

Gurukul System- An Ancient Educational System of India

P. SELVAMANI

Assistant Professor

Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram (Tamil Nadu) India

ABSTRACT

Education, since ancient times is one of the most important and essentials elements for the better society. Many civilisations of the world flourish and had their own system of education. Likewise, in India too, since ancient periods, the land had her own system of education for imparting of knowledge to the young peoples. The country had been always rich in the field of art and architecture and also in her rich educational system of which the Gurukul system of education was one of the most prominent and best educational system of the land during the early Vedic periods until the colonisation of the country and the introduction of western or modern education by the Britishers. The destiny of India is made in the classroom. The teachers are the real makers of future citizens and pillars of the Nation. They are the real architect of the nation and determine the destiny of the nation. Teachers in the ancient periods were called as Gurus and they played an important and sacrificing role in imparting of knowledge to the pupils whether it maybe intellectual, theoretical or practical or maybe secular or religious or in art of warfare. Thus, the following papers discusses about the rich ancient Gurukul system of education of India and its way of imparting and its usefulness to the society.

Key Words : Gurukul, Education, Guru, Shishyas, Vedic, Students, Learning

INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, India has always been boasted about her rich tradition in the field of learning and education. It is also well known that many people from other parts of the world too came to India for learning and acquiring education. Educations in ancient India were imparted in many forms and system but the famous educational system that was practised was the Gurukula System of education. It was mostly prevalent in India during the Vedic age where the students were taught in various fields of subjects and was taught how to live a cultured and disciplined life and produced their best for a happy society. It was a type of residential schooling system in ancient India with *shishya* (students) living near or with the guru, in the same house. The *guru-shishya* tradition is a sacred one in Hinduism and appears in other religious groups in India, such as Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. The word gurukula is a combination of the

Sanskrit words guru, (teacher or master) and kula (family or home). Before the British rule, they served as south Asia's primary educational system. In this system of education, the students will gather in their Guru homes and learn vedas from their Guru. No distinctions in the ground of social or economic background were made among the pupils of the Gurus. Every students were treated equally irrespective of their social standards. The students were treated as a part of Guru family. The Guru refers to the master or a teacher. Gradually, the gurukulam system gained a new tradition known as *Guru-shishya* tradition. The teacher is called as a *Guru* and the students are called as *Shishyas*. In those days, the students used to live in the house of the Guru and acquire knowledge traditionally. This system is called Gurukul system of learning. The meaning of Gurukul is, "learning while living with the Guru in his house"¹.

The teacher played a significant role in moulding

the character of the pupil. In fact, he became a role model for pupils. He carried the divine responsibility by not only imparting knowledge- religious as well as secular but also moulding the character and personality and transforming his pupil into a useful citizen of the society. Scholarship and excellent character were the two important requisites of a teacher. The students also maintain the perfect qualities to get proper intellectual training from the teachers. The Guru was an affectionate father, an effective teacher, and a person of high moral and spiritual qualities. He maintained discipline by the influence of his personality. He led a disciplined life.

Large number of students lives in gurukulas under the direct supervision of the teachers. Students were prohibited eating meats, sweets, spices and observe celibacy. They have to rise in the early morning, show courtesy to teachers and elders and pursue the rules of discipline. Students were required to live by begging to learn the spirit of humility. The objective of this system was “*Plain Living and High Thinking*”. The entire system was aimed to promote the feeling of gratitude to the society². Though the ultimate goal of education was to improve the intellectual, moral, religious and spiritual aspects, its also aim to equip the pupils for different profession and service to society. Thus, the main objectives of the gurukul system are:

1. Self- control,
2. Character development,
3. Social awareness,
4. Personality development,
5. Intellectual development,
6. Spiritual development,
7. Preservation of knowledge and culture etc.³.

The gurukul system was the only education system known at the time. The students gained their education with the in-depth knowledge. Not only the education but also, they had been taught essential aspects for their cultured and disciplined life. The *Shishyas* lived under the gurukul roof with the good brotherhood and there was a good humanity, love and discipline. The Gurukul is a comprehensive learning centre where the students are taught good habits of respecting the elders, mother, father and teachers. On the whole, the ancient system gained a huge respect with this Gurukulam system.

Different subjects were taught in the Gurukulas. Some of the important curriculum of the Gurukula system of education was:

The Vedas—There are four Vedas—The Rigveda,

the Yajurveda, the Samaveda and the Atharvaveda. These are classified as Samhitas, or mantras and benedictions.

The Aranyakas and Brahmanas—the Aranyakas are the text on rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices and the Brahmanas comment on those rituals.

Upanishads—These texts discuss meditation, philosophy and the spiritual world.

Vedangas—These consist of six areas of study: Phonetics, ritualistic knowledge, grammar, exegetics (the science of interpretation), metrics and astronomy⁴. Moreover, in Gurukula system of education, guru will teach how to makeup defects, overcome difficulties, analyse mistakes, develops the right use of the six senses by training and practice, training of mental faculty and logical faculty, fundamentals of Hinduism like, concept of Moral Responsibility or Dharma, the scientific basis of the law of “Action and Reaction” or karma to stress the need for responsibility for one’s own action are all taught everything working, playing and living⁵.

However, during the Vedic age, the art of writing was probably not known. A teacher usually used to recite the hymns of the Vedas and his pupils recited the same in chorus⁶. The entire instruction was orally given. Sometimes, beside the guru, father was also a teacher; his son taking lessons from him along with a few neighbouring children. The sharpening of intellectual as well as the development of character in the ‘Brahmachari’ was aim at⁷. Memorisation, recitation, recapitulation were the normal methods of education. Hieun-Tsang mentioned the extraordinary memory of the Vedic Scholars in Nalanda University. Lectures, discussions, debates, seminars, group discussions etc.... were some of the methods of study in our ancient educational system. Doubt clarifications were considered to be the important aspect of our system⁸.

In a gurukul, students would reside together as equals, irrespective of their social standing, learnt from the guru and distribute work in themselves to help the guru in his day-to-day life. Sanskrit was language of vedic education system and Pali was language of Buddhist education system⁹. While living in a gurukul, the students would be away from their home from a period of months to years at a stretch and disconnected from their family completely until their education were completed. At the end of one’s education, a *shishya* offers the guru *dakshina* (one time fees) before leaving the gurukula. The *gurudakshina* is a traditional gesture of acknowledgment, respect and thanks to the guru, which

may be monetary, but may also be a special task the teacher wants the student to accomplish¹⁰.

Conclusion:

Thus the Gurukul system of education of ancient period of India has unique characteristic and qualities which were not found in the ancient education system of any other country in the world. Gurukul (ashram) was a type of school in ancient India, residential in nature, with pupils living in proximity to the teacher (guru) where students would reside together as equals, irrespective of their social standing, learnt from the guru and the success and the achievements of an educational system depend to a large extent on the ideas that animate the teacher and the student. In ancient time the teacher and their student's relation were mutual. Before the introduction of formal educational system, these Gurukul systems of education played a tremendous role in the imparting of great knowledge and wisdom of Vedas, knowledge whether it maybe of intellectual, theoretical or practical or maybe secular or religious or in art of warfare and also moulding the character and personality and transforming his pupil into a useful citizen of the society. Through this system of education, the ancient rich culture and traditions of the country were also handed down from generation to generation, without which the tradition and culture of India would have lost through the ages. Though old and primitive in character, the Gurukul system of education of India is unique in character in its own way.

REFERENCES

1. Sanyukta Kashalkar- Karve, "Comparative study of ancient gurukul system and the new trends of guru-shishya parampara," *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, ISSN (Print): 2328-3734, ISSN (Online): 2328-3696, ISSN (CD-ROM): 2328-3688): 81-84, <http://www.iasir.net>
2. Saranya Kumar, S.R. (2016). Gurukula System of Education In Ancient Times" in *Business Sciences International Research Journal* : Volume 4 Issue 2 (2016): 44-45.
3. <http://www.edubilla.com/blog/the-gurukul-system-of-education/>
4. <https://blog.firstcrayon.com/the-essential-guide-to-vedic-education-in-india-cedc2e00ea>
5. <https://www.esamskriti.com/e/Spirituality/Education/Gurukula-is-a-Man-Making-Education-System-1.aspx>
6. Rao, B.V. *World History: From early Times to AD 2011*, 4th ed. (New Delhi: Sterling Publisher (P) Ltd, 2014), 57.
7. Luniya, B.N. *Evolution of Indian Culture: From Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Agra: Lakshmi Narian Agarwal, 2011-12), 44.
8. Saranya Kumar, S.R. "Gurukula System of Education in Ancient Times," *Business Sciences International Research Journal*, Volume 4 Issue 2 (2016) ISSN 2321-3191), 44-45.
9. Chouhan, Kalam, "Education System In Ancient India," *International Journal of History and Research (IJHR)* ISSN(P): 2249-6963; ISSN(E): 2249-8079 Vol. 6, Issue 2, Apr 2016, 1-4) www.tjprc.org
10. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurukula>
