Chapter 8
Indian Education System in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a vital role in developing a nation culturally, economically, and socially. That is why every nation focuses on this sector. For its improvement, all endeavors are made through formal education, non-formal, and distance education. The trend of education, particularly distance education, has developed considerably in developed countries and developing countries. Information technology plays a pivotal role for the development of education. This chapter introduces Indian Ancient Education System and structure of Indian Education System, and argues on distribution of schools throughout all categories of middle management, senior management, from state level to central level. The chapter focuses on all forms of education systems and ICT in school education systems with accreditation systems supported to nurture the Indian education system globally.

INDIAN ANCIENT EDUCATION SYSTEM: AN INTRODUCTION

Life takes inspiration from the past. The past history of any country is the inspiration of the country’s present or future. India is a religious country. In every aspect of life, religion plays an important role. In fact, Indian tradition is full of religion. Ancestors have defined life and our moral duties based on spiritual reasons and not on material reasons. They not only thought of development of India but also the progress of whole human race as such. For them the whole universe was like a family, like one unit.

Ancient Indian life followed its own ideal. It was considered moral and right and also above all material prosperity to achieve these ideas. The ancient education system developed on these ideals. The Indian education system and science had the objective of acquiring knowledge, but in addition to this it was used as a medium to follow religion and attain salvation.
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The Indian education system was totally based on the concepts like the futility of the material pleasures and the short-lived nature of the very existence, or the ‘life’ in general. The education system developed on these principles only. This is the reason why Indian sages sang praises of an invisible world and talked about spiritual superpower. The sages lived a life based on these principles.

In ancient times the student used to listen and understand the mysteries and complexities of life and this world in a very beautiful, quiet and peaceful atmosphere. Student stayed with the teacher to understand ins and outs all this. Their life was pure. Their knowledge was not restricted to books but they were also exposed to practical knowledge and true experience of life.

It is a strange Indian tradition that a disciple stays with his Guru or Teacher to attain knowledge. This tradition is not yet found in any other part of this world. All virtues of the Guru (Teacher) are naturally imbibed in the student or disciple because of his continuous presence with the teacher. This was very important for the development of personality of the disciple.

Another aspect of the Indian education system was that it was very practical. Due to the constant presence of the disciple with his Guru, the disciple used to get exposure to real social life. Attending to the household chores of his Guru’s home, was the duty of every disciple. The disciple not only got knowledge of the household things but also got training in following the principles like sacrifice, service and hard work. The disciple also learnt modesty and discipline. Many things, which today have become a major problem, were taken care of automatically because of this kind of education system. This goes on to prove the point that the ancient Indian education system was not only theoretical but had a very practical and real-life training approach. There are examples in Rigveda about many small family run colleges. The students used to stay together with their teachers.

There were different classes/levels of education prevailed in past. Primary education was compulsorily given to everybody, but higher education was given to only those who were capable of it. Nonetheless, the education system prevailing in Rigvedic period was mainly religious and philosophical. There was also an arrangement for the common man to get education in conventional and beneficial streams of life. A glance at the then financial, economical and political and industrial development reflects a picture of a wealthy and healthy nation. Farming, exchange and trade existed in its developed form. This prosperity was achieved because the common man was educated in material, scientific and arts related subjects. Farming, pastures and animal rearing were highly developed. People were also expert in handicraft. One also finds development in currency, things, exchange, loans, banking and interests. There are references in Vedas of sea trade.

In the ancient Indian education system, the student life was totally based on scientific thinking. The thought process has a firm basis of regular, stable, good conduct. This conduct was never influenced by time, society, or government, unlike today. Students observed celibacy religiously. Celibacy is a vast and healthy support system of the Hindu religion.

A child in a typical age group had to undergo the religious rite of ‘Upanayan’ or investiture with the sacred thread. After this ceremony, this child was called as celibacy. This was supposed to be a re-birth or a new life for him. He was looked at as the one, who is conquering the whole world. He looked and was different from the rest of the society in his behavior and also his dress. The code of conduct set for him for the day developed many good and basic virtues for him. Thus, the ancient student was a replica of sacrifice, conduct, and purity. He had to follow physical and spiritual discipline.

In ancient times, women also followed celibacy. Women used to pursue their education first by, abiding the conduct and rules of celibacy and then