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CHAPTER – 2

A STUDY ON THE ANCIENT GURUKUL SYSTEM: AN URGENT NEED TO IMPLEMENT IN THE MODERN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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1. Introduction

The Gurukul system of education existed in ancient times. Students lived at their guru's place and learned various subjects, which they could later use to solve real-life problems. A strong emotional bond between the guru and the shishya was essential before the teaching and learning could begin. The guru taught a wide range of topics, including religion, Sanskrit, scriptures, medicine, philosophy, literature, warfare, statecraft, astrology, history, and more. Learning involved more than just reading books; it required connecting ideas to the natural world and life experiences. It was not about memorizing facts and figures to pass exams. Education was based on the Vedas, the rules of sacrifice, grammar, derivation, understanding nature, logical reasoning, science, and the skills needed for a job. The ancient education system in India recognized that the ultimate goal of life is self-realization. It was unique in many ways, as society did not interfere with the subjects studied, regulate fees, or dictate the hours of instruction.

2. Subjects Taught in Gurukul System

The Gurukul system in ancient India taught various subjects, such as astronomy, medicine, philosophy, political science, economics, religion, yoga, physical education, defense studies, Vedic literature, Sanskrit, mathematics, and other traditional Indian sciences. This system focuses on practical knowledge, overall development, and passing knowledge and culture from one generation to the next. In addition to academic subjects, the Gurukul system emphasizes extracurricular activities like sports, yoga, and the arts, which are seen as essential to a well-rounded education. The system relies heavily on teachers, who manage the curriculum, teaching methods, and assessments. Learning is customized to fit each student's needs rather than following a general curriculum. The Gurukul system's focus on individual attention, practical knowledge, and overall development has influenced the modern education system in India and beyond.

3. The Role of Group Discussions in The Gurukul System

Group discussions are vital in the Gurukul system. They enable students to learn from one another and develop

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critical thinking, practical knowledge, and analytical skills. Some key aspects of group discussions in this system include:

1) Teachers often interact face-to-face with students, and group discussions are a regular part of the learning process.
2) The Gurukul system categorizes students by age: Vasu for those up to 24 years old, Rudra for those up to 36 years old, and Aaditya, also for those up to 36 years old. This structure supports age-appropriate group discussions and activities.
3) These discussions serve as a way to teach important content in subjects like languages, science, and mathematics.
4) The Gurukul system values arts, sports, crafts, singing, and other extracurricular activities that enhance students' intelligence and critical thinking skills.
5) Students learn the importance of honesty, compassion, and self-control, and group discussions help foster these values.

By integrating group discussions into its teaching methods, the Gurukul system promotes active learning, critical thinking, and the growth of essential life skills.

4. Modern Education System in India

The issue of quality of Higher Education in India cannot be understood without digging into the past. Historical records reveal that in 1916-17 there were only four engineering colleges in India with total annual intake of 74 students. The growth of the number of institutions of higher education was slow until Independence. After Independence, Higher education became one of the crucial agendas of the newly formed government. They realised that the development of our nation depended immensely on building the human capital by providing them with good quality education. Our first Prime minister advocated the scientific approach, the scientific outlook and the scientific temper. He had an inherent fascination not only for science but also for what he termed the scientific temper which he described as, "search, inquiry and applying your mind to it...and search by experience and reasoning...It is a way of training the mind to look at life and the whole social structure."[2] He intended to imbibe these ideals of rationality and social responsibility into the people through education so they may evolve into responsible citizens who may use their skills for the welfare of the nation. With this aim, the first Prime minister of our country made enormous contribution to the development of various institutes of Higher education especially those focusing on technical and managerial skills. He wished to make these institutes' world class centres of research and learning.

The public expenditure on Higher Education in India had continuously increased from Rs 171.5 million in 1950-51 to Rs 95,620 million in 2004-05. It had a good growth rate in the 1960s. The funding slightly decreased in the 1970s and improved again in the 1980s. The extent of public expenditure on any item can be taken as an indicator of the priority which the government gives to it. Under the pressure from various international funding agencies, the subsidies allocated for higher education were diverted towards the development of primary education as it was argued that investment in higher education benefits only a tiny section of the population whereas primary education would provide leverage to a wider section of the population. Privatization of Higher education took place following this drastic reduction in the state funding. Statistical information, reveals that in 2002, 78.2 percent of engineering and technical colleges and 71.3 percent of medical colleges were in the private sector. These private institutes mushroomed mainly to fulfil the huge demand for professional courses such as engineering, medicine, law and management. The number of universities went up from 20 in 1947 to as high as 659 in 2011, and a similar trend was observed as the number of colleges increased from 500 to 33,023.

5. Challenges Faced by The Modern Education System

The modern education system has greatly expanded and gone digital in recent decades, yet it still faces structural and functional challenges that impact its quality and inclusiveness. One major issue is the focus on rote learning and exam-oriented teaching. This traditional method promotes memorization rather than conceptual understanding, which limits creativity and analytical skills. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2023), a large percentage of students in rural India struggle with basic reading and math skills, exposing significant learning gaps (ASER Centre, 2023). Another challenge is the shortage of practical and skill-based education. Even though the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the need for skill integration, many institutions still rely on content-heavy, theory-based curricula. The India Skills Report (2023) shows that only about 50% of graduates are employable due to a gap between what is taught and what employers need (Wheebox & AICTE, 2023). Additionally,

many teaching methods remain outdated. Traditional lecture-based approaches are common, while interactive and student-centered techniques are less frequent. The National Achievement Survey (2021) found that classroom engagement is mostly passive in many government schools, which limits effective learning (NCERT, 2021). The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) varies widely by region, with rural areas facing significant technological barriers. A pressing concern is the digital divide and unequal access to education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, private urban schools switched to online classes, while over 60% of children in rural India lacked access to digital devices and internet connectivity (UNICEF India, 2021). This has widened educational gaps across different regions and income groups. Poor infrastructure in government schools remains another ongoing issue. A 2022 report by the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) showed that around 15% of schools still do not have electricity, 25% do not have functional libraries, and many lack gender-segregated toilets (UDISE+, 2022). This impacts girls and marginalized communities the most. The curriculum and syllabus in many institutions are often outdated and do not align with 21st-century skills such as digital literacy, environmental awareness, and innovation. According to NEP 2020, there is a strong need to update the curriculum to ensure it is relevant, flexible, and multidisciplinary (MHRD, 2020). Teacher quality and support are also vital issues. Many teachers are underqualified or not well-trained. Most states lack ongoing professional development. The National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA, 2022) reports that low teacher motivation and insufficient support hinder classroom performance and student outcomes. Students' mental health and emotional well-being are becoming urgent concerns in modern education. Academic pressure, competition among peers, and high parental expectations have led to growing cases of stress, anxiety, and even student suicides. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2022) noted a worrying increase in student suicide cases, underscoring the need for psychological counseling and life skills education. The privatization and commercialization of education have also added to the rising inequality. With more private schools and coaching centers, education is being viewed more as a market product. This undermines the constitutional vision of fair and quality education for everyone (Kumar, Krishna, What Is Worth Teaching? 2007). The assessment and evaluation system relies heavily on high-stakes board exams, which are often criticized for encouraging rote learning and exam stress. NEP 2020 suggests reforms in assessment systems for a more holistic and formative evaluation, but progress remains inconsistent. Moreover, value education and ethical learning are often overlooked in modern curricula. Ancient Indian systems emphasized moral and spiritual growth, but today's system falls short in fostering compassion, discipline, and civic responsibility in students (Altekar, A.S., Education in Ancient India, 1934). On the administrative side, poor policy implementation and bureaucratic slowdowns hinder progress. For example, despite the ambitious goals of the RTE Act 2009 and NEP 2020, many schools have not met the required standards for teacher qualifications and student infrastructure (MHRD, 2020). Another structural problem is the weak connection between industry and academia. Most Indian graduates lack sufficient opportunities for internships, research, or skill training. According to NASSCOM (2022), only 46% of Indian engineering graduates are employable because they lack real-world experience. Lastly, research and innovation in Indian higher education are underfunded and undervalued. The World University Rankings (2024) reveal that few Indian universities rank in the top 200 globally for research output, signaling a need for increased investment in R&D and academic independence (Times Higher Education, 2024). In summary, while the modern education system has made significant strides in access and literacy, it still struggles with equity, relevance, quality, and adaptability. Addressing the digital divide, reforming teaching methods, improving infrastructure, supporting mental health, and aligning education with national development goals are crucial for making education truly inclusive and transformative.

6. Comparative Study Between Gurukul System and Modern Education System

The modern education system was introduced in 1835 by Lord Macauley, based on a British model. This system has led to discrimination based on race, gender, and caste in Indian society. Today, many seats in schools, especially at the university level, are reserved for backward classes. This situation has caused many students to leave India for higher education abroad. The entrance exams for university are often unfair. For example, a student who wants to pursue a Master's in History may have to take an exam that includes Mathematics. This mismatch makes no sense. A student aiming to study Public Policy may face an entrance test unrelated to their field. Many students miss out on opportunities because we evaluate them based on school and college marks. These grades, which aren't linked to job performance, dictate their careers. In classrooms, one teacher handles about 50 students. After teaching, the teacher leaves, and whether the students understood the material doesn't seem to concern them. Students learn theories that don't hold much value in real-world applications. More than half of what we learn in school lacks relevance to our lives. We aren't taught anything innovative; we memorize theories and regurgitate them on tests. Our grades, based on rote learning, shape our futures, which is why many educated youth remain unemployed. The education system fails to provide practical experience. Another significant issue is that 90% of our young people know little about Indian culture and its glorious past. History books focus on events like the World Wars and British colonialism,

while our rich heritage often goes ignored. Foreign students come to India for cultural exchange programs, to study manuscripts, and even learn Sanskrit. Yet, how many people in India can speak the language? How many have read the Ramayana or Mahabharata, or understand the principles of Kautilya? Indian textbooks are filled with stories by Shakespeare. The education system includes both private and public schools. In private schools, English is the medium of instruction, while government schools typically use Hindi, or another state language, as India recognizes 22 languages. A major problem is the English language; only 30% of Indians are fluent in it. The remaining 70% do not speak English, and Hindi is the most commonly spoken language, followed by Bengali. This reliance on English has negatively impacted many people's futures. India is a poor country, with most people living below the poverty line, who can't afford private school tuition. Even if individuals have great ideas and skills, the inability to speak English can hinder their progress. Most high-profile jobs require English proficiency. Why should all Indians need to learn a foreign language like English?

7. Conclusion

India has a rich history of valuing education and learning. People from Europe, the Middle East, and Portugal came to India seeking better educational opportunities. The Gurukul Method was a prominent education system in ancient India. It covered various subjects, such as Sanskrit, Scriptures, logic, and metaphysics. Knowledge and insights from this system were passed down through generations. However, during the Colonial period, the British established schools that offered a limited curriculum focused on subjects like science and mathematics. The traditional system emphasized outdoor activities, while the new approach emphasized academics. Activities like yoga, meditation, and singing promoted positivity and contentment. Regular tasks were often completed independently to provide practical knowledge. The main goal of the Gurukul system in Indian education is to help children understand what it means to lead a prosperous life. This belief in harmony should be taught to children early on so they can make informed choices about work, rest, exercise, and how they want to live their lives.

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