

Full Length Research

SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN THE BHAGAVATA PURANA: A BRIEF OUTLOOK

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Accepted 23 December 2014

Education is a lifelong process. Education is life and life is education. Education starts from womb to tomb. In the process of education, there are four main elements such as Student, Teacher, Curriculum and Educational Institution. The process of education cannot be effective without these elements. These elements are playing an important role in the process of education. Education plays an important role in our life. Not only that it is one of the keys to modernisation. It is an instrument of social change. So far as individual is concern, it helps in the modification of human behaviour. It helps in the development of a nation. The present system of education in India is an evolution of past system of education. It does not come at once. If we analysis the history of education there are so many periods of education having unique characteristics. Education system in Modern India is very much influenced by the system of education in Ancient India. This study was purely theoretical based. Data was collected from two major sources i.e., to study the Bhagavata Purana as only the primary source of the data collection and as secondary sources, the investigators were collected data from different types books, journals, articles written by great educators about the Bhagavata Purana. The present paper wants to highlight the system of education in the light of Bhagavata Purana.

Keywords: Education, Ancient period, Gurukul System, Para vidya, Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

The Puranas constitute a branch of Indian literature which comes to be a store house of Indian culture and civilization and deserves to be critically studied for the sake of history and culture of Ancient India. In the Bhagavata Purana, the Itihasa and Purana are mentioned as the fifth Veda, that Brahma created^{1,2}. The Bhāgavata Purāna , also known as Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahā Purāna, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam or Bhāgavata, literally meaning *Divine-Eternal Tales of The Supreme*

Lord is one of the *maha* (Sanskrit: 'great') Puranic texts of Hinduism, with its focus on *bhakti* (religious devotion) to Supreme God Vishnu (*Narayana*), primarily focusing on Krishna³. The Bhagavata Purana is considered to be the purest and greatest of all the *puranas* since it invokes devotion towards Lord Vishnu and his various incarnations, primarily focusing on Krishna since he was the complete incarnation of Lord Vishnu⁴. The Bhagavata Purana truly reveals the means for becoming free from all

material work, together with the processes of pure transcendental knowledge, renunciation and devotion to Lord Vishnu and anyone who seriously tries to understand, hears and chants the verses of the Bhagavata Purana with devotion to Lord Vishnu, becomes completely liberated from material bondage and attains *moksha* or liberation from the cycle of births and deaths in the material world.⁵

The Bhagavata is widely recognized as the best known and most influential of the *Puranas*, and is sometimes referred to as the “Fifth Veda” along with itihasa and other puranas. It is unique in Indian religious literature; for its emphasis on the practice of bhakti, compared to the more theoretical bhakti of the Bhagavad Gita; for its redefining of dharma; and for the extent of its description of God in a human-like form.

The Bhagavata Purana is a great store house of religious, philosophical, historical, and political information of Ancient India. It is also full of information on subjects like education, music, art and painting, astronomy, astrology, architecture, economics, geography, and games and sports of the Ancient Indian society. This is a lamp of the mystic truth and with its aid people can dispel the darkness of ignorance of this world⁶. It consists of twelve Books (Skandha) and three hundred and thirty-five Chapters (Adhyaya).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Gupta Ravi M and Valpey Kenneth R. (2013) in their edited volumes “The Bhagavata Purana: Sacred Text and Living Tradition”, published by Columbia University Press, they introducing the Bhagavata Purana’s key themes while also examining its extensive influence on Hindu thought and practice, this new collection of essays conducts the first multidimensional reading of the text’s entire twelve volumes. Edlmann Jonathan B. (2012) in his book “Hindu Theology and Biology: The Bhagavata Purana and Contemporary Theory”, he replies to the sciences by drawing from an important Hindu text called the Bhāgavata Puraṇa, as well as its commentaries, and philosophical disciplines such as Sāṃkhya-Yoga. Edlmann clarifies fundamental issues in each tradition, for example the definition of consciousness, the means of generating knowledge and the goal of knowledge itself. He argues that although Darwinian theory seems to entail a materialistic view of consciousness, the Bhāgavata’s views provide an alternative framework for thinking about Darwinian theory. Furthermore, Edlmann argues that objectivity is a hallmark of modern science, and this is an intellectual virtue shared by the Bhāgavata. Lastly, he critiques the view that science and religion have different objects of knowledge (that is, the natural world vs. God), arguing that many Western scientists and theologians have found science helpful in thinking about God in ways

similar to that of the Bhāgavata.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- What is the system of education i.e. Aim of Education, Educational Administration, Curriculum, Methods of teaching, Education fee, Role of teacher, Role of Student, Women Education etc. in the Bhagavata Purana?

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To know the system of education i.e. Aim of Education, Educational Administration, Curriculum, Methods of teaching, Education fee, Role of teacher, Role Student, Women Education etc. in the Bhagavata Purana.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study was purely theoretical based. Data was collected from two major sources i.e., to study the original text of the Bhagavata Purana as only the primary source of the data collection and as secondary sources, the investigators were collected data from different types books, journals, articles written by great educators about the Bhagavata Purana.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was delimited with the system of education i.e, Aim of Education, Educational Administration, Curriculum, Methods of teaching, Education fee, Role of teacher, Role of Student, Women Education etc. in the point of view of the Bhagavata Purana.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The seers of Ancient India paid much attention to the formal education of a section of the people. Education was almost made compulsory for the upper three classes (viz. Brahmana, Ksatriya, and Vaisya). It is observed that, even from the Vedic period, efforts had been made to educate these three classes. The Vedic seers have demanded that one should never be indifferent to the study⁷.

• Aim of Education

It is observed in the Bhagavata Purana that some high concepts of philosophy are put into the mouths of some lower creatures also. Viz. Gajendra⁸ (Elephant king),

Nagapatni⁹ (Wife of a serpent) etc. We also found here that the entire outer world as a great source of human knowledge.

Though the aim of general education was to make one fit for the worldly life yet it appears that the purport of the author of the Bhagavata Purana is to some extent different. He wants to impart higher knowledge by which one can finally get rid of illusion (Maya) and can attain divine bliss or salvation. The King Parikshita who represents a worldly person on the verge of death finally observed that he was in a position to give up Maya and had no any fear for death. The king, being enlightened with supreme knowledge from Sukadeva was ready to merge with the supreme entity¹⁰. Hence, it is clear that the purpose of education in those days was to make one fit for the transcendental knowledge.

• **Educational Administration**

In the Bhagavata Purana, we get the idea of the education in Ancient India. A learned man, though young, was respected for his merit. In this connection, we may add that Sukadeva, who is described in the Bhagavata Purana as a young man of sixteen years only, was respected and listened to by all including the King Parikshita and the sages of Naimisa forest¹¹. This reminds us of the great saying in the Manu Smriti, which demands even a young man to be regarded as one old one provided he has studied (the Shastras)¹².

There was no educational institution established by the Government in the early society. The great seers conducted some sorts of educational institutions either in their own dwellings or in their hermitages. The young boys of the upper three castes went to the abode of the Preceptors (Guru) for their education. After their initiation (diksha) the Preceptors taught them the Vedas and other Sciences too. The initiated pupils are called Dvija (twice-born). At the beginning of the student life, the Preceptor made some preliminary instructions to the pupils viz. to follow the vow of a Brahmachari, to collect and place the fuel in the sacred fire, to obey the teacher, not to sleep in the day time etc¹³.

In the Bhagavata Purana, we find that residing in the abode of the Preceptor, the twice-born pupils learnt the Vedas with the six auxiliaries and the Upanisads, as per their capacity and the abode of the Preceptor was the primary educational institution for the students.

The Gurukula system of education is found in existence in Ancient Greek also. Alexander, the king of Macedonia studied under the great Preceptor Aristotle from 342-336 B.C. In the year 336 B.C. he left the residence of his teacher as he had to ascend the throne.

• **Curriculum**

The seers, who took to teaching, prescribed some

extracurricular activities along with the academic courses. The system of begging, tending of cattle, fetching of fuel etc. were included in the extracurricular activities. To beg alms was religious duty of the students. The Asvalayana Grhyo sutra prescribes that the students should begin both the morning and the afternoon¹⁴. The system of begging is recorded in the Satapatha Brahmana also. On the system of begging Dr. A.S. Altekar observes that it reminded the growing generation of the responsibility in respect of education and learning of the society¹⁵.

At that time there was no system of writing, reading and doing Arithmetic, so the pupils had to memorise the scriptures and handed them over to the next generation through verbal transmission. Besides the students, some other grown up people learnt the Vedas from the sagacious Preceptors. For example the exalted sage Vyasa compiled and divided the Vedas in a systematic way and taught each division to some disciples. Thus the Rgveda was given to Paila, Samaveda to Jaimini, Yajurveda to Vaisampayana, Atharvangirasa to Sumanta, Itihasa and Purana to Romaharsana¹⁶. These seers divided their respective Vedas into some other sections and taught them to their disciples, the disciples taught the Vedas to their disciples again in the same way. This was the mode of learning in those days.

Sometimes people learnt outside the Gurukula's also. As we have seen Bhishma instructed Yudhishthira in various subjects Viz. Varnasramadharma, Danadharma, Rajadharma, Vairagyadharma, Moksadharma, Stridharma, Bhagavaddharma, Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksa and various Akhyana and Itihasa¹⁷. Vijitasva learnt Antardhana Vidya (Vanishing science) from Indra¹⁸. Duryodhana learnt the art of mace fighting from Balarama¹⁹. Kunti knew the art of Devahuti Vidya (i.e. calling of the gods) from the sage Durvasa²⁰.

• **Methods of Teaching**

Now we discuss about the methods of teaching. There was not any fixed method of teaching the pupils in those days. The students learnt the Shastras obviously through the process of recitation. In course of time the Preceptors came to teach the difficult subjects with the help of some tales and fables etc.

We found in the Bhagavata Purana that the exalted sage Vyasa composed the Mahabharata in order to benefit the Sudras, women and other people of meagre intellect who could not go through the Vedic lores²¹. He also took the aid of certain episodes and symbols in order to preach the doctrine of the Bhagavata. First of all the king Parikshita is brought as the representative of the wretched worldly beings who are the enjoyers of the fruits of action. According to Sruti, the knowledge of Brahman is the only means to get rid of the worldly bondage. So, Sukadeva, being the Guru (Preceptor) communicated the

supreme knowledge of Brahman to Parikṣita to dispel the darkness of ignorance. Parikṣita stands for all the worldly beings that are on the verge of death and Paravidya (the Supreme Knowledge) is the only boat to cross over the ocean of death. So with that purport the author puts ahead Parikṣita to attract men to have the knowledge of the absolute²².

Apart from the Shastras one can learn from the various objects of nature as well as from the birds, animals etc. In this Purana, we found that a Brahmana gathered knowledge from various sources, other than the human Preceptor or Sastras. Those were the earth, air, space, water, fire, the Moon, the Sun, parrot, the python, the sea, the moth, the honeybee, the elephant, the honey-fly, the antelope, the fish, a pingala (a certain woman), an osprey, a child, a maiden, a maker of arrows, the serpent, the spider, and the wasp²³.

• **Role of Student**

In the period of student life, the pupils had to bear some symbols of studenthood. They were to put on Mekhala (girdle of Munja grass), Ajina (deer-skin), Aksa (a string of Rudraksa beads), Brahmasutra (sacred thread), to carry Danda (staff), Kamandalu (holy water pot), Kusagrass on the hands and to maintain Jata (matted locks)²⁴. The sanction of such uniform for the students is met with in the Smṛti texts also²⁵. The uniform serves as a means of differentiation of the students from other sections of people. The pupils were to abide by certain rules and regulations during their period of study. They were not to scrub teeth, not to sit on a coloured seat, to keep silence at the time of bathing, at the time of taking meal or offering of oblation in the sacred fire and practising of Japa, not to cut nails, not to shave hair even on the armpit, not to cast semen, to avoid collorium on the eyes, not to rub oil on the body, not to behold the picture of women, to avoid the taking of non-vegetarian diet, drinking of wine, garlanding, using cosmetics, scent and ornaments etc. The student should keep themselves away from the contract of women. They should keep themselves away from rubbing, combing, oiling and plastering of the sandal paste on the body of young wives of the preceptors²⁶. The Smṛti texts²⁷ and the Agni Purana²⁸ also prescribed some of the above mentioned restrictions.

• **Role of Teacher**

The teachers, even in the ancient days paid much attention to the manners and character of their students. They taught their pupils how to respect the elders. In the Bhagavata Purana, it is mentioned that the pupils had to bow-down to the feet of their Preceptors at the time of their arrival and departure. They should serve their Preceptors like a servant and remain restrained both by

the body and mind. This is also found in the Vishnu Purana.²⁹ It is observed in the Bhagavata Purana that if there was any violation of order or deviation from the path of conduct then the teacher inflicted physical punishment on the students.

In the Bhagavata Purana, we found the importance and necessity of the teacher through the speech of Vidura. According to Vidura only a teacher can dispel the darkness of ignorance of their pupils (which cannot be done by any Vedic knowledge, sacrifice, penance, gift etc.)³⁰. A similar view is seen in the Mahabharata³¹. In the Bhagavata Purana it is said that the teacher should be an expert in the Sabda and the Paravidya. The Sabda here stands for the Vedas and the Paravidya for the knowledge of the Brahman (i.e. the Absolute). He should be noble and is expected not to be naughty and proud of his learning. He should avoid bragging of his knowledge³². There were two types of students in Ancient India, viz. Naisthika and Snataka. The first category of students resided with the teachers permanently and the students of the second category went back to their respective homes at the completion of their education. In the Bhagavata Purana, we find the students being given four alternatives. At the completion of his studies, a student may go home or enter the forest or resort to mendicancy or may continue to reside with the Preceptor³³. Generally the teachers expected their students to resort to the household life.

In those days a cordial relationship developed between the teacher and the taught, as the pupils had to reside under the direct care and supervision of their teachers. There was no system of Examination as we have now a day. The teacher was the sole authority to assess the talent of his pupils. Krushna and Balarama learnt all the Shastras within sixty four days and after the completion of their study within that short period they returned home with due permission of the Guru³⁴.

• **Education Fee**

In the days of Bhagavata there was no system of paying any fixed fee or any other academic charge either to the teacher or to the institution, as we have today. But at the completion of the educational life and before leaving for home, the students had to pay Dakṣina (fee) to the Preceptors³⁵. The Preceptor of Krushna demanded him to bring his dead son and he did accordingly³⁶. Mahabharata³⁷ and Agni Purana³⁸ agree with such system. But Kalidasa's play Malavikagnimitram³⁹ abuses the system of taking fee for education.

• **Women Education**

There is no reference to the formal education of the women in the Bhagavata Purana, yet we have grounds to believe that the women even in those days knew many

branches of knowledge. They were found expert in the art and painting ⁴⁰, dancing and singing ⁴¹ and also possessed of some mystic sciences. ⁴² (viz.Devahuti Vidya, Maya i.e. the science of vanishing etc.) Sati, the consort of Mahadeva immolated herself through the power of Yoga ⁴³.

CONCLUSION:

In our over-educated, research-driven, statistical world, we can lose sight of simple truths in our attempt to find complex solutions. Because we think, we need over-educated geniuses, experts in their field, to find solutions to perplexing and persistent problems. We over-think, over-analyze, over-research, over-talk, over-create, over-produce, over-everything. Yet in spite of this sophistication and advancement, we are creating a civilization that is more overweight, depressed and chemically addicted than at any time in our society. The paradox of our time in history is that we have more degrees but less sense, more knowledge, but less judgement, more experts, yet more problems, more medicine but less wellness(Bob Moorehead). None can attain the Supreme Being by actions. God is visualized by means of knowledge. May you prefer the path of spiritualism to that of materialism? "*bhadrad adhi sreya prehi* " ⁴⁴. The system of education in the Bhagavata Purana deeply influences the education system in India. The educational system in Bhagavata Purana still relevant in the present day-to-day society.

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3. Bhagavata Purana Canto 12 Chapter 13 Verse 11
4. Bhagavata Purana: Canto 12 Chapter 13 Verse 16
5. Bhagavata Purana Canto 12 Chapter 13 Verse 18
6. Yah avanubhavamakhila srutisaramekamadhyatmadipamatitirsatam tamo'ndham | Samsarinam karunayaha puranaguhyam tam vyasasunumupayami gurum muninama ||(BP I.2.3)
7. SvAdhyAyAnmApramadaH |(TU 1.7)
8. BP. VIII.(ch.3).
9. BP. X.16.33-53.
10. BP XII.6.5-7.
11. BP I.19.26-40
12. Na tenavrddhobhavati yonasya palitam siraH| Yo vai yuvapyadhiyanastam devaH sthaviram viduH|| (MS II.156) Na tenavrddhobhavati yonasya palitam siraH| Yo vai yuvapyadhiyanastam devaH sthaviram viduH|| (MS II.156)
13. ".....brahmacaryasyasyaposna karma kuru madivasusupthA vAcam yaccha samidhamadhehyaposaneti |(PGS.2.4)
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18. Ibid. IV.24.3.
19. Ibid. X.57.26.
20. Sapa durvasasovidyam devahutim pratositat | Tasya viryyapariksarthamajuhava ravim sucih ||(BP IX. 24-32)
21. BP I. 4. 25.
22. BP I. (ch. XIX).
23. BP XI.7.32-35
24. BP VII .12. 4. Cf. BP XI.17.23.
25. HS III. 5; YS I.29.
26. BP VIII.12.8.
27. GS (Brahmacaridharma varnanam), HS III. 6; YS I.33, VSS.216.
28. AP 58. 14-15.
29. VIP III. 9.4.
30. BP III.7.39-40.
31. M(Santi Parva 313.22).
32. BP X.78.26.
33. BP VII.12.14.
34. BP X.45.33-36,47-48.
35. HS III.10,GS(Brahmacari Dharma Varnanam).
36. BP X. 45.36-46.
37. M (ShantibParva 311.25)
38. AP 58.16.
39. MA(act 1.17).
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