

Education System in India in 6th Century B.C.

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ABSTRACT: In ancient India a child followed the occupation of his father, either religious or professional and his training in that particular field was provided by his father in his house. Over a period of time two system of education developed the Vedic and the Buddhist. As the name indicates in the former system Vedas, Vedangas, Upanishads and other allied subjects were taught while in the latter system, thoughts of all the major school of Buddhism was taught. While Sanskrit was the medium of instruction in the Vedic system of education, Pali was the medium of instruction in the Buddhist system of education. But both system offered vocational education apart from religious education of their respective faiths. There was also a purely vocational system of education wherein master craftsmen and artisans taught their skills to students who worked as apprentice under them.

This system collapsed during the Muslim invasion. And later British education system or Lord Cornwallis education system of making clerks started which is continuing till date, which put the education level down in India.

KEYWORDS-education, vedic, Buddhist, vocational, India, 6th century, B.C.

I. INTRODUCTION

Famous Educational Institutions:

- Takshasila: In Gandhar. This was a chief center of learning in 6th century B.C. Here sixteen branches of learning were taught in different schools; each presided by a special professor. There were schools of painting, sculpture, image making and handicrafts. But this university was reputed for its medical school. Some famous student of this medical school was Jivaka who cured king Bimbisara of Magadha and the great Buddha. Jivaka had studied here for seven years under the Rishi Atreya. Chanakaya was the greatest student of this great centre, everyone knows about him. Chandragupta Maurya pupil of Chanakaya, first Maurya Emperor and conqueror of Nanda and Seleucus Nicator. King Puru who fought with Alexander the Great.
- Nalanda: In Bihar. It was a centre of learning from the fifth century BC . Renowned for its cosmopolitan and catholic character, the University of Nalanda was famous for its faculty of Logic, Buddhist literature, Sukta, Mimansa, Hindu and Buddhist Philosophy, Ayurveda, Astrology etc. It was also a great centre of Pali, Prakrit, and Mahayana. It had 7 storied Library. There were 2,000 teachers and 10, 000 students. The teacher - student ratio was 1/5.[1,2,3]
- Vallabhi: While Nalanda was the famous seat of learning in eastern India, Vallabhi was the renowned seat of learning in the western India. If Nalanda was specializing in the higher studies of Mahayana Buddhism, Vallabhi was the center for the advanced learning in Hinyana Buddhism. Secular subjects like Arthasastra (economics), Niti Shastra (law) and Chikitsa Sastra (medicine) were also taught here and like Nalanda students from all parts of India used to come here to study. Students who graduated from this university used to be employed in the royal courts as administrators with huge responsibilities. Just like Nalanda University was destroyed by Muslim invaders, Vallabhi also met the same fate.
- Vikramasila: In Bihar. The University of Vikramasila was renowned for Tantric Buddhism or Hinyana.
- Ujjain: In MP. It was famous for its secular learning including mathematics and astronomy.
- Odantpuri: In Bihar. Another centre of Buddhist education, literature, Sanskrit.
- Banaras: In UP. It is one of the oldest city of World. Still a great centre of learning. Sanskrit, Philosophy, Veda, Ayurveda, Astrology, a well-known centre for teaching theology.

- Salotgi in Karnataka was an important Centre of learning. It had 27 hostels for its students who hailed from different provinces. This college was richly endowed by Narayana the minister of Krishna III with the revenues of houses, land and levies on marriages and other ceremonies.
- Ennayiram in Tamilnadu provided free boarding and tuition to 340 students. Other important centers of learning in South India were Sringeri and Kanchi.

Methods of Learning: In ancient India close relationship existed between the pupil and the teacher. The teacher [4,5,6] used to pay individual attention on his students and used to teach them according to their aptitude and capability. Knowledge was imparted orally and the different methods of learning were-

- Memorization– The preliminary stage of learning was learning by heart the sacred text through indefinite repetition and rehearsal by both the teacher and the taught.
- Critical Analysis– This was another method in which knowledge was comprehended. It was through critical analysis that Sri Ramanuja and Sri Madhvacharya differed from their teachers on the interpretation of the Brahmasutra composed by Sri Shankara and later came out with their own interpretation of the Brahmasutra. Madhvacharya even made his teacher subscribe to his view which shows that gurus were open to new ideas and views articulated by their students.
- Introspection– Sravana (listening), Manana (contemplation) and Nididhyasana (concentrated contemplation) of the truth so as to realize it was another method to study Brahma Vidya (Vedanta).
- Story telling– The teacher used stories and parables to explain. This was the method Buddha used to explain his doctrines.
- Question and Answer method– In this method the pupils used to ask questions and the teacher used to discuss at length on the topics and clear their doubts.
- Hands-on method– For professional courses including medical science, students/apprentices used to learn by observation and through practical method.
- Seminars– The students also gained knowledge through debates and discussions which were held at frequent intervals.

Aims of Education: The aims of education were to provide good training to young men and women in the performance of their social, economic and religious duties. Also preservation and enrichment of culture, character and personality development and cultivation of noble ideals were the other aims of education in ancient India.

Subject of Study: The main subjects of study in the Vedic system of education were the four Vedas, six Vedangas (phonetics, ritualistic knowledge, grammar, exegetics, metrics and astronomy), the Upanishads, the six darshanas (nyaya, vaisheshika, samkya, yoga, mimamsa and vedanta), puranas (history), tarka shastra (logic), etc.

The chief subjects of study in the Buddhist system of education were the three Pitakas (sutta, vinaya and abhidhamma), the works of all the eighteen schools of Buddhism, hetu-vidya, sabda-vidya, chikitsa-vidya, etc. The Vedas were also studied for acquiring comparative knowledge.[7,8,9]

The art of writing was known in India for a long time. Those who wanted to become religious leaders had to learn several scripts. In Jaina works like Samavaya Sutra and Pragnapara Sutra reference to 18 different scripts are available. Buddhist literary works like Lalitavistara and Mahavastu mention different types of scripts in vogue. While the former refer to 64 types of scripts the latter to about a dozen types of scripts. Regarding the curricula of school students, the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang says that children began by learning the alphabet and then began the study of five subjects like grammar, arts and crafts, medicine, logic and philosophy. This was the general scheme of studies for laymen of all sects. Other subjects of study were law

(dharmashastras), arithmetic, ethics, art and architecture (silpasastra), military science (dhanurvedya), performing arts, etc.

Vocational Education: A majority of people earned their livelihood by following various professions. Ancient Indian literature refers to sixty-four arts which include weaving, dyeing, spinning, art of tanning leather, manufacture of boats, chariots, the art of training elephants and horses, art of making jewels, implements and equipment, art of dance, music, agriculture, building houses, sculpture, medical science, veterinary science, the profession of a chemist, manufacture of perfumes and a host of other professions. In the vocational system of education young men used to work as apprentices under a master for a number of years and gained expertise in their respective professions. The apprentices were taught free of cost and provided with boarding and lodging by the master.

Types of Teachers:

- Acharya was a type of teacher who taught his pupil Vedas without charging fee from the pupils.
- Upadhyaya was the one who adopted teaching as a profession to earn his livelihood and taught only a portion of the Veda or Vedangas.
- Charakas or wandering scholars toured the country in quest of higher knowledge. Though not normally competent as teachers they were regarded as possible source of knowledge by Satapatha Brahmana. Hiuen Tsang was struck with the knowledge gained by some of the wandering teachers (called Bhikkhus and Sadhus during his times) and who had accumulated a treasure of knowledge by constant travel and who used to gladly impart it to others.
- Guru was the one who used to lead a *gruhasta* life and earn his livelihood after imparting education to his disciples and maintain his family.
- Yaujanasatika were teachers famous for their profound scholarship that students from distant places, as far as from a distance of hundreds of miles would come to seek their guidance.
- Sikshaka was a teacher who gave instruction in arts like dancing.[10,11,12]

II. DISCUSSION

Educational Institutions:

- The Gurukul was the house of the teacher who was a settled house-holder. After the initiation ceremony a child would leave his natural parents and reside in the house of his preceptor or Guru till the end of his studies.

The Decline: With the invasion of Muslim conquerors nearly all the centers of higher learning of the Hindus and Buddhists were destroyed. Nalanda was burnt to the ground and all its monks were slaughtered. Kanauj and Kashi were looted and plundered. Temples and educational institutions and libraries were put to destruction and they were replaced by mosques. In spite of such merciless and extensive destruction, Hindu educational institutions remained a living reality. They sustained strength from its inherent vitality and vigour and maintained the Hindu education system. Even during the reigns of terror and turmoil, merciless persecution and wanton destruction, the Hindu culture and scholarship continued to survive, though it had to migrate to more congenial regions within the country.

While the Buddhist system of education was extinguished, the Vedic system of education found patronage in the southern peninsula in places like Hampi, Sringeri and Kanchi. It was under the patronage of Vijayanagara rulers that the Vedic savants Sayana and Madhava wrote commentaries on the Vedas. It was in the south that Ramanujacharya, Basaveshwara and Madhvacharya propounded the philosophy of Vishishtadwaita, Shakti Vishishtadwaita and Dwaita. With regards to the vocational system of education many new crafts and skills were introduced in India after the advent of Muslim into India and till the establishment of British rule in India, many industries like textile manufacturing, ship building, jewelry making and other allied industries flourished which shows the skill and expertise Indians had and in turn the knowledge they had received from their teachers. The products of Indian industries not only fulfilled the needs of Asian and African countries, but were also in great demand in the markets of Europe.

That was the time India was known as Golden Bird. Ships laden with spices sail towards Rome and other European Countries and come back laden with Gold.

III. RESULTS

India was and is currently a land of diverse cultures, learnings, teachings, traditions and lifestyles. The Indian population was exposed to a teaching method that had the parents as the ultimate teachers and the kids as their students. A father would teach the techniques of his trade or work to his son while the mothers would teach their daughters how to cook, dance, sing and the other household chores.’ ‘Gradually, the need to have a proper and a sincere education bloomed in the minds of many scholars who developed a system called “Vedic Education”. The Vedic period lasted from 1000 B.C. to 600 B.C. The Vedas sowed the first seed of education in India because the word “Veda” itself meant “education”. They preached two types of education: the first type encompassed all the social aspects of living a great life and the second type dealt with the pursuit one has to make in attaining knowledge and wisdom, for their self-realisation and self-growth.’

‘Was this education open for all because India, back then, was very rigid in their caste preferences?’ I asked with sheer enthusiasm to hear more from my grandfather.

‘That’s a great question dear. Yes, you are right. Indians, back then, were very much soaked in their caste systems. However, though education seemed to be open to all caste categories, during the initial stages, it became a caste-based education system. Even in this Vedic Education system, education was supplied to the pupil based on their caste. For instance, learning about religion (Hinduism) and scriptures was a privilege given to Brahmins because they were treated as the direct representatives of god. They were also prominent figures in society because only Brahmins became teachers or gurus. Next in line were the Kshatriyas who learnt about warfare and its other techniques and aspects because they were the warriors. A country’s business, trade, commerce, art and craft, and also other vocational courses were taught to Vaishyas because they were treated as the “business class”. The men who were involved in other work were called Shudras or the “working class”. They had education to learn more about certain skills needed for their regular work or livelihood. In fact, every caste had a different age-limit to start their education. It was 8 years for Brahmins, 11 years for Kshatriyas and 12 years for Vaishyas.’

‘Did the women get to learn too?’ I asked out of concern.[13,14,15]

‘Of course, they did, but not like men. Women were restricted to their homes and had their learning in a closed environment while men learnt in a free space. Women were usually trained to be good at dancing, singing and housekeeping. Education to women actually continued through their husbands, but usually many women stopped their learning after their marriage. Such women fell into the category of Sadyodwahas. There were also certain women who pursued education till the very end of their lives, who did outthrow their marriage and dedicate their lives for the purpose of education. They were called Brahmadinis. There were also women sages who were called Rishikas. All of these are derived from the Rig Veda, a scripture of the Vedic literature that talks about women sages and the related hymns and the Divine Truth that was shared with them.’

‘Oh, I get it. Now explain to me in detail the objectives of the Vedic education.’ I ordered my grandad.

‘Seems someone is pretty much into this topic.’ My grandad winked at me. ‘Vedic education, which is seen as the traditional educational system of the Indians, was helping the students introspect their actions and lifestyle to craft a more religious and an upright life. Vedic education supported spiritual enlightenment, cultural awakening and self-realisation in large numbers. It also helped the gurus to spread the ancient culture to the upcoming generations, to make everyone stay rooted to the basic principles of human living. Through this education, a right and moral character was developed within the students. On the whole, the Vedic education focused on lifting the spiritual, mental, physical and moral health of the students, for a better tomorrow.’

‘Before we continue further into their curriculum, I have a small doubt regarding their admissions to the gurukulas. How did men find their masters?’ This was my next question to my grandad.

‘I’m sorry, I forgot to tell you this earlier. Back then, there were different types of gurus, who were differentiated not for their teachings but for the way they preached those teachings and how they perceived the “teaching” activity. The foremost type of teacher, who taught Vedas/the holy scriptures to his pupils without any fee, was called Acharya. There were some teachers who taught only a part of the Vedas or Vedangas in their teachings. They were called Upadhyaya. A few teachers wandered the country in search of profound knowledge. They were not treated as regular teachers but were a great source of learning and they were called Charakas. These Charakas accumulate more knowledge through their endless travels. A Guru is similar to a teacher you have now, the one who makes a livelihood by imparting his knowledge to his pupils/disciples. Sikshaka was the term given to those teachers who taught arts like singing, dancing, etc. The last type of teachers present during the early days of Indian education were the Yaujanasatikas, who had rich knowledge and wisdom, so students from far off places travelled to meet them for seeking guidance and education.’

‘Wow.’ That was all I could say after getting to know that there were 6 types of teachers back then.

‘Now, how and what did students learn from the Vedic education?’ I asked impatiently, to learn more.

‘Vedic education was mostly about promoting one’s skills and understanding one’s purpose in life. We follow a ritual called Vidyarambham, where children of 2-5 years of age are made to write the first letter of the alphabet of their native language. During this ritual, we offer our prayers to Goddess Saraswathi, who is considered to be the Hindu goddess of learning, wisdom, knowledge, art, speech and music. Vidyarambham or Akshara Abhyasam is usually called Ezhuthiniruthu in South India.’

‘What’s its significance? How is it related to the Vedic Education system?’ I asked my grandad.

‘This ritual did expose and introduce the child to the world of education. The roots of Vidyarambham trace back to the Vedic period. During those days, they also had another ceremony called Upanayana, where a kid was offered a sacred thread to indicate that he was ready to “lead” and “sacrifice” based on family, social and personal Karmas/duties and Niyamas/procedures. Once the Upanayana was over, the boys were allowed to go outside their parents’ house and learn from their gurus by staying in the guru’s house/gurukhula. Such boys were called Brahmacharin. As I said earlier, each caste had a different age-limit for the kids to start learning from their gurus. Though Brahmins dominated the field of education, the other 2 castes were also given certain privileges to attain spiritual enlightenment. However, the Shudras did not have any permission to read the holy scriptures/texts.’

‘So, what did the kids actually learn under the guidance of the gurus in their gurukhula?’ I reacted spontaneously.

‘The curriculum of the Vedic education comprised 4 main Vedas and 6 Vedangas, the 6 Darshanas, the Upanishads, Tarka shastra, Puranas and many more.’

Before my grandfather could continue any further, I personally felt the urge to know each title in detail and so I asked him, ‘Grandad, before you say anything else, explain to me in detail the 4 Vedas, 6 Vedangas and the other texts’.

He said ‘Alright, for now let’s learn about the Vedas, Vedangas, Upanishads and the Darshanas’ and continued, ‘The Vedas are nothing but the religious texts written in Vedic Sanskrit. These depict the traits of early Hinduism and carry writings from the old Sanskrit literature. The first among these Vedas is the Rig Veda (1500-1200 BCE) which consists of 10 mandalas/chapters with 1028 suktas/hymns and around 10,600 mantras/verses in total. These talk about cosmology, the origin of the universe, nature of god and other worldly philosophies. A few of its mantras are recited even now in praise of deities. Next in line come the Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. All of these are believed to have been written during 1200-900 BCE.’

‘These Vedas, including “Rig Veda”, consist of 4 more subdivisions, namely the Samhitas, that deal with benedictions and mantras, and the Aranyakas, the compiled version of texts based on ceremonies, rituals and sacrifices. Brahmanas carry commentaries made on Vedas and Vedic sacrificial rituals. Upanishads comprise texts that speak about philosophy, spirituality and meditation. There is also another category called Upasanas that deal with “worship”. This was added by a few experts, only later. Any educational institution that addressed to these Vedas was treated as “Orthodox” while the others were treated as “heterodox”. Let us discuss about heterodox institutions later.’

‘Coming back to the Vedangas, there are totally 6 types and each type is related to the study of the 4 Vedas as these are only the auxiliary disciples of ancient Hinduism. The first type is called Shiksha which deals with sounds. In modern day terms, they cover phonology, phonetics and pronunciations. Second type is the Chandas which focuses on the forms and usage of verse metres, also called as prosody. Vyakarana, which is related to grammar and linguistic analysis, is the third type. The fourth type of Vedangas cover Nirukta which help people understand the actual meaning of different words through etymology. The fifth type comprises Kalpa that gives instructions to people for performing each ritual. This helps people follow a concrete set of procedures for each ritual. The last type is called Jyotisha as it deals with astronomy and astrology and is used for fixing an auspicious time for performing any ritual. So, in short, the 6 Vedangas focus on phonetics, prosody, grammar and linguistic analysis, etymology, knowledge about ritual practices, and astronomy and astrology.’[16,17,18]

‘While the Vedas helped one attain practical and spiritual knowledge, the 6 Vedangas aided them in that process. The Upanishads/Vedanta also added to the practice of developing and imparting spiritual ideas in the minds of ancient Indians. This fuelled the emergence of fresh ideas and institutions that led to the evolution of education in India. Till date there are around 108 Upanishads found including the Brahma Sutra and the Bhagavad Gita.’

‘Students of the Vedic education were also exposed to the 6 Darshanas, also known as Hindu philosophies, that helped the gurus train their students to be in the best of their behaviour, character, ideals, thoughts and actions. This philosophy had 6 systems and they were Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Mimamsa, Vedanta and Vaisheshika. All of these were taught for preparing the students to learn right knowledge correctly, boost their mental, physical and spiritual strength, understand naturalism, practice dharma and sound living.’

‘Apart from these religious and spiritual learnings, Vedic education also focused on imparting the syllabus of Dharmashastras (study of law), Dhanurvedya (military science), Silpasastra (arts, ethics, architecture, etc.), Ciktsavidya (surgery and medicine), Arthashastra (administration, economics, etc.) and many more. Even physical education that enveloped hunting, archery, wrestling, etc, were all included in the curriculum of Vedic education.’

‘Apart from these, there were 64 types of art that were taught to the students as part of their vocational education. Training the elephants and horses, making chariots and boats, practicing agriculture and weaving, producing perfumes, and many such courses were also included in the Vedic curriculum. The concept of “apprenticeship” is a relatively older concept, as even in Vedic education, students worked under a master for certain years, with no fee for training, to become an expert in their field of study.’

‘These students learnt in different ways, as teachers taught in different methods.’

‘Grandad, before you get into the methods of teaching and learning, enlighten me about the infrastructure and the facilities that students had in their gurukhula.’ I instructed my grandfather.

‘Gurukhula was not just an educational space that encompassed passionate learners/students with one master/guru, but was also the guru’s abode.’

‘Were the students called as “students” back then?’ I asked, after having it linger in my mind for a while.

My grandfather gave a quick laugh and said, ‘No my dear. They were called Shishya which also meant “disciples”. The gurus were also called Acharya. As I had mentioned earlier, Acharya would teach the students Vedas for free in his gurukhula. Gurus gave equal importance to all shishyas, irrespective of their castes, which made their profession a moral and noble one. Unlike the modern-day schools, the ones you have now, the gurukhula system believed in “dignity of labour”.’

‘What does that mean?’ I asked my grandfather because I wasn’t sure where he was getting to.

‘Dignity of labour refers to the philosophy of how there’s dignity in every work you do. A scenario where you avoid doing something just because you feel that it’s below your social standards, is considered to be against the laws of this philosophy. For instance, before this lockdown, you used to go to school. You would go there, sit in your class to learn, roam around the campus during break hours and by evening, you’d come home. Meanwhile, have you ever taken a broomstick to clean the floors of your class? No, because there’s no need for it. However, that wasn’t the case with the students of the gurukhula education. They saw gurukhula as their home and got involved in doing manual labour, apart from their learning periods. They were supposed to serve their guru/Acharya till the end of their education. On the whole, the gurukhula system was also referred to as the “Guru-Shishya method”.’

‘But why did they have to serve their guru? They were just students, right?’ I argued.

‘Yes, they were students but during those days people believed in serving their mother, father, guru and guests, with utmost care and respect. They saw this as their most significant duty in life. There’s a saying in the Upanishads which supports the statement I had just said. Here, I’ll share it with you.

Matru devo bhavah!

Pitru devo bhavah!

Aacharya devo bhavah!

Atithi devo bhavah!

Did you get its meaning?’

‘It says that there are 4 gods in this world to whom we should render our service. First serve your mother, then your father, then your teacher and finally your guest.’ I responded with sheer excitement and cheer.

‘Bravo! Brilliant. You got it right my dear. Seems like this activity got you more excited, so here’s another task. There’s another mantra that we usually utter during prayers but let’s see if you know its meaning.

Guru brahma, guru Vishnu, guru devo maheshwarah

Guru sakshat prabrahma, tasma shree guruve namah.

What does this mean?’

‘I chant this mantra every day grandad. It means that guru is Brahma (the god who creates life), Vishnu (the god who protects life) and also Lord Shiva (the god who destroys life). Guru is considered the only “Parabrahma” or the “highest Brahman”, who has more strength, wisdom and power. The last 4 words state that I hereby bow to such a great and powerful guru.’ I had a big smile on my face after answering on point.

‘I’m impressed! So now it’s clear why students served their gurus at the gurukhula, right?’

‘Absolutely!’ I replied.

‘Now, understand the main purpose of gurukhula. The disciples followed strict codes of conduct during their course of education as they obeyed each and every word of their master. This brought them discipline, self-control, refinement in character and upliftment of personality. As students of every caste learned from the same guru, a sense of equality bloomed and the spells of virtue resided in every student’s heart and mind. Even friendships grew. Apart from these, the teachings brought intellectual development and spiritual growth in the students. Through gurukhula, people also preserved their culture and knowledge, by passing it on to the next generations, who in turn did the same. Even today,

despite all these technological advancements, we still stay rooted in our culture and traditions, the ones passed from generations to generations, because we've been exposed to them since our birth. On the whole, students developed their character, widened their contacts, became intellectual and reformed to be the best version of themselves through their education at the gurukhula.'

'Gurukhula was the pioneer in public schooling as it accommodated groups of students for the purpose of education. During the Vedic period, people were encouraged to remain as students till the age of 25. This allowed them to seek and learn more, before they started facing the real world. In gurukhula, students were mostly divided into 3 categories based on their age-limits. Vasu was the name given to those who had education till the age of 24. Rudra referred to those who had education till the age of 36. The last type was called Aditya, which enveloped those who learnt till the age of 48.'

'In the gurukhula, the guru was the ultimate authority, who taught each and every kid. Students learnt all the skills during their initial learning period. Meanwhile, the guru would analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each student and would make them master the skills they were more talented in. Just like how Drona gave special archery practices to Arjuna, in the mythology Mahabharata, even the students at the gurukhula enjoyed such a privilege. The guru laid special focus on each student, which is a trait that the present modern schools are trying to adopt. However, one major drawback in this system was that the students had less exposure because they learnt all the skills from the same teacher, for years. Also, by staying at the gurukhula, the students had little exposure to the outside world.'

'So, you are saying that boys got their education by staying at the guru's house, learning various subjects and skills and also serving their master.' I added.

'Yes, but not just boys, even girls, at a later period were allowed to get their education from the gurus by staying in the gurukhula. The concept of co-education had developed in the Vedic period itself.'

'But weren't the girls supposed to be taught within the walls of their houses?' I wanted to clarify my doubt. [19,20]

'During the early stages, women were restricted to their homes but as time passed, people understood the significance of treating both men and women equally. Even in the Manusmriti, which is one of the legal texts from the many Dharmashastras of Hinduism, the importance of equal education to all is mentioned. The Puranas showcase that women and men studied together, during olden days. Some of the famous women scholars were Maitreyi and Gargi. Even characters like Atreyi, Rahu and Pramdwara, and Kahod and Sujatha, act as a proof of how women were educated during early periods.'

'I promised I'll tell you a story, so here it is. I've mentioned 2 main women scholars and 3 other women characters from the Puranas. Whose story would you like to hear?'

My pulse shot up because it was 'Story time!'. Without much delay, I said, 'Kahod and Sujatha sounds more attractive to me. Now, tell me their story.'

'The story of Kahod and Sujatha is inscribed in the Chandogya Upanishad, which is considered to be the 9th Upanishad in the total canon of 108 Upanishads. To begin the story, there was a sage called Aruni or Uddalaka, who ran a gurukhula for teaching Vedas to the kids. Aruni was, in fact, seen as a great Hindu sage during his time, which was before the arrival of Buddha. Uddalaka's teachings were a central part in the Chandogya Upanishad and Brihadanyaka Upanishad.'

'Let's have a revision, shall we? What does an Upanishad mean?'

'Upanishads are Vedic texts written in Sanskrit during the late Vedic period. These texts carry the essence, beliefs and culture of Hinduism and are the oldest texts found so far.' I responded without much delay.

'Very good dear. Let us resume the story now. As Aruni was a great Vedic teacher who was running a gurukhula for the kids to teach them Vedas, he had a favourite student called Kahod. Kahod was a devoted and sincere student who stole the heart of his guru, Aruni. Meanwhile, Aruni's daughter, Sujatha, was also studying in her father's gurukhula.'

'So, Kahod and Sujatha were classmates?' I popped my question.

'Yes. This also shows that girls, back then, were allowed to study with boys, paving the way for co-education. Aruni got his daughter married to Kahod, after they finished their education, as Kahod was his favourite student. After marriage, Kahod started to teach the other kids Vedas and made them recite those, as part of his teaching. When Sujatha was pregnant, she started to sit near Kahod, while he recited the Vedas, in the thought of making their kid learn them from the womb. The child inside the womb eventually learnt those and even corrected his father, Kahod, when he made errors in reciting the Vedas to his students. This infuriated Kahod and made him curse his own son to be born with 8 ailments in his body, which was why the child was named as Ashtavakra, meaning 8 bends.'

I listened without moving my limbs as I was pretty shocked at how a father could curse his own child. Before I could react, my grandfather continued.

'Back then, Kahod was only assisting Aruni and was not earning much, which was when Sujatha suggested to her husband that he should go and see King Janaka who was the father of Sita, as mentioned in the mythological

text Ramayana, and ask for dakshina/donations. Following her words, Kahod started his journey and reached the King's palace where a debate competition was in session. Kahod decided to participate and win the competition to earn some money, but unfortunately, he was defeated by the court's scholar, Bandy, who was also the son of Lord Varuna (the god of water). Just like all the other defeated participants, even Kahod was immersed in water. When this bad news reached Sujatha and Aruni, they decided to keep this secret from the unborn baby.'

'After a few days, the baby was born with 8 crippled body parts. Though he was physically challenged, his intellect was unbeatable. For long, Ashtavakra believed Aruni to be his father and Aruni's son Shvetaketu to be his own brother. Ashtavakra loved Aruni a lot. Days went by and it was 12 years since the birth of Ashtavakra. He was sitting on the lap of Aruni when Shvetaketu came and whisked him away saying that Aruni was not his real father. This shook Ashtavakra because he hadn't expected his family to have hidden such a big secret from him. With hurt and pain, he ran to his mother, who told him the truth. Enraged, Ashtavakra journeyed to King Janaka's palace with his mother, where he used his intellectual strength and won the debate competition against Pandit Bandy. Ashtavakra demanded that Bandy be immersed in water, just like the other Brahmins, including Kahod. However, Bandy, before he was pushed to death, revealed the truth about how none of the Brahmins were actually dead but were just involved in a sacred ritual that his father (the god of water) was performing. After this, all of the Brahmins, including Kahod, came alive. Kahod was now immensely proud of his son, Ashtavakra. While travelling back home, he asked his son to take a dip in the waters of the "Samanga" river and Ashtavakra obeyed. To his surprise, Ashtavakra came out as a person with no deformities in his body as his curse was lifted. Later on, he became the guru of King Janaka and was also the author of a great Vedic text called "Astavakra Gita" or "Astavakra Samhita".'

'This is one hell of a story. I enjoyed it!' I exclaimed with satisfaction.

'I'm glad you enjoyed the story session.'

'But grandad, did each and every student in the gurukhula have such ingenuity and brain power? If yes, then how were they taught and trained to be such great masters?' I asked because I wanted to be like Ashtavakra.

'That's an interesting question and to answer it, you should know about the methods of teaching and learning that prevailed in the gurukhula during the Vedic period. The Gurukul system, as I had stated before, had one superior guru who would teach his students all the skills they needed to learn, with all due respect and equality. These gurukhulas were usually located in forests to expose students to the functions and characteristics of each element of nature. Apart from the different Vedas and other studies I quoted earlier, students were also taught fishing and hunting. By staying in the forests, students learnt the need and importance of preserving nature for a better life. Apart from these, there were 5 main methods that were practiced in the Gurukul system, which need to be revived again, for betterment in the present-day educational system.'

'What are those methods, grandad?' I asked immediately.

'The first method is how gurus taught their students in open spaces and not within the walls of a classroom. By exposing students to the natural and outdoor surroundings, they started to observe even the minute details of nature, which helped them in concentrating and getting to understand life and its ways better. It also encouraged them to think outside the box. This is called the "observe and learn" method. An open environment will always be a great space for studying. The second method laid focus on having face-to-face interactions for better understanding and more practical learning. Unlike the subject books you have now, those days, students had to memorise everything or learn from oral teachings. This was why students were encouraged to have interactions with those they met throughout their life. They also had personal conversations with the guru along with mediation, which was more like the counselling sessions you have now. The third method focused more light on the concept of "survival of the fittest." Students were trained to be independent in their lives.'

'Which means, they never got married?' I asked in a low voice because I thought my question was a bit absurd.

My grandfather laughed and said, 'No my dear, they were trained to tackle any life situation on their own is what I meant. Is that clear enough?'

'Yes. You may now continue, grandad.' I said instantly.

'By getting prepared to face any situation, be it escaping from a forest or protecting themselves during any natural outbreak/war, the students mastered the act of practical living. They were also trained to make huts with just leaves and other items available in the forest. Collecting firewood for cooking and picking fruits, leaves and other nutritional food items were all part of their learning, even though it wasn't prescribed in their curriculum. This was the third method of learning. The fourth method supported active debates and discussions among the students and scholars. This improved their public speaking skills and also tested the students' ability to put their wisdom into the right words. The last and fifth method highlighted the idea of discipline and mutual respect. When shishyas were acquainted with this theory on a regular basis, they developed a sense of compassion and respect for others. This imparted good values and thoughts in the students' minds, which makes us conclude that without a good teacher, the students will be lost in a world of evil.'

‘Now I understand why teachers, more than parents, matter in crafting the lives of students. I guess Brad Henry has perfectly put that into words by saying, “A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination and instil a love of learning”.’ I shared my thoughts.

‘Super. I should say that you are a terrific student. You grasp things quickly. I like it. Similar to how you are learning things now, students of the gurukhula system learnt through 7 different methods. As there were no prescribed Vedic textbooks, the gurus would verbally impart the knowledge to their shishyas, who in turn would memorise the sacred texts/Vedas through regular repetition and rehearsals. It is similar to how you learn a song, by singing it repeatedly. Another method that was adapted by the students to learn Vedanta/Brahma Vidya was to lay more focus on Sravana (listening), Manana (contemplation/inspection) and Nididhyasana (concentrated contemplation). Through this and with the process of introspection, the students learnt the Vedas and its ultimate truth.’

‘Were there any methods similar to the ones I follow now?’ I enquired of my grandad, just to see if there were any similarities with the ‘shishyas’ and ‘students’.

‘Of course, yes dear. Shishyas, back then, had the liberty to ask questions to which the guru would answer in detail. The freedom, you modern students have to clarify doubts with your teachers, was prevalent even during the Vedic period. Experts call this method the “Question and Answer method”. Apart from this, shishyas also had debates and discussions which increased awareness among them as each shared their learning, in their own way, which is similar to the seminars you have these days. They followed another technique similar to the modern “Hands-on method” which dealt with learning derived from observation. Just like how you go to a Physics lab and understand the workings of a pendulum through experiments, even shishyas, back then, had a similar experience while learning. Gurus, during those times, were open-minded, especially to the views and suggestions of their disciples, which is also similar to our present-day methods.’

‘Now, the last method that we are going to discuss about is similar to what I’m doing now.’

I gave it a thought for a while and asked, ‘Did the gurus use stories to explain theories and concepts to their shishyas? Just the way you are teaching me through short stories?’

‘Excellent guess. You are right. This method was, in fact, used by Buddha for all his teachings, which brings us to the next topic, the “Buddhist system of education.”’

‘Oh grandad, hold on. Before ending the topic, tell me about how shishyas graduated from their Vedic schools.’ I demanded.

‘Oops! How did I forget that? Here’s your answer. Shishyas were expected to be learning for at least 12 years, because that was the minimum period required to master one Veda. However, the shishyas had the liberty to choose the number of years they wanted to study, which we have discussed earlier. By the end, when a shishya became a graduate, or when they finished their schooling under a guru, they were called Snataka, while their graduation ceremony was called Samavartana. There’s an interesting fact to this.’

‘What’s that?’ I responded.

‘Only when shishyas became Snataka, were they allowed to enter grihastashrama, the life of a householder or a married person.’

‘Oh, but there were also child marriages during those days. How?’ I asked because I was really confused.

‘Now, before I dive into the Buddhist system of education, are you familiar with who Buddha was? Do you have any idea about what his ideals, teachings and beliefs were about?’

‘How can one not know about Buddha?’ I thought to myself as I had a few answers pop into my mind.

‘Buddha was actually named Siddhartha Gautama by his father, Suddhodana, the ruler of the Shakya clan. Once, a holy man prophesied for the young Gautama that, “He would be either a great king/military leader or a great spiritual leader.” This brought a sense of fear in the mind of Suddhodana, which made him build a palace just for Gautama, where he raised him in total luxury. He also shared his apprehensions of the outside world, religion and human life. Gautama got married to princess Yashodara, at the age of 16 and had a son, quite later, but he still lived a secluded life as he was accustomed to it since birth.’

After taking a sip of water, I continued.

‘Gautama, with less knowledge about the outside world and the real hardships that men and women faced, grew up to be an adult. One fine day, he decided to go out of his palace to roam the streets of his kingdom and this was when he witnessed the poor living conditions of his people, and he understood the obvious realities. He had 3 encounters that changed his purpose, course and future.

He saw a very old man and was quite taken aback, which was when his charioteer explained to him about how people grow old as years pass by. He then came across a diseased man, followed by a decaying corpse, from which he learnt about death and suffering. Finally, he encountered an ascetic (one who follows a strict and disciplined life, without

enjoying much of worldly pleasures) and the charioteer explained about how the ascetic had shun the world in order to find a route to escape from the human fears of suffering and death. This incident changed the entire course of Gautama's life as he left his family and his luxurious lifestyle, at the age of 29, and decided to walk a more spiritual path. He took that decision as he was deeply determined to relieve people from common universal suffering, which became his ultimate mission.' 'This mission led to his ascetic life, to which he instantaneously adapted. Six years passed by and Gautama was still searching for the ultimate truth. However, he was not alone in this as he had a group of five ascetics who meditated and learnt the teachings of various religious gurus. Gautama was still deprived of the knowledge he was seeking, which made him starve even more, without food, water and sleep, but this went in vain too. One day, a young girl offered Gautama a bowl of rice which was when he understood that punishing oneself with extremist thoughts and actions was not the path to be followed for reaching an enlightened state. This made him release himself from the harsh physical constraints he got himself confined to. However, this act convinced the other 5 ascetics that Gautama was not an ascetic anymore and so they left him. By evening, Gautama sat under a Bodhi tree and started to meditate until he got the answers he was searching for a long time. All of a sudden, he started to get visions of all the past, present and future happenings in his mind which made him understand the ultimate truth about life. This was when Gautama, a 5th century prince, transformed into an "Enlightened Being" called "The Buddha".' I gave a pause. 'Wonderful dear.'

'Wait before you appreciate me, grandad because only now I'm getting to the main part. So, Gautama found all the answers he was searching for, but was reluctant to teach them to others because he found it impossible to put to words, the learning he had gained. However, people believe that Lord Brahma convinced Buddha to become a spiritual teacher. Buddha started his journey to meet the five ascetics with whom he had travelled for a while in his spiritual journey and convinced them to share their learning to a thousand others. This was when Buddha became a spiritual leader because he found many disciples following his worldly philosophy.' I finished the story and took a deep breath.

'Marvellous. You know quite a lot. Great! So, what did Buddha teach the others? What was his worldly philosophy? Are you aware about that?'

'I'm not pretty sure about that.' I answered with slight disappointment.

'Don't worry. I've got you. Let me continue the story. Buddha taught the importance of having a balance in life, of how one must avoid indulging themselves in either aesthetic or sensuous extremisms. Such balanced living was called "the Middle Way" by Buddha. Slowly a crowd gathered around Buddha along with the other 5 ascetics and so Buddha gave his first sermon, also known as Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma. From that sermon, he elucidated the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path of life, which later became the pillars of Buddhism.'

'Only after this incident, the other 5 ascetics became Buddha's disciples and set out to form a community of monks called "the Sangha." Everyone, irrespective of their class, gender, race and religion were admitted for the mere purpose of achieving enlightenment. However, Buddha continued his teachings as he kept travelling to familiar and unfamiliar places. Buddha believed in the phrase "be your own light" and this was what he shared to his disciples, until his last breath. He told them that they should not follow a leader but should be their own leader. Finally, at the age of 80, Buddha died, but his philosophy shook many religions and is still prevalent in many parts of the world.'

'However, Buddhism was a result of the religious movements that Buddha's disciples started after his death, which was around 483 B.C. By the 3rd century, Buddhist monasteries and missionaries were promoted by the great Mauryan emperor, Ashoka the Great. He even declared Buddhism the state religion of India. By these means, the philosophies shared by Buddha spread widely and were taught to people for centuries. Some followers made their own interpretations to those philosophies, which brought diversified thoughts. Even those were encouraged.'

'How did this new religion affect the already existing Vedic practices in India?' I questioned in a serious tone.

'Buddhism broke the social stigma that prevailed during the time of Buddha. Racial and caste discrimination in society, especially in the field of education was destroyed by the new Buddhist principles as it supported people of all castes to study and learn. With the emergence of Buddhism, a religious revolution broke out during 600 B.C. in India. The 62 heretical doctrines were considered outdated by some sections of society as a new doctrine emerged. The new doctrine was called "Buddhist doctrine." With the new-age Buddhist education, civilisation progressed in all aspects, all over India and this paved the way for many learning centres in India.'

'On an overall basis, the Buddhist system of education in India focused on bringing a spiritual and mental development to all its students, just to free themselves from the earthly pleasures and bondages. This was because Buddha preached that by removing avidya or ignorance from one's life, one can live in an ethical and moral way, thereby leading to Nirvana/Mukti (a state of eternal bliss). He also believed that chanting the Vedic hymns repeatedly was unsuccessful in helping people clear wrong desires from their minds. Instead, he advised people to follow the Arya Asthang marga, also known as the Noble Eightfold path. Therefore, the ultimate aim of Buddhist education was to make the Noble Eightfold path familiar to people.'

'What is the Noble Eightfold path?' I asked instantly.[21,22]

‘It involves the practices of right view, right resolve, right speech, right livelihood, right effort, right conduct, right concentration and right mindfulness. Buddha stated that this Noble Eightfold path will guide one to lead an enlightened and moral life. Apart from this, Buddhist education also focused on teaching the “law of Varna” to its students/monks. Even the importance of Ahimsa was imparted to the students. All of these were taught along with religious education to make the students morally and spiritually upright. Students were also given training to earn their livelihood.’
‘Did everyone enjoy this rich and intellectual education?’ My question was spontaneous.

‘Not right from the start, because only the members of the monastery were exposed to the early Buddhist education. However, it did not last long as the gates of Buddhist education were open to all, including laymen and women. In fact, the Buddhists were the first to bring an open education to all sects of society and this was a revolution that changed the social lifestyle and norms. The modern Buddhist schools we have now, are open to the entire world.’

‘Interesting. What was their curriculum?’ I asked because I was curious about how the Buddhist schools worked.

‘Buddhist schools followed a common curriculum through which teachers trained their students to be mentally, physically and spiritually strong. They also taught students the ways to attain enlightenment or the state which makes one free from the earthly pleasures like desire, lust, etc. However, Buddhism, after a certain period of time, became a single institution with different branches.’

‘I’m not sure I follow you.’ I said as I was a little confused with what my grandad had just said.

‘Buddhism got diversified soon after Buddha’s death as a few disciples had their own interpretation of the religious Vinaya and scriptures. Buddha did not appoint a direct successor, instead asked all his disciples to continue living in the way that he had preached till the very end. When Buddha died, the members of the Sangha conducted various Buddhist council meetings to interpret each Buddhist doctrine and practice, and to modify them according to the changes in time. The first Buddhist council was presided over by Mahakasyapa, one of the first disciples of Buddha, in a cave near Rajagriha (the place where Buddha attained his enlightenment). King Ajathasatru ruled Rajagriha at that time and helped the monks organise their first Buddhist council for preserving Suttas (Buddha’s sayings) and Vinaya (the rules that refer to monastic discipline). Though there’s no prominent evidence as to when this council took place, there are a few proofs as to what happened during that council meeting. It is believed that Ananda recited the Suttas while Upali recited the Vinaya.’

‘Who were Ananda and Upali? I’ve never heard about them before. Why did they have to recite everything?’ I asked.

‘Ananda was believed to be Buddha’s first cousin, but there is no adequate proof for that. However, it is proved in the early texts that Ananda became a monk and learnt from Punna Mantaniputta for 20 years. Ananda, in fact, was one among the ten principal disciples that Buddha had and was known for his strong memory. Buddha made him his assistant and asked him to act as an intermediary between him and the common people. Ananda was also the mouthpiece that Buddha used for sharing his knowledge to the members of the Sangha. Till the end of Buddha’s life, Ananda served as a sincere secretary, mouthpiece and assistant. During the first Buddhist council, Ananda, well-known for his powerful memory, recited all the teachings of Buddha. These recollected thoughts of Ananda were inscribed into texts that were called the Sutta-Pitaka. These are considered to be the early Buddhist texts. Therefore, if not for Ananda, many of Buddha’s teachings would have gone into the dark and wouldn’t have survived for long, which is why he’s called the Treasurer of the Dhamma.’

‘Upali, who was also one among the ten principal disciples of Buddha, was responsible for the reciting, and reviewing the monastic disciplines of Buddhism or the Sangha’s code of conduct. Upali, being a barber by profession, belonged to the low caste. However, he joined the Sangha as a child and was ordained even before the Sakya princes. This proves that Buddhism was not biased towards any caste, instead was open to all. He was also consulted in case of any doubts or issues regarding Vinaya, as he was an expert and the person in charge. This is the reason why Upali was made to recite the Vinaya/the rules that have to be followed by the monks of the Sangha, during the first Buddhist council meeting.’

‘The teachings and Vinaya were recited during the council meeting, because during those days only oral teaching was in practice. There were no inscriptions to read, so all that one could do was to listen, remember and learn. To have a record of all the teachings of Buddha as texts, his disciples conducted the first Buddhist council meeting. This was also required as the Sangha population increased and the ways of educating them called for improvements and updates. Till date, there are around 6 Vinaya traditions that are recorded as texts and this happened during the first and second Buddhist council meetings.’

‘Apart from this, there were around three other Buddhist council meetings which were conducted to improvise the norms of the Buddhist schools and the Vinaya of the Sangha. As the disciples grew in number, so did the branches of Buddhism. Many disciples settled in different parts of the world, leading to different methods of teaching and preaching Buddhism. On the whole, Buddhism fragmented into different sects or groups due to different languages and landscapes, influence of other religious schools, disagreements on certain doctrines and the absence of a central or single authority/organisational structure.’

‘So, does this mean that there were many types of Buddhist schools which functioned with different curricula?’ I placed my question immediately.

‘Buddhist schools preached almost the same syllabus but varied in their course of action, location and names. The first division occurred in Buddhism, during the 5th century B.C., which was a few centuries after Buddha’s demise. This division was basically because of the differences people had in Vinaya, then in the doctrines and finally in their geographical locations. It was between the minority Sthaviravada and the majority Mahasamghika that this division took place at first. One of the common features of these early Buddhist schools was the division of the modes of Buddhist practices into different “vehicles/vana.”’

‘What were the names of the early Buddhist schools, grandad?’ I asked.

‘When the original Sangha split into 2, after Buddha’s demise, even the Buddhist schools were divided into Sthaviranikaya and Mahasamghika. After a certain period, the Buddhist schools were further divided into the Saryastiyadins, the Dharmaguptakas, the Vibhaviyavada and another 15-17 types of schools.’

‘Now that you are quite familiar with the Buddhist schools, it is time for you to know what was taught in those schools. As I had mentioned earlier, all the Buddhist schools taught their monks three main aspects of life which constituted meditation, discipline and wisdom. Wisdom was taught to be the ultimate goal of one’s life and that it could be achieved through deep meditation. All of the teachings in these Buddhist schools stuck to these 3 basic points. Another main objective of the Buddhist schools was to expose the students to the rules of the Sangha and guide them through.’

‘One of the main teachings included the teaching of Tripitaka (the sacred canon of Theravada Buddhism), which carried all the teachings, philosophies and messages of Buddha, along with the rules framed for the Bhikkhunis and Bhikkhus, in the Pali language.’

‘Who are Bhikkhunis and Bhikkhus?’ I raised my query to my grandad.

‘Bhikkhu was the term given to an ordained male monk/the one who had become an adherent member of Buddhism. Ordained female members of Buddhism were called bhikkhuni/nuns. However, anyone below the age of 20 was not allowed to be ordained, instead were considered sramanera (a male novice monk) and sramaneri (a female novice nun).’

‘Both bhikkhu and bhikkhuni were obliged to follow a certain set of rules as their code of conduct called pratimoksa, which consisted of 227 rules for bhikkhus and 311 rules for bhikkhunis.’

‘Why did nuns have more rules than monks?’ I asked in a curious tone.

‘Women had to fight for their rights and equality in those days. In fact, Gautama Buddha was reluctant at first to accept women as disciples or nuns. However, it was Mahapaiapati Gotami, Gautama’s aunt and foster-mother, who convinced Buddha to accept women as followers. She was also the first ordained bhikkhuni who encouraged and inspired many other women. When it comes to the rules, Buddha formulated them and made them more severe for women because he believed that bhikkhunis should have a stricter code of conduct. Even in the case of sramaneri, they were taught to assist sramanera and were not considered equal. All of these were followed in early Buddhist schools, however are not considered currently.’

‘What do you mean by “ordained monks,” grandad?’ I raised a question.

‘Ordained monks refer to those men who left their homes to be part of the Sangha or the Buddhist monastic order after their ordination ceremony. Similar to the Upanayana ceremony, which was followed in the Vedic system of education, Buddhists performed the ordination ceremony with many rules. The ceremony had two parts: pabbajja (going-forth) and upasampada (acceptance). Going-forth referred to the act of how a person leaves their home and decides to spend the rest of their life as a homeless disciple of Buddha in monasteries. This was when men and women shaved their heads, started to wear ochre robes and began to live a life disciplined with the ten precepts of Buddhism. However, the minimum age requirement for officially deciding to become a monk/nun was 15 years.’

‘Acceptance was the phase where one became an official member of the Sangha or a full-fledged monk/nun through the democratic Upasampada ceremony. In this ceremony, the novice (the one who has completed 12 years of education) has to present themselves in front of the other monks, who in turn would vote in favour or against them. A novice was said to be accepted as a permanent member in the Sangha only when they received majority of votes in their favour. This was usually performed for those who were at least 20 years old because the basic education that monks received in the schools was for a minimum of 12 years. However, this ceremony was simplified for the sramaneras and sramaneri. For bhikkhunis, it is proved that they were deprived of full ordination.’

‘Ordination evolved during the years because at each phase, its rules, ceremonies and many factors were interpreted in different ways leading to many flaws and contradictions. Other factors that led to changes in ordination were the political, social and economic factors along with doctrinal debates and dynamics.’

‘Students learnt Tripitaka in their Buddhist schools. Apart from those, what other things did they learn?’ I asked to get a better understanding of the curriculum of Buddhist education.

‘Tripitaka consisted of Sutta Pitaka (verses of truth), Vinaya Pitaka (monastic rules of conduct) and Abhidhamma Pitaka (Summary of Dharma). This brought together, both Buddha’s worldly philosophies and the code of conduct to the monks and nuns. However, only the monks were allowed and encouraged to have an education which was spiritual

and laid more focus on attaining liberation in life. This was provided to them through the religious books and scriptures. Apart from these, students were also taught to be experts in weaving, spinning, tailoring, surgery, accountancy, cloth printing, sketching and coinage. These additional subjects, other than the religious texts, came into practice with the spread of Buddhism among all sectors of people. Arts, science, architecture, sculpture and many other professional courses/subjects improved the scope of learning for the general public. On the whole, Buddhist schools transformed into institutions that served for the welfare of mankind rather than serving only for religious purposes.'

'What was the language in which these teachings were conducted?' I asked.

'During the initial stages, the Buddhist schools taught kids in their mother tongue but later, Pali and Sanskrit were made the mediums of instruction. Days passed and so did the educational practices. Education in both the languages varied in accordance with their teaching methods. Even a special Sanskrit Buddhist literature emerged because there were many teachers like Asanga, Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, Candrakirti and Shantideva, who carried the Sanskrit Buddhist education practices to many.'

'What methods were followed by teachers in the Buddhist schools?' I asked.

'The full-fledged monks became teachers after 10 years of living a strict and spiritual life including 8 years of Bhikshu education. They were supposed to lead a life with purity of character and thoughts, and generosity. Lifelong celibacy was to be adopted by the teachers without any exceptions. Teachers and students lived together in the monasteries/vihara which paved the way for a more personal and spiritual relation between both. They were also responsible for those monasteries, which was why every action inside it followed the same code of conduct. The students were expected to serve their masters/teachers while the teachers imparted education to the students. Teachers took good care of all of their pupils by providing them with clothes, food, shelter and also their undivided attention. Teachers worked to ensure development of their students' moral, physical, emotional, spiritual and mental states.'

'Teachers had their basic duties, which were to educate their students through discussions, lectures, debates, propagation, question and answer method, and oral transformation of information regarding the Buddhist religion, Sangha's code of conduct and the other social subjects needed for mankind. Meditation was an unavoidable part in their teaching methods. The basic aim for the teachers was to make their students all-rounders, which was why every student learnt every subject. Apart from teachers teaching the Tripitaka, they also taught the philosophical principles of Buddhism through Pratitya samutpada, arthkrivakaritva, anatnavada and ksanikavada. The five Tatvas/Skandas under 5 categories and Karmavad were also included in the curriculum that the Buddhist schools followed.'

'Similar to the Vedic gurukhulas, each Buddhist vihara, with different Bhikshus as teachers, had their own ways of teaching students and apprentices. Imitation was followed by all because students learnt each and every word of the sacred texts and took their teachers as their role-model. The latter provided a strong reason for the teachers to stick to a strict code of conduct. However, despite such differences, the teacher and student had a mutual self-esteem which stipulated trust, respect and affection towards each other. Students stayed with their teachers for a minimum period of 12 years and regarded them to be their intellectual or spiritual father.'

'Sounds interesting. Were the students expected to follow a strict routine similar to the one present in the gurukhula system?' I asked as I was curious to know about the students' life in the Buddhist vihara/monasteries.

'As I had mentioned earlier, teachers and students lived together in the monasteries which accelerated a better understanding and a cordial relationship between both. The teacher acted as the overall guardian to their students, while students served their masters. A general routine of a sramanera/novice student began with them waking up early in the morning and starting to serve their master by attending to menial jobs. This extended to cooking food, washing his clothes and cleaning the used utensils. Students placed everything they owned or received with their master because the teacher was the ultimate authority and the students were just his disciples, who had no connection with the materialistic world. All of these were mandatory for the students to prepare themselves to learn from their master/teacher. This was also part of their education as it made the students more disciplined and inclined to serve others, which was the basic principle of Buddhism.'

'Students were also not that privileged to interrupt their teacher in speaking, and were not allowed to correct their mistakes. Teachers expelled certain students who had no inclination, devotion and affection towards him and the Buddhist practices. A student who seemed to be with no shame or any great reverence was also expelled. However, expulsion of a student had certain rules and was not based on an individual's decision.'

'I find these monasteries similar to the gurukhulas. However, what was the actual name given to the Buddhist teachers?' I questioned to know the exact details.

'Good question. The Buddhist teachers were divided into two categories: Acharya and Upadhayas. Acharya was a senior teacher in Buddhism while Upadhaya was a teacher who taught the novices and ranked below the Archaryas. Similar to the Acharyas of the Vedic period, even the Buddhist Acharyas taught many students simultaneously, for free. However, these Acharyas focused on the high-level subjects while Upadhayas focused on imparting the basic monastic vows and precepts to the novices. Upadhayas were also called "master of novices." Here's another interesting fact about the Buddhist schools. They, unlike the Vedic schools, encouraged the students to learn other religious

philosophies, culture and practices. Talking of other religions, it is time for us to move to Jainism and the educational system that prevailed during its time period.'

IV. CONCLUSION

'Jainism is quite relevant to Hinduism and similar to Buddhism. However, people fragmented into different religious groups due to clashes in their opinions about life and living. While one sect believed in the atman or soul, another group of people preached against it and declared themselves "heterodox". During the 6th century B.C, a few people decided to sacrifice all worldly pleasures and live a rigid, strict and spiritual life. This led to a movement called Shramnic movement that separated people into two distinct philosophical groups in India. One was related to the Vedas/Hinduism, which followed the astika (believer in God) philosophy as their ultimate objective while the other pointed to different religions that followed nastika (an atheist) as their primary philosophy. Jainism along with Buddhism was one among the nastika group of religions.'

'So, how and when did Jainism prosper in India? Who started it?' It seemed like I never ran out of questions because I understood I was looking for more answers.

'The exact time, date and year of Jainism's birth is still unclear in the pages of history. However, on a collective level, historians have proved that there were twenty-four spiritual teachers who preached the objectives of Jainism to others. These teachers were called tirthankara. Mahavira/Varshamana, the 24th tirthankara, was believed to be a contemporary of Gautama Buddha. This proves that Jainism existed in India even before Buddhism. Even Chandragupta Maurya, who was the grandfather of Ashoka the Great (the one who spread Buddhism), was a Jain. However, the lives of Gautama and Mahavira are similar because both renounced their comfortable lives and began an ascetic lifestyle, which later led to their spiritual enlightenment. Similar to Buddha, Mahavira taught many philosophical lessons and left many life lessons for thousands of his disciples to share and follow.'

'After Mahavira's death in 527 B.C, his disciples who had memorised his teachings, began teaching others the same. However, as years passed, people started to forget a few lessons of Mahavira, which was why Jain council meetings were conducted.'

'Were these council meetings similar to the Buddhist council meetings? Did Jains convert the oral teachings of their guru into written texts for better teaching and long survival?' I asked.

'You are right, my dear. Jain council meetings were convened to document Mahavira's oral teachings. Though there were early scriptures of Jainism, which were called Purva, it was hard for the Jains to preserve them without any actual inscriptions. There were fourteen Purvas, but as days passed, they went missing, which was why the council meetings were conducted to find an immediate solution. There were more than 3 meetings and each meeting focused on those aspects that would improve Jainism as a religion of practice. The practice of Jainism spread from Bihar to Karnataka and other Indian states. With the spread of these religious practices came the conflict of thoughts.'

'Jainism split into Digambara and Svetambara, based on their schools of thought. While the former refers to those monks who are considered to be the strictest ascetics, who even refuse to wear clothes, the latter refers to those monks who wear a white robe. However, both follow the same principles of Jainism. So, you need to understand that though Jainism split into two groups, Jains followed the same basic objectives and teachings, but through different practices.'

'What exactly did Mahavira teach his disciples?' I voiced my question.

'Mahavira preached mahavratas, which was nothing but a compilation of vows of satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence), brahmacharya (chastity), asteya (non-stealing) and aparigraha (non-attachment). The principles of reality or Anekantavada were also preached by Mahavira. Apart from these were his 55 recitations/pravachana and the Uttaraadhyayana-sutra, a collection of his lectures. Indrabhuti Gautama, who was the leader of the first 11 disciples of Mahavira, compiled Mahavira's teachings into "Jain Agamas". Nevertheless, these Jain Agamas were widely taught in the Svetambara tradition as its authenticity was questioned in the Digambara tradition.'

'Mahavira's disciples became teachers who taught a wider sect of Jains and this slowly became the foundation of the Jainism system of education. The main objective of this system was to liberate humans from the worldly pleasures through a strict code of conduct. This was also termed as Moksha in Jainism. Another area that these schools focused on was "self-help", which helped in the teaching of the philosophy of nastika/atheism. Along with these, the Five Vows of Mahavira were also taught to the students. There were also three core principles that guided Jainism: right belief, right conduct and right knowledge. These core principles were taught to guide students to reach the enlightened state. In short, the Jainism system of education focused on guiding people on the path of liberation through knowledge and efforts, which finally led a person to their Jivan Moksha and also to Dravya Moksha (higher level).'

'So, how was the Jainism system of education practised? What was their prescribed curriculum, methods of teaching and learning, types of teachers and students, etc?' I asked.

'Before you understand the curriculum of Jainism system of education, you need to know the infrastructure that supported it. As an initial attempt, Jains built caves/lenas/layanas for the monks and nuns near their temples/jinalayas.

Slowly, the jinalayas, which were used for meditation and worship, transformed into a centre for learning. As caves were considered to be only a temporary means of residence for the Jain monks, permanent residential quarters were built. These quarters were called Basadi and were considered to be a place for wandering monks and group worship, and a residence for teachers, students and scholars. Basadis were built with huge investments over a large area in Karnataka.'

'Similar to that of Buddhist schools, even Jainism system of education had two main types of teachers: acharyas and upadhyayas. Acharyas were the learned and nomadic gurus who headed the basadis. These acharyas were always accompanied by a group of monks/sadhhus called gachchas, while they toured several places. Upadhyayas were the subject teachers who stood below acharyas in the educational hierarchy order. Even nuns/women monks were part of the sadhus who accompanied acharyas in their travel. Such Jain nuns were called kanti/ganti/sadhvi. They have also contributed to the spread of Jainism and its teachings, in large numbers.'

'Acharyas, upadhyayas, sadhus and sadhvis were ascetics who renounced their family, marriage and other worldly pleasures. It was in fact mandatory for the teachers to lead an ascetic life because the philosophies of Jainism focused on liberating humans from the bondage they had with the world and its pleasures. This is also another important factor as to why these four types of teachers, who lived together as a community, kept travelling instead of getting attached to one place or group of people. These teachers were welcomed with much hospitality and were accommodated in the basadis by the locals. The local people organised festivals and other ceremonies in the basadis they maintained and administered. Whenever an archarya visited a matha, the entire village celebrated and allowed the acharya to clarify various religious doubts and help many resolve their life problems.'

'These basadis were a great place of worship and learning, where the nomadic archaryas and other gurus guided the students in their social, economic, spiritual and physical growth. Apart from these jinalayas, other Jain monasteries/mathas were also established to cater to larger groups of people. Even members of other religious groups were accepted, accommodated and educated in the jinalayas/basadis and Jain mathas. In the mathas and basadis, the student ascetics were accommodated along with sadhus and sadhvis, while acharyas and upadhyayas roamed different places for preaching their knowledge. However, the place where the teaching and learning happened was called Pathasala.'

'How were people admitted in the Jain matha, grandad?' I enquired with speculation.

'The Jain matha supported both primary and secondary education. The minimum age requirement for a boy to become a student was 5 years. Every boy had to be initiated by the archarya or upadhaya to begin his education at the matha. The initiation was all about making the boys draw letters of siddhamatraka/table on fine sand spread over a board. Once this was mastered by the boys, they were made to write on kadata/folded blackboards with balapa/chalk. As the final step, they were expected to write on palm leaves.'

'Now, let us understand the curriculum of Jainism system of education. Many Jain texts were written in Sanskrit and Prakrit but were later translated to Kannada (in Karnataka) and Ardhamagadhi (in North India) to promote various groups of locals to read these Jain texts. The basic subject learnt by many (both boys and girls) was the Ratnakaranda sravakacara/code of conduct, which was a handbook of 150 verses intended for householders. This book was written in Sanskrit by sage Samantabhadra but was later translated to many regional languages in India. Apart from this, other Vedas, Upanishads, shastras, darshanas and puranas were also taught to the students in Pathasalas. Jains also added the subjects of chemistry, vijnana (science), manufacturing of small machines and five other subjects to the already existing 64 arts streams in their curriculum. This was because Jainism was dominated by the merchant class which paved the way for more vocational and trading courses.'

'In general, the curriculum of the Jain system was centred around the belief that one had to understand and accept their Jiva/life as it was gifted to them, not by the grace of god but by their own deeds. Their curriculum also helped one gain control over their mind, speech and body, which in turn led to moral conduct and non-violence. With the help of various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, the Jain system helped one attain salvation by the end of their education. Vocational education was also imparted to the students with the aim of improving the economic condition of the country and its manpower.'

'So, in short, the Jainism system of education imparted to its students, natural and social sciences in addition to vocational and moral education with the help of various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. What methods were used by the teachers to teach these and how did the students learn them?' I asked.

'The prominent method of teaching adopted by the Jainism system of education was the practical/experimental method. The experimental method proved to be effective in liberating the monks from their worldly pleasures and thus transforming them into Jains (ones who have overcome their sensual vices). Therefore, practical activities were given more importance in the process of imparting education. In fact, this system of education might sound modern to you because they formulated a method which gave importance and respect to each student's point of view. A subject was taught along many angles and no particular interpretation was imposed on the students. This supported and encouraged teachers to have coordination with the students, thus easing the process of imparting education. Teachers and students got a thorough knowledge of each subject through this method.'

‘Students were encouraged to learn theories and lessons through experiments and practical application. This can also be called “learning by doing method”. Similar to teachers, students at Jain schools understood that each subject had multiple interpretations and that one should be open to all those rather than being rigid in their point of view. Therefore, a student learnt how to listen to others’ opinions. All of these allowed a student to maintain equipoise throughout their life.’

‘On the whole, the Jainism system of education stimulated teachers and students to be involved in healthy discussions (vada) and debates. This improved student participation and acted as a platform for teachers to understand their students. Group activities were also highlighted to bring self-control and responsibility in the minds of the students. This system of education also wrapped up the essence of students’ responsibility towards their nation in its educational methods. Apart from these, the practice-based education which led to vocational training is another feature of Jainism system of education.’

‘Let me summarise what you just said. The Jainism system of education stressed upon practical methods like experimental learning, learning by doing, coordination in teaching and vocational training to impart knowledge to its students.’ I said with much confidence.

‘You are 100% right. However, though the methods of teaching were quite different from those of the Vedic period, the learning process remained the same. Students learnt their subjects by memorising, repeating and reproducing. This was due to the presence of oral teaching and training. All of these prove that Jains were great orators who uplifted Jainism over the other religions through their speeches, discussions and logical arguments. Self-study was encouraged in the Jain schools which motivated the students to learn out of interest rather than through compulsion. Therefore, the Jainism system of education paved the way for a better livelihood and practical living.’

‘What do you mean by “practical living”? Weren’t the monks supposed to lead an ascetic life?’ I asked.

‘You are right. According to Jains, an ascetic life was more practical than the normal way of living. This was why students were trained to be deprived of the urge to find joy in all the worldly possessions, right from a young age. In fact, they were trained to restrain their basic instincts like sorrow, anger, joy, and treat all living beings equal, irrespective of size, age, species, etc.’

‘How were the students trained through this method?’ I asked.

‘Once the students were admitted in the jinalayas, shelter, books, food and even medical facilities were provided to them for free. However, there was a supervisor/niryapaka who made sure that every student obeyed the strict code of conduct. The violators and wrongdoers were punished and admonished. Students were also exposed to rigorous training and activities.’

‘What do you mean by that, grandad?’ I questioned.

‘Students were expected to wake up early, make arrangements for their everyday needs and beg for food. They were also expected to serve their masters/gurus/teachers. Apart from this, they also had a strict code of conduct and you know what it was.’

‘How did the Jain schools run? Were there any challenges in running the schools?’ I asked.

‘Though the students never paid any fees, there were donations that came from the kings and locals for running the schools. Adding to this, were the donations from the affluent trading class.’

‘What was the role of women in the Jainism system of education? Were they even allowed to attain enlightenment?’ I asked because my mind longed for more information.

‘Jainism encouraged women to become nuns, even before the period of Mahavira. The main objective and work of those nuns was to spread and impart religious knowledge/education to all, which was also called dharmadana. This made the nuns wander different places, thereby creating a cultural awareness among others. However, the digambaras never believed that women could attain the highest state of enlightenment because of their strict code of conduct, while the svetambaras assisted women in attaining their moksha (spiritual liberation). The first ever female leader of the monastic order, under Mahavira, was Chandana. All of these prove that women were encouraged to be part of Jainism and its system of education.’

‘I’m still not clear about how women were part of the Jainism education system.’ I stated.

‘The Jain schools had ajjis/kantis who were mostly learned nuns/arye/aryake and these people motivated their disciples to renounce their normal life. There are a few inscriptions in literature about how ajji had a team of male disciples to assist them. This shows that Jainism gave equal rights and place to both men and women. These ajjis were also expected to remember in detail various rites, injunctions and practices.’

‘Nuns kept travelling in and around India and by their dress, one could identify if they were from the northern or western part of India. These learned nuns also spoke in assemblies/shravaka-goshtis to cover large groups of disciples, mostly youngsters. Even Jinagamas were learnt and recited by women. Community singing was also part of their worklist. While housewives attended storytelling sessions to listen to stories of great men in Jainism, ajjis conducted

story-sessions and recitals. Nuns and other commoners were involved in making copies of sacred texts and donated them to the basadis and other individuals. The thousand copies of Shantipurana (a sacred text of Jainism) stand testimony to this.’[24]

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