Sustainability of Education and Appropriation of Ancient Knowledge Tradition: An Indian Context

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Abstract

Survival of human civilization on earth has been 'thought centered' and preservation of the thought in terms of the foundation of ideas and ideologies. Since time immemorial thinkers of different traditions have tried to preserve the knowledge tradition in many ways. Right from transmitting the knowledge to other generations through oral, written, symbolic, or even through folktales. The aim perhaps was not only survival but rather surviving with meaning and purpose. This paper specifically tries to explore the need of revisiting the varied knowledge traditions prevalent in Indian written and spoken cultures which in a way preserving the tradition and the ethos of India. Post-colonial gesture of Indian knowledge tradition seems extremely trapped in many faced persuasions which led to more confusion and tension among the theorist and thinkers. Hence, one of the aims of this paper is to offer this revisiting itself as method. However, the method of the is analytical and descriptive and aims to contextualize the traditional knowledge system vis-a-vis the sustainability issue of mankind at large.

Keywords

(Sustainability, Indian philosophy, Folk, Liberation)

Education has always been considered as the The system/s of education in India have its own rise and fall over the centuries due to several intercultural and inter-religious invasions. And today when we talk of the ancient Indian education system we only mean, the ancient system of education was the education of the Vedas inclusive to the studies of - [1]rnayakas, Brāhmanas, *Upanicad*s, and Dharmasāstras. Though it is claimed that India has a rich history owned mainly by the domination under the umbrella term of Hinduism[1], It is in the twenty-first century – a multicultural, multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multireligious nation. We announce it is a matter with equal pride and satisfaction across the globe - that in spite of its plurality, India has remained one nation, it is also a matter of concern that the plurality has been the reason for many of its conflicts, outbursts of occasional violence and atrocities against each other. Yet India is what it is because of its diversity and plurality and, thus, it is not one context to churn rather a context amongst the contexts to research upon."[2] The knowledge acquired by people of ancient times was passed on from one generation to another and is reflected even in the teachings of today in the form of culture and its practices. If we look back India before any ethnic invasion, what could possible mode of transmission of education and preservation of the entire knowledge tradition – then perhaps we don't really have any access to that system in isolation. In recent years, however, there has been a tendency across the globe to call on the ancient Indian system of thought and philosophy for tackling the aftereffects of modernity and post-modern condition.[3] My concern however not with regard to the system of knowledge but rather with regard to the very fact that – the claims (mostly conflicting or confusing in nature) with regard to the prevalent practices and methodology requires sufficient proof and justification for the claim and at the same time requires extensive research to verify the claims made already. This age of postmodernism in India urging to ponder upon the ancient education system as of the ancient Indian system of knowledge offered a lot to the domains of Astrology to the matter and physical sciences to the spirituality. The researchers made it explicit that, at the core of these foundational thinking was nothing but the coherence approach towards life and worldview.

The traditional system of education in Ancient India was considered to be a meaningful discourse lately – when the whole of the world is struggled more with educating people not being coherent in attitude and social strata. The world has faced more problems with the educated ones than illiterate one- be it with exploitation or otherwise. It is believed that the idea of education In India had been very grand, noble, and high in ancient times. The aim of learning was to achieve the ideal - "training for completeness of life and beyond". The aim of education is to build the

character for life - stated in detail by Vivekananda as "Man Making and Character Building".

On the other hand, if sustainable development by definition means - "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"[4] – as defined by The Brundtland Commission, formerly also known as the World Commission on Environment and Development was formed in 1983. The idea behind setting up the commission was to bring together the developed – developing and underdeveloped nations to bring about a global change in the livelihood of the people in terms of resources and change alongside the development in the globe – which in return create a sense of belongingness and interconnectedness with the world. And in the same line, education for Sustainable Development has been conceptualized as a tool to aid policymakers in authoring and monitoring the educational policies that take into account the present environmental, societal, and economic challenges. According to the UNESCO, it is based on all levels and types of learning - learning to know, learning to be, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to transform oneself and society." With this philosophy at the backdrop of the paper, I intend to analyze - how the ancient Indian system of education both in its formal or informal type can be justified to meet the sustainable goals.

In Search of the Sustainable Goals in Education

The objective of education unlike today was not only to get knowledge or get skilled in a particular faculty and become suitable to get a job. But a long-term objective of knowledge system best known as education per se but it is process of logical/critical approach towards life and being – so that by the preservation and practice it can be transmitted to the next generation to adjust and survive in an ever-changing situation in life and the world. This has been the foundational philosophy of every indigenous culture to whom the British government attached a very belittling meaning. Which also led these cultural groups to confine themselves to the hills and terrains where the "civilized"[5] refused to inhabit.

Comparing Past Knowledge Tradition with Present Context of Education

The contemporary education system has been idealized based on the several dimensions - such as urbanization, modernization, industrialization, urbanization, privatization, globalization mostly influenced by western cultures and theories so that our country can also stand alongside the west. This caused an adverse impact on education patterns in India. We can consider ourselves as literate but declining drastically in terms of preservation of the given which are free otherwise. More specifically in terms of family values and ethics, India has declined – not because of

institutions but because of a clash of ideologies among generations. And at this juncture of age even if we realize it because of the pressure of the system and the common hazardous practice in society to identify the Aim of Education and major causes of declining Social, moral values and spiritual strengthening in the Indian education system. It can also be further interpreted that the enwrapping of spiritualism in education is not only the aim of the present education system but it is a proven fact that, spiritualism has been promoted as one of the hindrances of ancient India. Prioritizing a futuristic goal - deliver skills for earning and manifesting as a human being for the mankind is a must if we march towards a new dimension of learning. If the first motto remains a priority until a solid exit is destined for a mechanical processing of skills for a consumer-centric world. The present education system is absolutely perfect and if the second one is on the priority list so social ethics spirituality and morality must be enlisted among the educational curriculum. Indeed, the reality is inside of enclosing spiritualism in education system promotion of yogic practice is also required to consist a concrete base to incorporate education.

This could also mean unfolding the human mind to the possibilities of one's own self and let it decide what it wants to achieve. The qualitative aspect of education still remains a complex phenomenon and is great influences the quality of manpower for the social wellbeing. As the comparison between the ancient and present education system – highlighted on the basic structure of both the systems and philosophy - ancient education which contributed more towards the development in quality in man so that whatever man makes for him and others are driven by the highest will to protect and empower. The present education system though not intended to weigh down but remains individualistic/ self-centric and this calls for several alterations for the improvement in present education – and can implemented from ancient education for the overall development of students as a human beings.

The philosophy of development is always founded on the concept of sustainability and it has a direct impact on education and the scope of development is always futuristic. Nations across the turned towards the knowledge of indigenous traditions/cultures whose essential aim to be with aboriginality i.e. in natural state of being which is believed to be proving their ways to achieve the goal of sustainability and growth (together) in the name of development. But these elements of growth and development alongside sustainability have been seen only from the glasses of the destruction of the natural/given environment and indigenous knowledge has been seen as a savior to the issues of twenty fast century i.e. environment. Hence as a solution to the problem of development in terms of sustainability was seen as a solution and that solution was bestowed on the shoulders of the indigenous traditions and the knowledge tradition practiced by them.

The tradition of India which is essentially spiritual in nature aims at to attain liberation or *mokca* not for all but for the self. With the same aim, the ancient philosophy of education made especially provisions for the spiritual or idealistic growth in human personality, and hence the entire process of education is either associated with any culture and thereby considered as a sacred affair. If we go by the meaning of education in the last two centuries then this definition results in bringing out the best in human beings by aiming at the all-around development of human personality. But none of us questioned so far what are the domains which constitute the phrase 'all-round development. It appears that 'all-around development' has been conceptualized as an ideal to achieve as an aim that physically does not have any limitation. At this foundational aspect at the core, this paper attempts to explore the developmental meaning and context of education in India with regard to its traditional aim of it. The methodology of the paper is purely historically analytical in nature and aims at revisiting the concept with regard to its traditional and postmodern context.

India i.e. Bharat as we know it today through the historical references - is a land of the longest colonized space in the globe yet retaining its name and identity amidst all odds of religiosity language and culture at large. Indian system of the development of the concept of *mokca* which is considered as the supreme ideals of each and every human being is associated with a number of writings in Indian scholars - General overviews of Mokca or liberation are usually found in works that cover a wide spectrum of topics or systems developed over the ages in Indian philosophy. Some are massive compilations by a single author such as S. N.Dasgupta and R. Radhakrishnan in in volumes on *Indian Philosophy* or within series under the same name by Karl Potter in the recent past. Other general approaches are far briefer but still comprehensive works on Mokca in the context of Indian thought (at times historically organized) by Pramod Kumar in *Mokca: The Ultimate Goal of Indian Philosophy (1984)*, By M. Hiriyanna in *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (1949), Balbir Singh in *Atman and Moksha: Self and Self-Realization* (1981), or even in several articles of past two decades by several authors and experts on Indology. Due to the prestige of neo-Vedanta, the overviews have played up Vedanta, especially Sankara's Advaita Vedanta, but over the last few decades, the balance has shifted somewhat to yoga and Samkhya as seen in Dasgupta 1974 on yoga and in Halbfass 1991 on Samkhya. (Oxford Biographies: Ariel Glucklich). Hence the reason being these scholars highlighted the significance of Indian philosophical teaching to be taught among the educational institutions of India. With such aim the first education policy of India aimed at promoting the Indian philosophy in Indian

universities. Still, the unanswered question that why it is not been popularized/ implemented in Indian educational institutions with method and rigor? This has manyfold answers and relates to the context of India alongside its past.

Another significant aspect of Indianness to legitimize is through an attribution and appropriation to the tribal way of education which aims at sustainability and development without any formal transmutation of the knowledge and skill. This indigenous/ tribal (which I prefer to call it) worldview which constitutes in almost seventy percent of Indian land and population if the term tribal took in its cultural meaning without any created meaning of the tribal by the colonizers. The very meaning of the term not only represents what is the basis of this tradition but also lays its foundation for the ancient way and worldview of India i.e. Bharat. For instance, before the term, Hindu was coined in the 18th century and its meaning and usage we are still struggling to analyze. Indian knowledge tradition in a way needs to evolve from foundational totality to a multicultural dimension of the meaning. Plurality which is the basis of this tradition might regain its lost glory by giving due credit to the multiple cultures than associating one big brand tradition with it.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, it can be stated that, the best practices of an ancient pattern of education which are more towards achieving the sustainable goals for the future generations to come can be implemented in the modern education system too. The aim of modern education could also focus on character formation and not merely on the creation of resource/s. One separate domain needs to be preserved in system of education aiming – development of personality and philosophy in life and teaching rather than merely acquiring of Artha (wealth) and Kama (pleasure) – but creation of an amiable condition for teaching-learning – the reason being we cannot adapt to a completely different life altogether from what we are today – but can be enriched by the sense of peace, humanity, brotherhood. The quality of education is the key indicator for the standard of development of a self-sufficient state. A value such as education is not only a process but an end in itself which facilitates an individual to use them as skills in everyday life. Hence more than imparting a systemic and monotonous process of acquiring knowledge – the system of education can attempt to transmit the necessary and sustainable tradition to the next generation. That in turn might create an imaginative mind to create a new country of innovation.

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Footnotes

1. Hinduism can be seen as more of a cultural term than religious. The reason being, the cultural term is much wider in scope than its religious connotation and it includes all the different cultural groups who prefer to call themselves Sanātani than that of Hindu.

2. Prabhakar Samson "Religious Education inIndian Contexts" in *Studies in World Christianity*, Volume 12, Number 1, 2006, Edinburgh University Press. pp. 50-58 https://muse.jhu.edu/article/201833

3. Voluntary National Review Report on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, 2017

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5. The term "civilized" here means the common connotation of having an advanced or humane culture, society, etc. polite; well-bred; refined of or relating to civilized people: The civilized world must fight ignorance. easy to manage or control; well organized or ordered: The car is quiet and civilized, even in sharp turns.