Revisiting Vedic Pedagogies: Historical Perspectives on Teaching and Learning

Dr. Rajendra Kumar Shah[1]

[1]Associate Professor Tribhuvan University, Sanothimi Campus, Faculty of Education, Head of the Department (HOD) Department of Foundation of Education,

Email ID: drrajendrakumarshah@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-0533-1338,

ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the instructional traditions of Vedic education by revisiting ancient pedagogical approaches to assess their enduring influence on contemporary educational thought. Grounded in the spiritual, philosophical, and cultural foundations of early Nepali civilization, Vedic pedagogy emphasized the holistic development of the learner through oral transmission, dialogic inquiry, and moral cultivation. Adopting a qualitative research design within an interpretivist paradigm, the study employs textual analysis of Vedic literature to investigate key pedagogical constructs such as oral instruction, reflective learning, and the guru - siṣya relationship. Thematic analysis reveals fundamental philosophical underpinnings embodied in practices such as *sravaṇa* (attentive listening), *manana* (critical reflection), and *nidhidhy asana* (contemplative assimilation). The findings provide valuable insights into the continuing relevance of Vedic educational principles in informing and enriching present-day pedagogical discourse. This study concludes that the instructional methods employed during the Early Vedic period - such as *tapas* (austerity or disciplined effort), textual recitation, textual comprehension, the conference method, and *brahmaṇa-sanghas* (scholarly assemblies) -retain significant pedagogical value in the contemporary context. These approaches remain highly pertinent to both school - level and higher education. Likewise, the pedagogical practices of the Later Vedic period - including practices such as renunciation and meditation, the question - answer method, oral instruction, practical assessments, independent study, and experiential learning through field visits - continue to hold considerable educational importance. Collectively, these time-honored methods offer meaningful potential for fostering the holistic development of learners in modern educational settings. At the same time, this study concluded that these instructional strategies promote holistic education by integrating intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. Practices like tapas and meditation foster self-discipline and reflective learning, while oral traditions enhance linguistic skills and knowledge retention. Interactive methods such as the conference and question-answer foster critical thinking and collaborative learning. Practical examinations, self-study, and field trips encourage experiential learning, learner autonomy, and real-world application, supporting lifelong learning.

Keywords: Vedic education, pedagogical practices, teaching, learning, instruction strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

In the ancient era, rote memorization formed the cornerstone of Vedic education. Instruction was predominantly oral and delivered through individualized, face-to-face interaction between teacher and student (Bajracharya, 1974; Altekar, 2009). This oral tradition, deeply embedded in the Vedic system, was not merely a method of content delivery but a philosophical approach to internalizing sacred knowledge (Agnihotri, 2013). Memorization during this period was rigorous and purposeful - unlike the often-mechanical rote learning seen in modern contexts, it demanded intellectual engagement and deep reflection. Teachers provided personalized guidance, allowing students to absorb knowledge through repeated recitation, questioning, and dialogic interaction. The guru - shishya relationship was central to this pedagogical model, nurturing not only the learner's cognitive development but also their moral and spiritual growth ((Gupta, 1993; Bakshi, and Mahajan, 2000).

In addition to personalized instruction, scholarly dialogues and debates were occasionally conducted, serving as a means to refine and clarify complex philosophical concepts. Such assemblies of learned individuals were frequently supported by royal patronage. True education, however, was regarded not merely as the accumulation of information, but as the attainment of profound insight and inner illumination (Banerjee, 1958). Furthermore, self-directed study and disciplined meditation were esteemed as the most effective pathways to acquiring spiritual and intellectual wisdom in the ancient educational framework (Acharya, 1958; Bloomfield, 1899). These practices emphasized inward reflection and experiential understanding, underscoring the holistic nature of learning in that era.

In the early stages of education, writing as an art was not yet known, and even after its eventual development, it was not employed for the preservation or dissemination of Vedic texts, which remained the central focus of scholarly pursuit for many centuries ((Acharya, 1958; Jayaswal, 1930). The sacred nature of these texts demanded an extraordinary level of precision in memorization. It was considered imperative that the canonical scriptures be retained without the slightest deviation, including the accurate pronunciation of every accent and syllable (Dutt, 1930). While writing did find application in the recording and teaching of non-Vedic literature, its utility was limited by the lack of affordable materials. In the absence of paper and printing technologies, books were luxury items, accessible only to the wealthy (Gupta, 1993). Manuscripts were often inscribed on birch bark, which was not only delicate but also expensive. As a result, most students could not afford to own personal copies of their textbooks. In fact, aspiring to possess such materials was sometimes interpreted as a sign of laziness or a lack of intellectual rigor (Keith, 1923). Given these constraints, the notion of a public or institutional library was unrealistic, and visual aids such as charts or diagrams were virtually non-existent in pedagogical settings. Consequently, oral instruction emerged as the most viable and effective means of teaching. It was not only cost-efficient but also ensured a level of accuracy and retention that written methods of the time could not guarantee.

In ancient Nepal, the *Gurukula* system of education was deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual fabric of society. Within this system, the teacher assumed a pivotal role, not merely as an instructor but as a revered parental figure - *Guru-Abhibhavak* - while the students were regarded as members of his extended family, akin to his own children (Altekar, 2009; Jayapalan, 2005). The learning environment resembled a household, where knowledge was imparted in an atmosphere of emotional closeness, ethical discipline, and spiritual guidance (Aryal, 1957). In a modern context, the *Gurukula* framework can be interpreted as an educational philosophy that aims at the holistic development of the learner - body, mind, and spirit. Here, the teacher continues to function as both a mentor and moral exemplar, guiding a learning community as a symbolic family within the school setting. This educator fulfills multiple roles: *Guru* (Upadhyaya) as the spiritual guide, *Adhigam Sahayak* (Acharya) as the learning facilitator, *Adhigam Karmi* (Adhyapak) as the active instructor, and *Parakhī* (Meghavi) as the discerning evaluator (Aryal, 1970).

The Vedic pedagogical tradition is grounded in a multi-dimensional model of education. It comprises four foundational components: (i) *Vidya*, which refers to the pursuit of self-knowledge and inner realization; (ii) *Shikṣa*, the process of enabling, facilitating, and empowering meaningful learning experiences; (iii) *Dīkṣa*, denoting deep engagement, repetition for mastery, moral cultivation, and the development of character and cognitive resilience; and (iv) *Parīkṣa*, the process of assessment or evaluation, rooted in both internal reflection and external demonstration of competence (Kane, 1962).

The Vedic educational tradition recognized that no single *Acharya* could embody the entirety of knowledge (Max, 1860; Hedrick, & Hedrick, 1972). *Historical*. Consequently, students who demonstrated advanced understanding were encouraged to seek out distinguished teachers from different regions, each renowned for expertise in specific disciplines (Hartog, 1939). This approach fostered a culture of specialized learning, ensuring that scholars could deepen their knowledge by engaging with subject-matter experts across various fields.

A prominent pedagogical technique employed in higher learning was the dialogic exchange between teacher and student (Maskey, 1996). Typically, the student initiated these interactions by posing thoughtful questions - *Prashna* - on particular topics of interest. The teacher would then provide comprehensive explanations, guiding the student through a progressive series of inquiries and responses (Hamilton, 1819). This method often involved the use of illustrative narratives, analogies, and parables to clarify complex ideas and facilitate deeper comprehension. Several Upanishads, including the *Keno Upanishad* and *Katha Upanishad*, vividly exemplify this dialogical method (Hartog, 1939). Moreover, the *Taittiriya Brahmana* refers to participants in this process using terms such as questioner, cross-questioner, and answerer, underscoring the dynamic and interactive nature of the discourse (Macdonell, 1997). Given the intricate nature of this instructional style, it is reasonable to infer that it was particularly suited to advanced stages of learning, where it served to resolve conceptual ambiguities, refine understanding, and explore profound philosophical themes in depth (Monroe, 1990).

Within the Vedic educational framework, the teacher is revered as a *Guru* - a highly esteemed spiritual guide who dispels the darkness of ignorance. The Guru serves not only as an instructor but also as a facilitator of knowledge, mentor, curriculum planner, and educator (Olivelle, 1993). As an educator, the Guru embodies multiple professional roles, acting as an assessor, intervention specialist, counselor, and mentor. Through these roles, the Guru aims to nurture the student into a learned and virtuous individual who contributes meaningfully to society, embracing the principle that "work is worship" (Kaur, 2005). The Vedic system of learning is structured around three primary stages. The initial stage, *Sravaṇa*, involves attentive listening to the teacher's recitation of sacred texts. This foundational step ensured the preservation and transmission of knowledge across generations. Following this is *Manana*, the process where the student reflects deeply and internalizes the teachings. It involves thoughtful contemplation and critical examination of the subject matter to achieve intellectual assimilation. The final stage, *Nididhyasana*, refers to meditation or sustained contemplation, through which the learner attains direct realization of ultimate truths. This step is considered essential for experiencing the Supreme Reality (Rakhe, 1992).

During that era, teachers devoted considerable attention to their students, tailoring their instruction to match each learner's knowledge and abilities (Wilson, 1862). The primary mode of teaching relied heavily on oral transmission and dialectical

engagement. Several distinctive pedagogical methods were employed: First, since written texts were unavailable, students cultivated a strong habit of memorizing all teachings presented orally, with teachers actively supporting this memorization process. Second, learners engaged deeply with the concepts conveyed by their instructors, often exploring innovative ways to understand and assimilate the material. Third, methods such as attentive listening, reflective contemplation, and focused meditation were integral to the learning process, helping students internalize the lessons. Fourth, storytelling served as a powerful pedagogical tool, allowing teachers to impart knowledge through relatable narratives. Fifth, students were encouraged to pose questions regarding the subject matter, fostering interactive discussions that clarified and expanded understanding. Sixth, education at the time was predominantly oriented towards practical application, emphasizing knowledge that could be directly utilized in real-life contexts. Seventh, regular seminars and debates offered rich opportunities for students to gain and share knowledge collaboratively. Eighth, oral recitation, dialogue, and discussion formed the cornerstone of the educational experience. Ninth, practical training received special focus, underscoring the importance of applying theoretical knowledge. Finally, instead of formalized half-yearly or annual examinations, student evaluation was conducted through their performance and adaptability in practical, real-world situations (Winternitz, 1981).

Effective communication between teachers and learners forms the foundation of successful teaching. A well-designed instructional approach actively involves students in the learning journey and fosters the development of their critical thinking skills. Without employing appropriate teaching strategies, the objectives of education remain unattainable. It is evident that suitable teaching methods not only capture students' interest but also encourage their enthusiastic participation throughout the educational process.

In the early Vedic era, formalized teaching techniques were virtually nonexistent. The sages (Ṛiṣis), having attained profound knowledge through intense spiritual practices, primarily transmitted their wisdom orally to disciples, often their own sons (Sreekala, & Pillai, 2012). Over time, this knowledge was shared with wider society and carefully passed down across generations. Written systems for preserving knowledge had yet to be developed. The seers gained insight through rigorous austerities and disseminated it through oral transmission (Seshagiri, 2010). Consequently, oral instruction became the predominant mode of education during this period. As society evolved and recognized the critical importance of education, especially in response to growing social complexities, additional teaching methodologies were gradually incorporated to enhance and expand educational practices (Altekar, 2009).

Religious education in both Buddhist and Hindu traditions predominantly relied on memorization, collective instruction, and repetitive chanting. Alexander (2000) describes this educational approach as primarily oral, involving continuous recitation and repetition between teacher and students, ensuring the texts were thoroughly committed to memory. The teacher held a prestigious position as the key source of knowledge and enjoyed considerable discretion in choosing which texts to teach and determining the pace of instruction based on each student's individual progress. Essentially, students who had successfully memorized and could accurately recite a given portion of text were then assigned the subsequent segment for learning (Altekar, 1957).

In the monastery, a student's daily routine commenced at dawn with prayers held in the main prayer hall. The students sat cross-legged in orderly, crisscross rows laid out on carpets. Presiding over the assembly, the Khembu - the head of the college - occupied an elevated seat, observing the gathering. Nearby, the choir leader took position on a raised platform, leading the chanting of hymns, with scheduled breaks for tea. The choir leader intoned the psalms in a deep, resonant bass voice meant to emulate the Buddha's tone, which was then echoed by the collective voices of the students, sometimes numbering in the thousands (NNEPEC, 1956, p. 15). Periodic clapping punctuated the pauses between verses, both to mark rhythm and to symbolically dispel evil spirits. As daylight advanced, students moved outdoors to attend their classes, sitting on the ground and forming separate groups for each lesson. At this time, the Khembu would ascend the platform to deliver his teachings. While one group received instruction, other students gathered in circles to engage in debates and discussions, sharpening their reasoning skills.

The primary method of teaching followed the Sravana-Manana-Nididhyasana approach. Initially, the Acharya would recite a passage from the Vedic Samhita, which the student was expected to commit to memory - this stage was known as Sravana. Following this, the student engaged in a process of critical inquiry and thoughtful discussion with the teacher, combined with personal reflection, to grasp the meaning of the text and clarify any uncertainties; this phase was called Manana. The final stage, Nididhyasana, involved deep meditation and contemplation, where the learner internalized the newly acquired knowledge, integrating it into their existing framework of understanding. This process of assimilating fresh insights with previously acquired knowledge formed a significant part of advanced learning in the Vedic educational tradition, as students would have already developed a foundational knowledge base during their earlier studies.

In the traditional system of education, teaching was closely linked with ongoing assessment. Before each lesson, the Guru regularly evaluated the students' retention through a brief oral review lasting about 10 to 15 minutes. This daily practice allowed the teacher to assess the learners' grasp of previous content. Students studied the Samhitas in alignment with their individual intellectual capacities, advancing at their own pace under the guidance of the teacher. Learners who demonstrated quicker understanding and stronger memory skills were permitted to move ahead to new material without having to wait for

their peers to catch up. Unlike the modern classroom model, where the progress of the entire class depends on the readiness of all students, this system allowed faster learners to progress independently. Those showing readiness were not held back by those who required more time.

According to Altekar (1957), the Vedic system of education was characterized by several distinctive instructional strategies that cultivated intellectual, spiritual, and practical growth among learners. One of the foremost methods was rote memorization, wherein pupils committed sacred scriptures to memory through persistent recitation and repetition under the guidance of their instructors. This technique ensured the preservation and internalization of the Vedic corpus across generations. Another foundational approach was introspective learning, structured into three progressive phases. The initial phase, Sravaṇa, required students to attentively listen to the teacher's oral delivery of Vedic texts. This was followed by Manana, wherein students engaged in thoughtful reflection and analytical contemplation of the teachings. Finally, the stage of Nididhyasana involved meditative absorption, allowing the learner to realize and embody profound philosophical truths through deep introspection. In addition to memorization and contemplation, the pedagogy encouraged critical reasoning. Learners were urged to engage with ideas independently, evaluate philosophical concepts critically, and even question or debate their teachers, fostering intellectual autonomy and dialectical inquiry.

Experiential learning also played a pivotal role, especially in disciplines such as social sciences, where students were expected to learn through direct observation and practical application. This hands-on approach bridged theoretical understanding with real-world utility, particularly for those entering professional trades. Finally, academic discourse through frequent seminars, debates, and scholarly dialogues was a vital component of Vedic instruction. These forums provided learners with opportunities to articulate their interpretations, defend their views, and gain diverse perspectives through collective discussion, thereby enriching the learning process.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a qualitative research design rooted in the interpretivist tradition, which is well-suited for examining the philosophical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of Vedic pedagogy. Interpretivism highlights the contextual and symbolic meanings embedded in historical practices (Geertz, 1973; Schwandt, 2000). Given the oral, dialogical, and metaphysical nature of Vedic education, particularly the guru - siṣya tradition, this approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of knowledge transmission (Radhakrishnan, 1948; Dasgupta, 1922). The study uses documentary analysis to engage critically with classical texts - including the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Brahmaṇas, and Dharmashastras - and modern scholarly interpretations (Altekar, 1957; Kane, 1946; Olivelle, 1993). As Bowen (2009) notes, this method is ideal for reconstructing educational systems where empirical data is unavailable. This hermeneutic approach ensures textual analysis remains grounded in the authentic historical and cultural contexts of the Vedic tradition, avoiding the imposition of external theoretical frameworks. This study draws on a purposively selected sample of textual sources that provide deep and contextually grounded insights into Vedic pedagogical traditions. These sources include foundational texts such as the *Rigveda*, *Upanishads*, *Brahmanas*, and *Dharmashastras*, which form the core of the Vedic intellectual and spiritual framework. Complementing these are secondary sources - classical and contemporary scholarly works by figures like Altekar (1957), Kane (1946), Olivelle (1993), and Bloomfield (1899) - that critically interpret ancient Indian education systems. Additionally, peer-reviewed articles, academic books, and dissertations enrich the dataset, enabling a comprehensive reconstruction of Vedic pedagogical practices through documentary analysis.

Given the interpretive focus of this study, a document analysis protocol serves as the primary research instrument, enabling systematic examination of classical and scholarly texts (Bowen, 2009; Krippendorff, 2013). The protocol applies rigorous criteria for selecting texts based on authenticity, relevance to Vedic pedagogy, and representativeness within the educational tradition (Altekar, 1957; Olivelle, 1993). A thematic coding framework, centered on pedagogical elements such as teaching methods, teacher-student dynamics, learning processes, and instructional philosophy, guides organized data analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2019; Saldana, 2021). Reflexive analytical memos are used to document interpretive insights and ensure methodological transparency and rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This qualitative, text-based approach requires no physical instruments or surveys, maintaining a purely documentary and non-intrusive methodology.

Data were systematically gathered from archival sources, university libraries, scriptural repositories, and reputable online databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Project MUSE (Bowen, 2009; Flick, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Selection criteria emphasized historical significance, authenticity, and relevance to Vedic educational philosophies (Altekar, 1957; Olivelle, 1993; Kane, 1946). Key primary texts - like the *Rigveda*, *Upanishads*, *Brahmanas*, and *Dharmashastras* - alongside critical secondary sources were carefully read and annotated to identify pedagogical themes, including teaching methods and teacher-student relationships (Altekar, 1957; Kane, 1946; Olivelle, 1993; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2019; Saldana, 2021). Extracted data were organized via thematic coding to support focused analysis (Patton, 2015; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This rigorous, transparent approach upheld qualitative research standards and ensured integrity throughout the data collection process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Flick, 2018).

This study employs qualitative content analysis to systematically interpret textual data, beginning with thematic identification of key pedagogical concepts such as *sravaṇa* (listening), *manana* (reflection), and *nidhidhyasana* (meditative assimilation)

(Braun & Clarke, 2006; Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The data are then categorized into themes including teaching methods, knowledge transmission, moral and spiritual development, learner engagement, and the teacher's role (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2019). Interpretive hermeneutic methods are applied to uncover the philosophical foundations and contextual meanings within the texts (Gadamer, 1975; Ricoeur, 1976). A comparative review contrasts Vedic pedagogy with modern educational theories, highlighting continuities and differences over time (Freire, 1970; Dewey, 1938). These combined techniques enable a thorough and nuanced reconstruction of Vedic educational practices.

Validity in this study was rigorously maintained through triangulation of diverse data sources, including primary Vedic scriptures, classical commentaries, and contemporary academic interpretations. This triangulation ensured a comprehensive and corroborated understanding of Vedic pedagogical practices by cross-verifying information across multiple perspectives (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). Additionally, peer debriefing sessions were conducted with experts specializing in Eastern philosophy and educational history, providing critical feedback that enhanced the interpretive rigor and minimized researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Together, these strategies strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the methodologies outlined above, the study has produced a series of significant findings and insights. These findings are organized systematically under distinct themes and sub-themes to highlight core aspects of Vedic pedagogical practices. Each theme captures a fundamental element derived from the interpretation of relevant textual sources. This thematic structure ensures that the presentation of results is clear, coherent, and comprehensive. The organization facilitates an in-depth understanding of the pedagogical approaches within their historical and cultural contexts. The study's findings are divided into two main chronological categories: the Early Vedic period and the Later Vedic period. The major findings are discussed in the following sections.

4. VEDIC PERIOD

The Vedic education system was flexible and adaptive, adjusting its methods according to learners and contexts. Rather than following a fixed instructional model, it responded to various challenges and sought to improve both access and quality of education. Rooted in mutual respect between teacher and student, its core aim was the pursuit of the highest truth - guiding learners from illusion to reality, ignorance to knowledge, and mortality to immortality. Learning combined sensory perception with intellectual inquiry. Observation was valued as a direct means of gaining knowledge, while teaching methods such as lectures, discussions, dialogues, debates, and storytelling fostered critical thinking and engagement. These interactive approaches made learning dynamic, accessible, and meaningful. Storytelling, in particular, helped convey complex philosophical ideas in simple, relatable ways. Student inquiry was highly encouraged. Learners were seen as active participants who could raise questions based on their interests or doubts. In turn, the Guru responded with personalized explanations, making education both dialogic and learner-centered. This strengthened the educational bond and deepened understanding. The learning process in Vedic education followed three key stages: *Sravana* (listening), where students absorbed oral teachings; *Manana* (reflection), where they analyzed and internalized knowledge; and *Nididhyasana* (meditative realization), where deep contemplation led to personal spiritual insight. These stages ensured that learning progressed from memorization to understanding and ultimately to self-realization, reflecting the deeply philosophical and transformative aims of Vedic education. Major teaching learning methods are discussed in the following sections.

5. EARLY VEDIC PERIOD

A variety of instructional methods were employed during the ancient period to facilitate learning. In the early Vedic period, pedagogical practices were characterized by a combination of oral transmission, interactive engagement, and reflective inquiry. The following instructional approaches were commonly utilized:

Tapas

Tapas comes from the Sanskrit word *tap*, meaning "to heat" or "to burn," symbolizing the inner fire needed for spiritual growth. It involves deep meditation, self-discipline, and solitude. Practicing yoga with dedication is also a form of *tapas*, and a person who does this is called a *tapasvin*. However, people often misunderstand *tapas* as extreme denial, strict emotional control, long fasting, or meditating only in harsh places like forests or extreme climates. In Hindu texts, especially the Vedas, *tapas* refers to spiritual practices involving self-control, discipline, and moral living. It is seen as a way to connect the body and spirit, foster inner strength, and achieve self-realization. Mentioned in the Upanishads and Puranas, *tapas* is valued both for personal transformation and collective worship. When practiced sincerely, it serves as a form of penance that deepens spiritual insight and strengthens one's connection with the divine.

Tapas has three forms - physical, verbal, and mental - each fostering self-discipline and spiritual growth. *Physical tapas* includes fasting and bodily practices to build self-control, resilience, and deeper connection with the self and universe, enhancing physical and emotional balance through yoga. *Verbal tapas* emphasizes ethical speech and mantra use to promote mindfulness, respectful communication, and stronger relationships, supporting mental clarity and personal growth. *Mental*

tapas focuses on meditation and concentration to cultivate inner peace, emotional stability, and self-awareness, with regular reflection enhancing spiritual development and self-discovery.

The Rigveda, in the form of Rigveda Samhita, reveals two stages and types of education and educational method. *Firstly*, the matter and the hymns of the Rigveda are the outcome of the method of the pursuit of the highest Truth and its direct realization on the basis of ascetic austerities and concentrated contemplation, called Tapas which, as explained by Sayana, consisted of austerity, sacrifice and penance. Thus, Tapas was the method of learning which marks out the Rishi or Seer (Kumar and Orsterleld 2007). The Muni can be defined as the Seers of Truth beyond the senses by Sayana, who lived in a state of Samadhi, living in the spirit, not in the body. Rigveda rises to the culminating conception of Rita and Satya, truth of thought and speech, as the fruit of Tapas, and of the whole creation resulting from the Tapas of Brahma. *Secondly,* besides Rishi and Muni, other terms indicative of highest spiritual advancement are Vipra, Vedhas, and Kavi. There is also a reference to Seers in Rigveda, called Manishis, who comprehend Vak or Speech in all its four forms, Brahma as Sabda as Yogis (Desai, 2010). Of these four forms of Vak, three are stated to be hidden in guha while the fourth is manifest as the speech of man, laukiki bhasha. This states the philosophical position, rendered explicit in the creation, is only a fragment of the Absolute.

Teaching through Vedic Tapas methods centers on cultivating deep focus, self-discipline, and experiential learning. It emphasizes sustained effort and inner reflection to move beyond memorization toward true understanding. Lessons begin with quiet preparation, progress gradually through repetition, and include periods of silence for internalization. Ethical values like humility and self-control are integral, supported by Vedic hymns and stories to deepen engagement. The teacher guides patiently while the learner practices dedication and respect. This method fosters holistic growth of mind, character, and spirit through disciplined, reflective practice.

Recitation of Texts

The first stage of learning in Vedic education was the recitation of text (hymns). Students in Vedic schools began their education by memorizing and chanting these sacred texts. The entire learning environment echoed with the rhythmic sounds of hymn recitation. This chanting was not done in an ordinary way. It was developed as a special art form, where every word and sound was carefully pronounced. The way the hymns were recited followed specific rhythmic patterns known as metres. Over time, seven major metres were developed to guide the recitation. These metres helped maintain the structure and flow of the verses. According to Altekar (1944), the seven metres are: Gayatri (24 syllables), Pankti (28 syllables), Anushtup (32 syllables), Brihati (36 syllables), Viraj (40 syllables), Trishtup (44 syllables), and Jagati (48 syllables).

In the Rigvedic education system, correct recitation of the texts was considered extremely important (Basu, 1922). It was believed that the proper pronunciation and chanting of the hymns were essential not only for preserving the sacred knowledge but also for achieving their intended spiritual effects. According to the *Aitareya Aranyaka* (Jayaswal, 1930), there were three main methods of reciting the Rigveda. The first was *pratnna,* which involved chanting the words one at a time, as done in the *Pada Patha* (word-by-word recitation). The second method, *nirbhuja,* involved reciting the words in pairs. The third, *ubhayamantarena,* was a continuous style of chanting similar to the *Krama Patha* method, where the recitation flowed smoothly without breaks. These techniques ensured that the verses were memorized and transmitted accurately across generations. Additionally, Vedic education placed great emphasis on sound and pronunciation, supported by a well-developed system of phonology. Every sound, syllable, and accent was carefully regulated. It was believed that if a Mantra was not recited properly, it would lose its power or could even have negative consequences. As Jaimini stated, the Mantras had to be pronounced exactly as prescribed to bring about their full spiritual and ritual benefit. To support this focus on oral accuracy, the Sanskrit alphabet itself was developed as a tool to aid proper recitation. It helped in systematizing the pronunciation of sounds and preserving the precision of the oral tradition. Thus, the foundation of Rigvedic education was built upon the accurate and disciplined recitation of sacred texts.

Comprehension of Texts

Rigvedic education was not limited to rote memorization. Although memorizing sacred texts was a significant part of the learning process, deeper understanding and thoughtful reflection were also highly valued. Learners were encouraged not only to recite but also to contemplate the meaning of the hymns and scriptures. Comprehension was seen as essential for true learning. As Jayapalan (2005) notes, teachers often provided explanations when students requested them, highlighting an interactive approach to education rather than a purely mechanical one. While many students may have memorized the Vedic hymns without fully grasping their meanings, the need for explanation became even more apparent as additional disciplines and sciences emerged. These newer fields required learners to go beyond surface - level knowledge. In particular, the Sutras - brief, formulaic texts that conveyed complex ideas - were written in a highly condensed language. Understanding them would have been impossible without interpretation. For this reason, the study of Sutras was typically accompanied by commentaries that clarified their meaning, ensuring students developed a proper understanding of the concepts involved.

Furthermore, in the Upanishads, which mark the philosophical culmination of the Vedic tradition, teaching was often done through stories, metaphors, and analogies. For instance, the story of Nachiketas - a boy who travels to the realm of death to learn spiritual truths -was used to convey deep philosophical ideas in an engaging and memorable way. This method of

teaching through parables and symbolic stories shows that educators sought to make abstract concepts relatable and understandable. Finally, the importance of understanding over rote learning is clearly expressed in a passage from the Samhitopanishad Brahmana, which states: *"Learning without understanding is called cramming (nigadenaiva sabdyate), like dry wood on ashes, which can never blaze"* (Dash, 2000). This metaphor emphasizes that memorized knowledge without comprehension is lifeless and ineffective - just as dry wood placed on cold ashes cannot ignite. It underscores the fundamental belief in Vedic education that true knowledge must be internalized and fully understood to be meaningful and transformative.

Conference Method

The first step in education was developing the everyday spoken language, also known as the vernacular, which was used to name things. Vedic Sanskrit came from this common spoken language. This idea was discussed by the ancient scholar Yaska. According to Weber (1974), the passage explains how Vedic Sanskrit grew out of ordinary speech. Scholars would gather in meetings where they refined and improved the language through discussion, just like grain is cleaned by passing it through a sieve. The sages, or Rishis, would come together in these meetings to share and talk about the hymns they had discovered through deep meditation and spiritual practice (Sharma, 1951). According to Sayana, this process shows the use of a "conference method" - a method of discussion used to develop Vedic language and knowledge (Vidyat - Samghe vachamakrata).

The Shastrarth method, which means religious or intellectual debate, was an old way of showing one's knowledge and thinking skills (Altekar, 1944). Davidson explains that in ancient higher education, teachers sometimes held special events or conferences where scholars from different schools of thought came together to discuss and debate important topics (Das, 1930). Experts gave talks on specific subjects, and afterwards, Shastrartha sessions were held. In these sessions, students could ask questions and express their doubts. The speaker would then explain the answers clearly. This helped students understand the topic in a deeper and better way. There are many historical records of Shastrartha, not only from ancient and modern times, but also from the Buddhist period, Emperor Ashoka's time, King Harsha's time in the 7th century AD, and later periods too ((Altekar, 1944).

In ancient times, a method known as Sangosthi, or seminar, was used - but it was quite different from what we now call a seminar. Back then, it was a focused meeting where only the teacher and students of a particular subject came together to carefully discuss and decide on an important issue related to that subject. Everyone in the group shared their ideas and reasons, and through this process, they worked together to reach the right conclusion or solution. This traditional form of a seminar, especially during the Buddhist era, was not the same as today's seminars, which often include a broader audience and format.

Brahmana - Samghas

In ancient period, the highest stage of education was institutionalized through Brahmana-Samghas, which functioned as scholarly assemblies or academies. These intellectual forums brought together the most advanced and competent students who engaged in the collective pursuit of knowledge through dialogue, critical reflection, and mutual exchange. Such gatherings were often convened in conjunction with significant religious rituals or sacrificial ceremonies, reflecting the integration of spiritual and intellectual life in Vedic culture (Ulich, 1947). The practice of collaborative learning and discourse in these assemblies represents an early form of the conference or seminar method, underscoring the historical roots of dialogic pedagogy. This tradition of knowledge advancement through structured academic discussion finds mention even in the Rigveda, affirming the antiquity of this educational approach (Waddell, 1929).

Later Vedic Period

In the later Vedic period, education followed a catechetical method of structured question-and-answer exchanges, using stories and parables to clarify concepts (Regmi, 1965). Terms like *Prasnin*, *Abhi-prasnin*, and *Prasna-Vivaka* in Vedic texts, and *Pravachika* in the *Atharvaveda*, reflect this dialogic style, which laid the foundation for *Tarka Shastra* and later *Nyaya* logic (Keith, 1925; Rakhe, 1992). Debate and discussion were central to student life, highlighting the active role of learners. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* outlines three stages of learning: *Sravana* (listening), *Manana* (reflection), and *Nididhyasana* (meditation), with *Sravana* supported by six aids: *Upakarma*, *Abhyasa*, *Apurvata*, *Phala*, *Arthavada*, and *Upapatti* (Keith, 1923). This oral tradition, called *Guruparampara* or *Sampradaya*, preserved and transmitted knowledge across generations. Learning was rooted in *Sruti* - "what was heard" - and true understanding came through listening, reflection, and deep meditative insight.

In the Sutra period, oral teaching was the only method of education due to the absence of writing and learning aids (Childe, 1934). Learning relied heavily on memory, rote recitation, and a close teacher-student relationship, where the teacher was the sole source of knowledge (Bendall, 1883; Childe, 1926). In the Brahmanic period, education centered on Mantras, with emphasis on accurate recitation and pronunciation. While memorization was important, understanding the inner meaning was essential, achieved through guided questioning (Bhandarkar, 1940). The methods of *Sravana*, *Manana*, and *Nididhyasana* formed the core of pedagogy. There were no formal exams; students progressed at their own pace, and the teacher evaluated their learning. True wisdom required more than intellect - it demanded self-discipline, Yoga, and

renunciation to overcome doubt and illusion (Bhandarkar, 1918). Yoga was both a spiritual and moral path to knowledge.

In the Brahmanic period, teachers controlled and safeguarded the transmission of knowledge, ensuring its preservation through an unbroken lineage. Each teacher, seen as a living library, took personal responsibility for conserving and spreading knowledge. Education was based on a close, personal teacher-student relationship, with the teacher's home serving as the school (Farquhar, 1920). Teaching was individual rather than collective, with students typically focusing on one subject for about 12 years, leading to early specialization. Major teaching and learning activities are detailed in the following sections.

Renunciation and Meditation

Intellectual study and formal instruction can provide only indirect or secondary knowledge. To attain direct understanding of Ultimate Reality or Truth, one must rely on personal inner realization. True knowledge - knowledge of the Self or *Atman* - cannot emerge from insights rooted in the external, empirical world, which is considered a domain of ignorance (Gokak, 1989). Rational inquiry or speculative reasoning (*tarka*) alone is insufficient for realizing the Self; such knowledge arises solely through inner revelation, achievable only through an advanced stage of personal and spiritual development. Liberation, or *moksha*, which represents the culmination of such knowledge, is not a product of intellectual pursuit but of lived spiritual experience.

According to Keith (1924), two fundamental preconditions are essential for attaining this ultimate knowledge: (i) the complete eradication of desire, and(ii) the dissolution of the illusion of multiplicity - the perception of a pluralistic universe. To fulfill these conditions, two spiritual disciplines evolved: (i) Sannyasa, the renunciation of worldly attachments such as home, possessions, and family, designed to eliminate desire; and (ii) Yoga, a practice involving the withdrawal of the senses from external objects and directing focus inward toward the Self, thereby breaking free from the illusion of diversity and achieving union with the *Atman* (Ghoshal, 1945).

During the Later Vedic period, Yoga became integral to the pursuit of higher knowledge, with meditation serving as the pathway to inner revelation. The act of renunciation, embodied in *Sannyasa*, marked the final stage of spiritual development. In post-Vedic times, Yoga was systematized into a formal discipline with its own authoritative texts. Consequently, the spiritual tradition institutionalized two significant practices -*Sannyasa* and *Yoga* - through which liberation was both pursued and facilitated, reflecting the profound spiritual insight and innovation of civilization.

Debate and Discussion Method

In ancient time, scholarly debates and discussions were a key part of education, often held in forest hermitages, royal courts, and during grand sacrifices. Eminent teachers and students participated with enthusiasm to deepen their knowledge. Texts like the *Brahmanas*, *Upanishads*, and *Epics* document such events, especially those in royal settings (Frazer, 1898). Scholars traveled widely to attend these debates. Uddalaka Aruni, Svetaketu, Satyayajni, Yajnavalkya, and Narada are noted for engaging in such intellectual exchanges. In one instance, Narada expanded his knowledge through discussion with Sanat Kumara (Mitra, 1964). Winners of debates were often awarded prizes. King Janaka of Videha, a patron of learning, hosted many such gatherings, offering rich rewards - such as a thousand cows with golden horns - to the most learned, as in the case of Yajnavalkya. In another event, Uddalaka Aruni lost a debate to Saunaka and became his student as a mark of respect (Kosambi, 2006).

The method of teaching through debate and discussion was widely used in ancient times. It was recognized and practiced throughout different historical periods. Both Vedic and Buddhist systems of education considered this method essential for developing students' intellectual abilities (Majumdar, 1916). In this approach, scholars would gather in certain places and engage in lively discussions on philosophical, spiritual, and theological topics. The *Rigveda Samhita* refers to such intellectual gatherings, especially during major religious events and sacrifices. It describes how sages, after reaching deep spiritual insight through intense meditation and self-discipline (*tapas*), would come together to share and reflect on the sacred hymns they had individually realized.

During this period, enthusiastic young students often took part in scholarly discussions, either on their own or accompanied by their teachers, to gain new knowledge from wise scholars. However, participation in such debates was open to all - there were no restrictions (Hopkins, 1901). Many examples of these open debates can be found in the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads*. For instance, the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* and the *Satapatha Brahmana* describe a famous debate during King Janaka's horse sacrifice ceremony, where Yajnavalkya and Gargi engaged in an intense philosophical exchange. Both participated independently, though Yajnavalkya ultimately emerged as the leading voice in that debate (Muller, 1993; Mitra, 1964). Such discussions were not limited to formal gatherings - they also occurred between hosts and guests, fathers and sons, teachers and students, and even husbands and wives. These intellectual conversations were referred to as *Brahmavada* or *Brahmodya*. In classical Sanskrit literature, they were known as *Vidya Vivada* or *Vidya Vichara*, as they involved scholars coming together to logically and respectfully debate questions related to religion and philosophy (Hopkins, 1895; Mookerji, 1969).

These forms of dialogue were not only cost-effective but also highly valuable for the intellectual and cultural development of society, as they promoted deep learning and understanding (Mukhopadhyay, 2004). As a result, the Buddhist education system also placed great importance on the method of debate and discussion. From the start of their training, Buddhist monks were taught how to debate skillfully. The Buddha himself spent much of his spiritual life engaging in such discussions. Buddhist monasteries regularly hosted these debates, with renowned centers like Nalanda and Vikramashila becoming famous for their commitment to this intellectual tradition (Kosambi, 2006; Mukherji, 1969).

Question Answer Method

In the Vedic period, teaching often took the form of question-and-answer sessions and discussions. Students would pose questions to their teachers, who would then explain the concepts in detail. This method was a central part of how knowledge was shared in ancient times and was especially developed during the Brahmanic era. It was considered a logical and systematic approach to education. Through questions, counter-questions, and thoughtful answers, doubts were clarified and deeper understanding was achieved. Teachers explained complex spiritual and philosophical ideas using various tools such as examples, stories, and parables. Sometimes the teacher would ask the student questions, and at other times students were encouraged to raise their own questions. This method was often used at the beginning or conclusion of lessons. Teachers also helped students understand pronunciation and meaning by having them repeat words or phrases and then memorize the texts (Winternitz, 1981; Kumar & Orsterleld, 2007). If a student had difficulty, the teacher would clarify doubts using relatable stories or comparisons.

This method was even formalized with specific terms in the *Brahmana* texts, such as *Prasnin* (questioner), *Abhi-prasnin* (cross-questioner), and *Prasna Viveka* (analysis of questions). When students struggled to grasp the meaning of a subject, this interactive method helped make the content clearer. The *Rigveda* emphasizes that understanding meaning is essential (Pandey, 1987). Simply memorizing verses without comprehension, it says, is like dry wood or ashes that cannot catch fire - meaningless and lifeless. The *Kena Upanishad* provides a clear example of this method, where a curious student asks deep questions, and the teacher responds with clear explanations (Krishnamachariar, 1937). Many *Upanishads* are written in the form of dialogues, showing that the teaching approach of that time was fundamentally based on questions and answers - a method known as catechetical teaching (based on a structured question-and-answer format).

Oral Teaching

During the Vedic period, education was entirely oral, with no reliance on written texts. Teachers transmitted knowledge by speaking, while students learned by listening and repeating. Pupils would sit near their gurus and absorb the teachings directly. The teacher would articulate the verses of the Vedas, and students were required to repeat them with precise pronunciation, including correct intonation and accent. This process was repeated until the student could recite the verse flawlessly. If a student encountered difficulty, the teacher would patiently repeat the words. Each student received personalized guidance, and the same meticulous method was used with every learner. The day began early, with students reciting the Vedic hymns even before dawn. However, this recitation involved more than rote memorization; it emphasized understanding and precision (Venkateswara, 1928; Ulich, 1947).

The Vedic sages (ṛiṣis) emphasized not only the accurate chanting of mantras but also a deep understanding of their inner significance. Mere mechanical repetition - like that of a parrot or frog - without comprehension was considered ineffective, as it failed to yield the true spiritual benefits of the mantra. Hence, students were expected to focus carefully on each individual syllable or *akṣara*, since even a minor error in pronunciation could distort the meaning and undermine the essence of the mantra (Wilson, 1862). To ensure accuracy and preserve the intended meaning, the ṛiṣis devised systematic methods for instruction and learning. Initially, mantras were committed to memory through simpler patterns such as *Samhita*, *Pada*, or *Krama* recitations, incorporating specific tonal patterns (*svaras*). Once these were mastered, students advanced to more complex recitation techniques known as *vikṛti paṭhas* (Wauchope, 1933).

The *Vikṛti paṭhas* consist of eight distinct styles: *Jaṭa*, *Mala*, *Lekha*, *Sikha*, *Dhvaja*, *Daṇḍa*, *Ratha*, and *Ghana*. These advanced techniques were developed to preserve the accuracy of Vedic recitation. The *Samhita paṭha* involves chanting an entire sentence smoothly with the correct intonations. In the *Pada paṭha*, the sentence is separated into individual words (*padas*), helping learners understand the structure and meaning of each term. The *Krama paṭha* connects the first word with the second, the second with the third, and so forth, progressively combining the words to form the complete sentence. This method trains students not only to recognize each word but also to observe how words merge in recitation, along with the changes in tone (*svaras*). In the *Jaṭa paṭha*, pairs of words are recited first in their original sequence, then in reverse, and finally once more in the correct order - strengthening memory and precision in oral transmission.

The *Aitareya Araṇyaka* refers to three distinct modes of mantra recitation - *Pratrinna*, *Nirbhuja*, and *Ubhayamantrin* - which represent progressive refinements in oral chanting techniques. Over time, successive generations continued to uphold and prioritize oral transmission as the primary mode of education. This method was viewed as the most effective way to disseminate knowledge throughout society, and thus the traditional, rigorous oral practices were preserved without alteration. According to Manu, a *dvija* (twice-born) Brahmana was expected to internalize the Vedas entirely through memorization, as

Vedic recitation was regarded as the highest form of spiritual discipline or *tapasya* (Wright, 1966).

During the period reflected in the early Buddhist texts, education had not yet become reliant on written documents. However, this does not imply that writing was unknown or undeveloped at the time. In fact, writing is mentioned in the *Mahavagga* as a legitimate profession or means of livelihood. Furthermore, the *Vibhanga* advises Buddhist nuns (*Bhikkhunis*) to learn the art of writing, indicating that literacy existed within certain social and religious contexts (Keith, 1923; Dahlke, 1927). Despite this, there is no substantial evidence suggesting that writing was used to document or transmit large bodies of sacred teachings. Instead, oral instruction remained the principal and most trusted method of education. Rote memorization was the dominant learning technique, requiring students to commit texts to memory (Dvids Rhys, 1902).

Buddhist educators, much like their Vedic counterparts, implemented oral assessments as part of the learning process. Before introducing new lessons, teachers - or sometimes senior monks - would conduct oral tests to ensure that students had properly understood previous material. In addition, formal oral examinations were often held at the end of one's education. A notable example is found in the *Samavartana* ceremony, a traditional rite marking the completion of studies. Following this ritual, the graduate (*Snataka*) was brought before an assembly of scholars who posed challenging questions. If the responses were deemed satisfactory, the graduate was formally recognized as a learned individual (Wright, 1966).

This tradition of scholarly evaluation through public questioning also appears in the *Ṛigveda*, which describes gatherings of learned individuals who tested the capabilities of newly trained scholars. Other religious and philosophical texts also confirm that such assessments were commonly held at the conclusion of the *Samavartana* ceremony. These practices reflect the strong oral foundations of education during that time, highlighting both the rigor and communal nature of knowledge transmission.

Practical Examination

In the ancient education system, the process of evaluating a student's learning and intellectual development was significantly different from today's formal academic assessments. Unlike the modern education system, which relies heavily on written examinations held at fixed intervals (such as annual or semester-end exams), ancient educational institutions like *Gurukulas* and *Samghas* followed a more organic and continuous evaluation method. The primary modes of assessment were oral and practical examinations, which were considered more suitable for the pedagogical environment of that time (Venkateswara, 1928).

In this system, evaluation was not a separate event; rather, it was closely integrated with daily teaching and learning activities. Teachers would regularly pose questions to students to verify their understanding of a subject immediately after teaching a lesson. These oral examinations served as a means for teachers to judge not only whether a student had memorized the material but also whether they had understood its deeper meanings. This method also encouraged dialogue, critical thinking, and the development of strong memory and reasoning skills - qualities highly valued in ancient education.

In addition to oral questioning, practical examinations were used, especially in subjects where application of knowledge was essential. For example, in military training, archery, or performance of rituals, students had to demonstrate their skills in practice under the supervision of their teacher. These methods were holistic and aimed at developing the learner's intellectual, spiritual, and practical abilities. Ancient scriptures such as the Brahmanas, Upanishads, Epics (like the *Mahabharata*), and Sutra literature provide numerous references to these kinds of examinations (Vidyabhushana, 1921). These texts highlight the continuous and personalized interaction between the teacher (*guru*) and the student (*shishya*), where assessment was seen not just as a measure of achievement but as part of the process of inner development and moral growth.

The stories of Satyakama Jabala and Svetaketu are prime examples. Satyakama's character and honesty were tested through oral questioning by his teacher, who assessed not only his knowledge but also his ethical values. Similarly, Svetaketu was examined by his father to determine the depth of his understanding after completing his formal education. In the *Mahabharata*, Dronacharya, the martial arts teacher of the Pandavas and Kauravas, is described as testing his students through both oral questioning and practical demonstrations of their skills in warfare. These stories underline how the educational assessment in ancient India was comprehensive, experiential, and value-laden, focusing on holistic human development rather than just academic success. Thus, the traditional education system promoted a more interactive, individualized, and integrated approach to assessment, where oral and practical examinations were not just tools of measurement but central aspects of the teaching-learning process.

Self-study

The term *Svadhyaya* originates from the combination of two Sanskrit words: *Sva*, meaning "self," and *Adhyaya*, which translates to "study" or "lesson." Hence, *Svadhyaya* can be understood as the act of self-study or personal reading. Another interpretation connects *Sva* with "self" and *Dhyaya* with "meditation," both derived from the root *Dhyai*, which implies thinking, imagining, or contemplating. From this perspective, *Svadhyaya* literally refers to the meditative study of the self. Ancient scriptures provide diverse interpretations of the concept. While some scholars view *Svadhyaya* narrowly as the repeated recitation or rehearsal of Vedic texts, others, such as those referencing the *Satapatha Brahmana*, offer a more expansive understanding. According to this text, *Svadhyaya* is equated with *Brahmayajna* - a sacred act of devotion - and is

considered a pathway to achieving eternal glory (Venkateswara, 1928).

The transformative power of *Svadhyaya* is further emphasized in classical literature. Regular and disciplined self-study of the Vedas cultivates a deep affection for sacred knowledge. Such an individual becomes content and self-reliant, needing no external support. He enjoys restful sleep, attains inner peace, and becomes a healer of the soul. Additionally, he develops mastery over the senses, enhanced concentration, sharper intellect, and deeper comprehension. This intellectual and spiritual discipline supports the fulfillment of religious duties and personal growth. The *Manusmṛti* also recognizes the profound spiritual value of *Svadhyaya*, referring to it as the highest form of *Tapasya* - a practice of austerity and deep devotion. Thus, *Svadhyaya* stands not only as an academic pursuit but also as a sacred, self-transformative discipline within the spiritual and philosophical traditions of ancient period.

According to the *Apastamba Dharmasutra*, *Svadhyaya* - or self-study - is regarded as a form of spiritual discipline (*Tapas*). It is through this dedicated practice of self-study that an individual gains mastery over the sacred texts (*Sastras*) and achieves success in life. This emphasis on continual study is echoed in the *Mahabharata*, which declares "*vedam ca nityasaḥ*", meaning that the study of the Vedas should be pursued on a daily basis. The *Upanishads* outline a structured method for such self-study, emphasizing a threefold process: *Sravaṇa* (listening), *Manana* (reflection), and *Nididhyasana* (deep contemplation) (Rakhe, 1992). Through this approach, the student begins by attentively listening to the teachings of the guru. Then, by carefully reflecting on the meanings behind the mantras, the learner internalizes the wisdom. Ultimately, through focused contemplation and personal insight, the metaphysical truths of the teachings are fully realized.

Buddhist texts also propose a similar tripartite model of learning - *Sruta* (hearing), *Chinta* (thinking), and *Bhavana* (meditative realization). These stages align closely with the Vedic progression of *Sravaṇa*, *Manana*, and *Nididhyasana*, as they too emphasize a gradual deepening of understanding: from initial study and intellectual engagement to personal experience and absorption of the teachings (Agnihotri, 2013). Throughout the ancient period, teachers consistently encouraged their disciples to engage in daily self-study and reflection, viewing it as essential for the attainment of ultimate truth. An illustrative example appears in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, where the sage Varuṇa provides his son Bhṛgu with the foundational framework for divine knowledge. He then instructs him to realize this knowledge through persistent contemplation and personal inquiry. Following this method diligently, Bhṛgu attains true knowledge after several years of disciplined self-effort (Rajagopalachari, 1958). A similar narrative is found in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, where Aruṇi imparts analogous guidance to his son. These episodes reflect the broader pedagogical philosophy of the time - one that placed supreme value on continuous learning, internal reflection, and the self-realization of truth as the path to higher wisdom.

Field Trip

In ancient times, travel was considered a vital part of the educational process. One of the accepted methods of learning involved journeys undertaken by scholars in pursuit of deeper knowledge and broader experiences. These intellectuals often left their native lands, seeking wisdom in distant regions. Long and purposeful travels allowed them to gain practical insights that extended beyond theoretical instruction. Teachers during this era actively encouraged their students to explore other regions as a means to expand their understanding. It was believed that exposure to new ideas, places, and philosophical traditions would enrich one's intellect. In the post-Vedic period, this practice continued with even greater vigor. Wandering scholars, often referred to as *Charakas*, journeyed far from home in their quest for advanced learning and intellectual engagement.

The *Bṛhadaraṇyaka Upaniṣad* provides evidence of this tradition, describing groups of itinerant scholars who traveled across the land in search of authentic knowledge (Agnihotri, 2013). These scholars regularly engaged in scholarly debates, participated in intellectual assemblies, and exchanged ideas with thinkers from different regions, thereby both deepening their own understanding and contributing to the broader intellectual community. Further support for this tradition appears in the *Satapatha Brahmaṇa*, which recounts the story of Uddalaka Aruṇi, a Brahmin from the Kuru-Pañcala region. He is said to have traveled northward to challenge the scholars of that area, exemplifying the spirit of academic inquiry through movement and debate. Similarly, the *Mahabharata* narrates the account of the learned UgraSrava, who visited the hermitage of Saunaka at Naimiṣaraṇya. There, he delivered discourses on *Brahmatattva* - the nature of ultimate reality - to an attentive audience of Saunaka's disciples. These examples illustrate how travel served as a bridge between knowledge systems, allowing ancient scholars not only to learn but also to teach, inspire, and contribute to a dynamic and interconnected intellectual culture.

In ancient times, it was a common educational practice for both students and teachers to journey to distant regions in pursuit of advanced learning and intellectual refinement (Ramkrishna Centenary Committee, 1937). Travel was not merely for exploration but served as a purposeful means of acquiring deeper knowledge and engaging with diverse philosophical traditions. The *Upanishads* provide several examples of this tradition. One such account tells of Svetaketu, who visited the court of Pravahaṇa Jaivali to participate in scholarly dialogues and expand his understanding through intellectual debate. Similarly, in the *Ramayaṇa*, after completing their formal education, Rama and his brother Lakṣmaṇa embarked on pilgrimages to sacred sites and the hermitages of great sages, seeking further spiritual and philosophical instruction.

Historical and literary references also highlight how even royalty engaged in such practices. For instance, it is said that King Duryodhana traveled to Mithila to undergo specialized training in mace warfare under the guidance of Balabhadra. These narratives emphasize that travel was considered an essential component of one's educational journey. Toward the conclusion of their formal studies, students were often encouraged to undertake educational tours. These journeys allowed them to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts, encounter new perspectives, and refine their intellectual capabilities. Such practices reflect the integral role of travel in the traditional education system as a powerful method for experiential learning and personal growth.

6. CONCLUSION

Nepal embodies a profound and enduring educational legacy, deeply embedded in its ancient cultural and philosophical foundations. The inception of a formalized education system, however, commenced only in 1854 under the autocratic governance of the Rana regime, signifying a pivotal moment in the institutional evolution of education within the country. Prior to this transformation, educational practices in Nepal were predominantly informal, community-oriented, and transmitted through indigenous modalities. Despite their non-institutional character, these traditional systems were grounded in localized epistemologies and remained largely autonomous from external pedagogical influences. Within the broader South Asian context - including regions of ancient Nepal - the Vedic education system was notably prominent. This historical epoch was marked by the genesis and maturation of diverse philosophical and religious traditions, with the Vedic pedagogical framework evolving in parallel. Central to this framework were its teaching-learning practices, which constituted the pedagogical nucleus of the system. A spectrum of instructional activities emerged during this period, reflecting a comprehensive and integrative approach to both intellectual cultivation and spiritual refinement.

The pedagogical practice of Tapas is fundamental in fostering disciplined austerity, self-regulation, and holistic character development, preparing learners for deep intellectual, moral, and spiritual engagement. It promotes perseverance, ethical conduct, and experiential learning, emphasizing transformative self-development beyond simple knowledge acquisition. Central to Vedic education was the oral recitation of texts, which ensured accurate preservation and transmission of sacred knowledge through active, reverential memorization. This method reinforced mnemonic skills, phonetic precision, and linguistic proficiency, highlighting the vital role of aural learning in maintaining knowledge continuity absent written records. Together, these practices underscored a pedagogy rooted in personal transformation and philosophical inquiry rather than mere cognitive accumulation. Beyond mere memorization, Vedic pedagogy emphasized deep comprehension and internalization of philosophical concepts through reflective and critical engagement. This constructivist approach fostered intellectual maturity, analytical reasoning, and higher-order thinking essential for transformative learning.

The oral tradition ensured precise preservation of sacred knowledge, while the conference method - characterized by structured dialogue and debate - promoted active learner participation, critical inquiry, and collaborative knowledge construction, reflecting a proto-Socratic spirit. Additionally, Brahmana-Samghas, or collective assemblies, cultivated cooperative learning and ethical communal inquiry, creating inclusive, dialogical learning environments grounded in shared spiritual values rather than competition. Together, these methods exemplify learner-centered, interactive, and ethically rooted pedagogies that nurtured holistic intellectual and spiritual development.

Renunciation and Meditation cultivate inner discipline, self-awareness, and contemplative insight, essential for focused attention, emotional regulation, and holistic spiritual growth. Educationally, they foster metacognition and reflective learning, enabling transformative experiences beyond mere knowledge acquisition. The Question-Answer Method is an interactive pedagogical strategy that promotes critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and active engagement. It facilitates concept clarification and deeper understanding through dialogue, embodying formative assessment and Socratic principles that develop reasoning, analytical skills, and learner autonomy. Accordingly, oral teaching remains a foundational educational strategy that emphasizes the direct transmission of knowledge through spoken communication. Its utility stems from its ability to promote immediacy in communication, personalized instruction, and the development of listening and verbal skills.

This method allows for prompt feedback and instructional adaptation, rendering it particularly effective for conveying complex or nuanced material. Educationally, oral teaching cultivates linguistic proficiency, auditory comprehension, and interpersonal rapport, underscoring the essential role of teacher presence and dialogic interaction in effective knowledge dissemination. The Practical Examination method functions as a pivotal mechanism for assessing applied competencies, experiential learning, and problem-solving skills. Its importance is underscored by its focus on authentic evaluation within real or simulated contexts, effectively bridging theoretical knowledge and practical application. Educationally, practical examinations reinforce hands-on expertise, critical thinking under pressure, and the ability to translate conceptual understanding into concrete performance. This method promotes experiential learning, accountability, and mastery of skills critical to comprehensive educational outcomes.

Self-Study encourages autonomous learning, fostering self-discipline and intrinsic motivation by enabling learners to take ownership of their educational progress. Its value lies in promoting lifelong learning habits, personal responsibility, and the capacity to independently seek, evaluate, and synthesize information. From an educational standpoint, self-study nurtures

metacognitive awareness, effective time management, and critical reflection, empowering learners to engage deeply and persistently with content beyond formal instruction. The Field Trip method offers experiential learning opportunities by immersing learners in authentic, real-world contexts. Its significance lies in connecting theoretical concepts with practical observation, thereby enriching contextual understanding and sensory engagement. Educationally, field trips facilitate inquiry-based learning, collaborative investigation, and the development of observational and analytical skills. This approach fosters curiosity, contextual awareness, and multidisciplinary integration, substantially enhancing the educational experience through immersive and participatory learning.

REFERENCES

[1] Acharya, B. (1958). *History of Nepalese education*. Kathmandu: Navin Sikshya.

[2] Agnihotri, V. K. (2013). *Indian history and culture*. Kolkata: Allied publishers Private Limited.

[3] Alexander, R. (2000). *Culture and pedagogy: International comparisons in primary education.* Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

[4] Altekar, A. S. (1944). *Education in ancient India*. Banaras: Nand Kishore & Bros.

[5] Altekar, A. S. (1957). *Education in ancient India*. Varanasi: Nand Kishore and Bros.

[6] Altekar, A. S. (2009). *Education in ancient India*. Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.

[7] Aryal, K. R. (1957). *Siksha vijan*. Kathmandu: Bureau of Publication, College of Education.

[8] Aryal, K. R. (1970). *Education for the development of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Shanti Prakashan.

[9] Bajracharya, D. B. (1974). *The inscriptions of the Lichchhavi period*. Kirtipur: CNAS, Tribhuvan University.

[10] Bakshi, S. R. and Mahajan, Lipi. (2000). *Education in ancient India*. New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publication Pvt. Ltd.

[11] Banerjee, Sir Gooroo Dass. (1914). *The education problem in India*. Calcutta: S. K. Lahiri and Co.

[12] Basu, B. D. (1922). *History of education in India under the rule of the east India company*. Calcutta: Modern Review Office.

[13] Bendall, C. (1883). *Catalogue of the Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts in the university library Cambridge*. Cambridge: University press.

[14] Bhandarkar, D. R. (1918). *Lectures on the ancient history of India*. Carmichael Lectures. Calcutta:

[15] Bhandarkar, D. R. (1940). *Some aspects of ancient Indian culture*. Madras: University of Madras.

[16] Bloomfield, M., (1899). *The Atharvaveda*. Strassburg: K.J. Trubner.

[17] Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9*(2), 27-40. http://dx.doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

[18] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

[19] Childe, V. G. (1926). *The Aryans*. New York, London:

[20] Childe, V. G. (1934). *New light on the most ancient east*. London. Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD.

[21] Creswell, J. W. and Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design choosing among five approaches* (4th Ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks.

[22] Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.

[23] Das, S. K. (1930). *The educational system of the ancient Hindus*. Calcutta: S. K. Mitra.

[24] Dash, B. N. (2000). *Foundations of educational thought and practice*. Delhi: Kalyani Publishers.

[25] Dasgupta, S. (1922). *A History of Indian philosophy,* (Vol. I). London: Cambridge University Press.

[26] Dahlke, P. (1927). *Buddhism and its place in the mental life of mankind*. London: Macmillan.

[27] Desai, P. K. (2010). *History of education in India*. New Delhi: Akhand Publishing House.

[28] Dewey, J. (1938). Experience and education. New York: Macmillan Company.

[29] Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall

[30] Dutt, N. K. (1930). *Aspects of Mahayana Buddhism and Its relation of Hinayana*. London: Luzac & Co.

[31] Dvids Rhys, T. W. (1902). *Buddhist India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publisher.

[32] Elo, S., & Kyngas, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of advanced nursing, 62*(1), 107-115

[33] Farquhar, J. N. (1920). *Outlines of the religious literature of India*. London: H. Milford

[34] Flick, U. (2018). Triangulation in data collection. In U. Flick (Ed.), *the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection* (pp. 527-544). London: SAGE Publications.

[35] Frazer, R. W. (1898). *Literary history of India*. London: T. Fisher Unwin.

[36] Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

[37] Gadamer, H.-G. (1975). Truth and method. In Maxwell (Eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (Vol. III). Crossroads, New York: University of Minneapolis Press.

[38] Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretative of cultures: selective essays*. New York: Basic Books.

[39] Ghoshal, U. N. (1945). *A history of Hindu public life* (Part I). Calcutta: Ramesh Ghoshal.

[40] Gokak, V. K. (1989). *India and world culture*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy.

[41] Gupta, N. L. (1993). *Education in Mahabharata*. Nagpur: Chetan Prakashan.

[42] Hamilton, F. (1819). *An account of the kingdom of Nepal, and of the territories annexed to this dominion by the house of Gorkha*. Edinburgh: A. Constable and company.

[43] Hartog, P. (1939). *Some aspects of Indian education - past and present*. London: Oxford.

[44] Hedrick, B. C. & Hedrick, A. K. (1972). *Historical and cultural dictionary of Nepal*. The Scarecrow Press Inc.

[45] Hopkins, E. W. (1895). *The Religions of India*. Boston: Ginn & Company.

[46] Hopkins, E. W. (1901). *The great epic of India*. New York: Scribner's Sons.

[47] Jayapalan, N. (2005). *History of education in India*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors.

[48] Jayaswal, K. P. (1930). *Manu and Yajnavalkya: A comparison and a contrast: A Treatise on the basic Hindu law*. Calcutta: Butterworth.

[49] Kane, P. V. (1946). *History of Dharmasastra* (Vol. II). Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

[50] Kane, P. V. (1962). *History of Dharmasastra*. Bombay: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

[51] Kaur, N. (2005). *History of education*: New Delhi: Mittal Publications.

[52] Keith, A. B. (1923). *Buddhist philosophy in India and Ceylon*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

[53] Keith, A. B. (1925). *Religion and philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*. (Vol-II). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass

[54] Kosambi, D. D. (2006). *The culture civilization of ancient India in historical outline*. Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.

[55] Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content analysis. an introduction to its methodology* (3rd ed). California, CA: Sage Publications.

[56] Krishnamachariar. M. (1937). *History of classical Sanskrit literature*. Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass.

[57] Kumar, K. & Orsterleld, J. (2007). *Education and social change in south Asia*. Delhi: Orient Longman.

[58] Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London: Sage Publications.

[59] Macdonell. A. A. (1997). *A history of Sanskrit literature*. Mothilal Banarsidas publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.

[60] Maskey, G. (1996). *Social life in Nepal from tradition to modernity (1901-1925)*. New Delhi: Anmol Publication Pvt. Ltd.

[61] Mazumdar, N. N. (1916). *A history of education in ancient India*. Calcutta: Macmillan.

[62] Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourceb ook* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

[63] Mitra, V. (1964). *Education in ancient India*. Delhi: Arya book Depot.

[64] Monroe, Paul. (1990). *International encyclopedia of education* (Vol 3, B). New Delhi: Cosmo publications.

[65] Mookerji, R. K. (1969). *Ancient Indian education (Brahmanical and Buddhist)*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

[66] Muller, M. F. (1993). *A history of ancient Sanskrit literature*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

[67] Mukherji, R. K. (1969). *Ancient Indian education*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass.

[68] Mukhopadhyay, M. (2004). *Ancient India education: A plea for reintroduction as a liberating education from the decadence of our time*. Delhi: Shipra Publications.

[69] NNEPC. (1956). Report of Nepal National Education Planning Commission. Kathmandu: Author.

[70] Olivelle, P. (1993). *The asrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[71] Pandey, C. B. (1987). *Ṛṣis in ancient India*. Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan.

[72] Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research*, 34(5 Pt 2), 1189-1208.

[73] Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

[74] Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *Indian philosophy* (Vol. 1). George Allen & Unwin.

[75] Rajagopalachari, C. (1958). *Mahabharata* (5th. ed.). Bombay: Bharatiya Vidyabhavan.

[76] Rakhe, S. M. (1992). *Education in ancient India*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

[77] Ramkrishna Centenary Committee (1937). *The cultural heritage of India* (I-IV Vols.). Calcutta:

[78] Regmi, D. C. (2003). *The history of music in Nepal with special reference to classical music during the rana period 1846-1950*, (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis). Delhi University, Delhi, India.

[79] Ricoeur, P. (1976). Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning. Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth.

[80] Saldana, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Limited.

[81] Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed). pp. 189-213. SAGE Publications.

[82] Seshagiri, K. M. (2010). Cultural overview of education in Hindu civilization. In Zhao. Y., Lei. J., Li. G., M. F., Okano, K., Megahed, N., Gamage. D. & Ramanathan. H. (Eds.) *Handbook of Asian education: A cultural perspective*. Routledge.

[83] Sharma, B. C. (1951). *An outline of Nepalese history*. Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

[84] Sreekala, D. S & Pillai, K. N. M. (2012). Genesis and evolution of education in ancient India. *Pragati Quarterly Research Journal*, 14-34.

[85] Ulich, R. (1947). *Three thousand years of educational wisdom*. Harvard: Harvard University Press. University of Calcutta.

[86] Venkateswara, S. V. (1928). *Indian culture through the ages*. London: Longman, Green & Co.

[87] Vidyabhushana, S. C. (1921). *History of Indian logic*. Calcutta:

[88] Waddell, L. A. (1929). *The makers of civilization in race and history*. London: Luzac & Co.

[89] Wauchope, R. S. (1933). *Buddhist cave temples of India*. Calcutta:

[90] Weber, Albert. (1974). *History of Indian literature*. Varanasi: Chaucamba Sanskrit series Office.

[91] Wilson, H. H. (1862). *Religious sects of the Hindus*. London:

[92] Wilson, H. H. (1984). *Essays: analytical critical and philological on subjects connected with Sanskrit literature. (Vol. III)*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

[93] Wintennitz, M. (1981). *History of Indian literature*. Vol. I. New Delhi: Mothilal Banarsidas.

[94] Wright, D. (1966). History of Nepal: With an introductory sketch of the country and people of Nepal. Calcutta: Ranjan Gupta.