS:** Bramhachari, Education, Ethics, Moral Training, Moral Ethics, Teacher, Monk

### INTRODUCTION

Education always plays a great role in the development of a sovereign state. It is a process of stabilizing, transmitting and guaranteeing continuity to culture. Education as a part of culture has the twin traditions of conservation and modification or renewal of culture<sup>1</sup>. Education is a process by which society through schools, colleges and Universities transmit the cultural heritage – knowledge, ethics, skill etc. In this paper, I made an attempt to present how ethical values were imparted to pupils in Vedic Age, Post-Vedic Age, Age of Sutras and epics and also teaching of ethics in Buddhist system of education.

#### Education Ethical Teaching in Vedic Age

Education in vedic age was a private affair. The head of the family transmitted the knowledge of the Vedas to his son. Later, Brahmanas were engaged in this profession, established ashramas to impart vedic education. Thus, the education was completely in the hands of priests, Brahmanas and philosophers.

#### Ethics of Education

The aims of education were having noble ideas, forming of character, pursuing time-tested ethics, enrichment of culture and moulding the personality of the pupil to shoulder and perform the social, economic and religious responsibilities. Education was considered as means to develop saintly habits, to control one’s uncontrolled desires and lead ethical and noble life in the society. After the upanayana ceremony, student was called as Brahmachari, means religious student or vedic student<sup>2</sup>. After upanayana ceremony, the Brahmachari has to pursue two fold course of discipline – physical and spiritual. The details of discipline are;

- Wearing the deer or goat skin
- Growing hair

- Collecting fuel and begging alms
- The spiritual ethics include, offering fuel and worshipping Agni twice a day
- Control of senses
- Practice of austerities
- Living a dedicated life
- Satisfying the teacher with his ethical and moral behaviour.
- The pupil has to show the divine reverence to the teacher.

Thus the student followed prescribed discipline and vows as 'vratachari'. Thus, he will be under the observation of the teacher all the twentyfour hours. The main duty of the pupil is to respect the teacher like his father and also is asked to follow the aims of learning – shradda (faith), praja (progeny), Dhan (wealth), Ayush (longevity), Amritatya (immortality), Strict discipline was maintained<sup>4</sup>.

The Upanishad required that a student should be calm, un-perturbed in mind, patience, composed and self-restrained. He must be the embodiment of asceticism, humility, chastity and followed satya, devotion to the teacher and to one's parents. The daily begging made pupil to inculcate 'plain living and high thinking'. Much emphasis is laid on chastity and celibacy. He had to overcome wild desire, passion for glory, evil habits, excessive sleep, anger, desire fragrance etc<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, moral training formed the backbone of the vedic educational system. Great emphasis was laid on the development of character. A student has to observe many ethics and undergo rigorous discipline. Physical training is also imparted. A student has to perform pranayama and other physical exercises to maintain health<sup>6</sup>.

### **Ethical Teaching in Post Vedic Period 1000BC to 600BC**

Priests dominated the vedic education during vedic period. The scholars thinkers, sages, philosophers started meditating on 'parabrahma'. This particular thinking was reflected in education of post-vedic period. Many vedic schools, which were specialized in separate Vedas, started giving or imparting spiritualism and human perfection.

### **Pupil and his Ethics**

The pupil lived in the house of the teacher. His important duty was begging alms and collecting sacred fuel, 'samidha', from the forest, herding the cattle and doing other services to the teacher. This particular training was symbolic of intellectual, ethical and spiritual training. He will live under very rigid ethical discipline and he has to effort himself to overcome passions and evil thoughts and prepare himself or equip himself to attain supreme knowledge of Brahma<sup>7</sup>.

Bhihadarankya Upanishad says that the student has to do sravanam, mananam and Nididhyasana. Vedic gurus exposes pupils in academic gatherings, conferences and thus were thoroughly exposed to thinkers, scholars, rishies, etc. These gathering are highly useful for the students.

### **Education in the Age of Sutras and Epics (600BC to 320BC)**

The Vedas and Upanishads reached genith durina this period. Sutras, smruties and epics imparted ethical training to the students.

### **Ethics of Education**

The evolution of inner nature or character of student as one of the essential object of education. The aim of the education was to develop ethics and mould character. The main object of education was to create an ideal student, an ideal house-holder, an ideal social and political being<sup>8</sup>.

The life of Brahmachari was a life of discipline. He had to observe many vows, such as, lead a life of personal chastity, truthfulness, observance of duty, devotion to teacher etc. He has to avoid use of perfumes, garments, use of shoes, umbrella etc. He must also avoid singing, playing musical instruments and dancing. If a student fails to withstand strict discipline, he would be discarded by the teacher<sup>9</sup>.

Kautilya made it clear that it is not only the duty of the teacher to impart knowledge but also to develop the personality and character of the pupil. So, he insisted that the teacher should be the main source of inspiration for the pupil. After studying 25 years in his study and service, then he would offer guru dakshina and return home to shoulder his responsibilities.

Thus, the Brahmanical education moulded the characters of the student. He has to rise in the early morning, bathe early, remain barefooted and take little food. They were prohibited eating sweets, using scents, music etc., Thus, Brahmanical education contributed towards the mental, moral physical and spiritual development of personality.

### **Buddhist System of Education**

Buddhism came into existence in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. monasteries imparted the Buddhist education. The Buddhist education was in the hands of monks. In Brahmanical education, a brahmachari is allowed to become householder after education, whereas upasampadha (student) is to become monk after his education. The education is open to all.

### **Ethics of Education**

A pupil is known as sraman. The following are some of the ethics he has pursue.

- Must be devoted to his teacher-monk
- Rise early and take cold-bath
- Serve the teacher by giving water and teeth-cleanser
- Give him milk and wash the vessel
- Sweep the place
- Begging alms
- Help the teacher in his bath
- Wash the clothes of the teacher
- Attend on him when he is sick
- Clean the vihara of the teacher and
- Not to leave the teacher without permission<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, the Buddhist educational institutions are opened to all people irrespective caste and communities. The system aimed to develop moral, mental and spiritual development of the monk-pupil. It produced the best intellect such as Nagarjuna, Ashvagosha, Vasubandha, Darmapal etc. Hiuen-Tsana describes that Buddhist education aimed at very disciplined life and attainment of wisdom and knowledge.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Brahmanical system of education is mainly a domestic system of education. A student undergoes very rigid physical, mental and moral discipline. It aims to convert the student into a 'full human being' and train him efficiently to shoulder the responsibilities of the society. The Buddhist education concentrates, more, on spiritual training. It is mainly a monastic system of education. It is binding on the pupil to become monks after completing education. But, both the systems moulded the moral and spiritual personality of the students not only by teaching moral ethics but also trains them to practice those ethics.

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