



## Education: A Survey Systems & Practices

India has always had a well developed system of education. Scholars from as far as Tibet, Java, Sumatra, China, Mongolia, Japan and Korea were attracted by it and journeyed to study in Indian centres of learning. The Chinese monk Fa-Hien (Faxian) who travelled in India between 399 and 414 CE spoke of how the fame of Indian education had spread far beyond India.

### Goals of Indian Education

Indian education aimed at both the inner and the outer dimension of a person. Truth, patience, regularity, self-mastery, humility, self-denial, purity of self (*sattvasuddhi*), cognition of the underlying unity of life, nature and environment, reverence for all beings were the inner values cultivated by Indian education. Learners were taught to grow by pursuing the realisation of *puruṣārtha catuṣṭaya* (four ends of life), *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (material well-being), *kāma* (enjoyment), and *mokṣa* (liberation from worldly ties). Pupils were trained to guide their life in consonance with *dharma*, the modelling principle for the individual, the family and the society. *Dharma* required all, including students, to perform their duties towards parents, teachers, people and gods. The outer goal of mastering a discipline, history, art of debate, law, medicine etc., was also assiduously pursued but this 'outer goal' of gaining knowledge could not be divorced from the inner dimension as all knowledge in the tradition is ethically inflected.

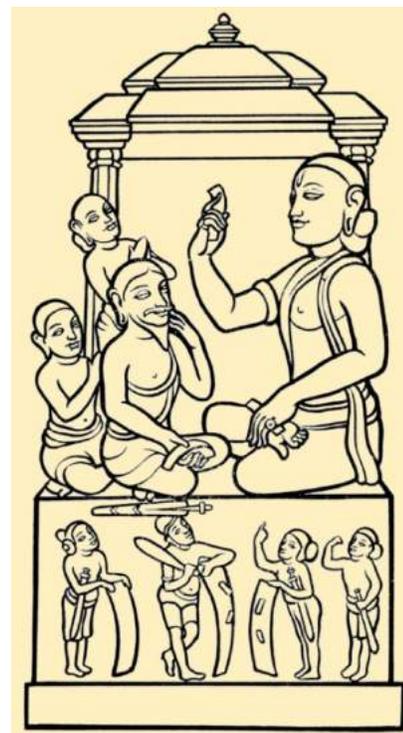
Physical education was important and students participated in *krīḍa* (games, recreational activities), *vyāyāma prakāra* (various types of exercises), *dhanurveda*

(archery, sword play etc.) for acquiring martial skills, and *yoga-sādhana* (*prānāyāma*, *āsana*, *nāḍīsuddhi* etc.) for developing control over the sense organs. Examinations had a different form in the Indian system. In order to demonstrate what they had learnt, students engaged in the exercise of learned debates (*śāstrārtha*) and defended their position. Advanced students were often called upon to teach beginners and in the process acquired some valuable teaching experience as well.

### Teaching and Learning

In Indian tradition, all knowledge is one but for the purpose of education is codified or divided into various disciplines. These disciplinary formations can be described in a hierarchy. The first division is made between *Śāstra* (learned disciplines) and *Kāvya* (imaginative literature). The *śāstras* are classified into *apauruṣeya* (disciplines dealing with knowledge not contingent on individuals) and *pauruṣeya* (disciplines whose knowledge is contingent on the individual). *Apauruṣeya* texts are *Vedas* and *Vedāṅgas*. *Vedas* also includes the *Upaniṣads*. The word 'vedāṅga' literally means limbs of *Vedas*, sciences auxiliary to *Vedas*. They are six: *śikṣā* (phonetics), *kalpa* (social thought), *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), *nirukta* (exposition of words, etymology), *chanda* (metrics), *jyotiṣa* (astronomy) and *alaṃkāraśāstra* (study of figures of speech) may also be enumerated as such.

Under *pauruṣeya* there are at least nine disciplines. This body of literature is also described as *smṛiti* literature in opposition



A teacher instructing disciples, a bas-relief at Konarak (source: R.K. Mookerjee, *Ancient Indian Education*)



to *Vedas* and *Vedāṅgas* that are called *śruti* literature. The *pauruṣeya* disciplines are: *purāṇa*, including *itihāsa* (record of ancient events), *anvikṣiki* (logic), *mimāṃsā* (analysis/interpretation), *dharmaśāstra* (sociology), *kāvya vidyā* (literary theory), *kāmaśāstra* (erotics), *śilpaśāstra* (architecture), *arthaśāstra* (polity) and *vārtā* (agriculture, animal husbandry, trade and commerce). There is another category of discipline known as *upavedas* – their status as knowledge texts is between *apauruṣeya* and *pauruṣeya* as they all deal with applied knowledge. The disciplines of *itihāsaveda* (science of history), *dhanurveda* (science of warfare), *gandharvaveda* (music) and *Ayurveda* (medicine) fall under this category. Teaching was teacher-centred and text-centred and the process of teaching depended on the exposition of the knowledge by a learned teacher.

Learning had three distinct stages. In the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* we are told that the path to knowledge consists of three stages. In the first stage, *śravaṇa*, students listened intently to the teacher; in *manana*, they thought, reflected and removed any doubts that may arise. In the third stage, *nidhidhyāsana*, students observed carefully, remembered minutely and meditated on what they had acquired.

Teaching was in the oral mode and students were also expected to gain firsthand experience of what they were taught in the class.

## The Teacher and the Student

A given teacher-student relationship obtained in Indian culture. The teacher, the *guru*, the *ācārya*, was highly honoured and was seen as the guide who helped students escape the darkness of ignorance and attain the light of knowledge. The teacher's house was the centre of the *ācāryakula*, the *gurukula*. The student and the teacher had a symbiotic relationship and students were treated as members of the teacher's family.



Teacher instructing students in an *āśrama* (bas-relief from Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh, 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, colour added)

Students living with the teacher led a life of self-control, abstinence, obedience and devotion and regulated their lives by adhering to *yama* (self-restraint) and *niyama* (five observances), that is, *śauca* – purity of body, mind, thought; *santoṣa* – positive contentment; *tapas* – austerity; *svādhyāya* – self-study, introspection; and *īśvarapraṇidhāna* – faith in and surrender to the gods.

### Centres of Education

Education in India started in the village itself in the home and in the temples. From there the aspiring student moved to *gurukulas*, centres of learning around great teachers and from there the aspiring scholar went to *vihāras* and universities. After that, the best of them became teachers-in fact *parivrājakas* who walked around the country village to village, promoting *loksaṅgraha*, general welfare, by imparting right values and *jñāna*.

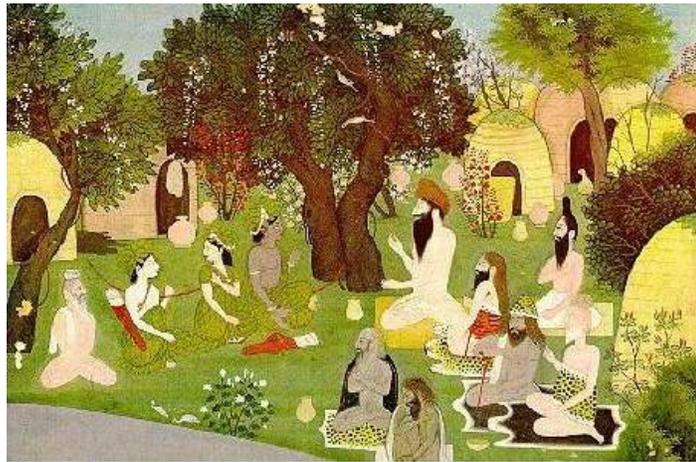


### Temples as First Schools

Temples, and later mosques, in villages were the first schools for children. Many temples sustained educational institutions and maintained students within their precincts. The famous Saltogi inscription of Bijapur district of northern Karnataka describes a temple during the reign of the Rāṣtrakūṭa monarch Kṛṣṇa III (939-97 CE) that housed a college with twenty-seven hostels for students from different parts of the country. The inscription also details how the temple supported students, teachers and how the centre was maintained by endowments. Another inscription of the period of the great monarch Rājendra Colā I (1012-1044 CE) mentions how a village made an endowment for establishing an education centre that would provide free boarding and teaching to at least 340 students. Hostels and educational institutions attached to temples were looked after by the people and villages supplied daily provisions to hostels while temples provided ghee, milk and curd.

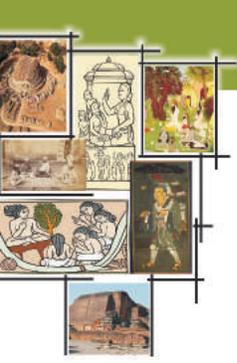
### Gurukulas

The secluded, often forested areas, where *gurukulas* were generally located were known as *āśramas*. These *āśramas* bore the name of the *guru*. Ancient texts mention many such *āśramas* where pupils gathered and lived with the teacher. Among such centres were the *āśrama* of Ṛṣi Kaṇva, in the



*Bharadvāja Āśrama* (source: Wikipedia)

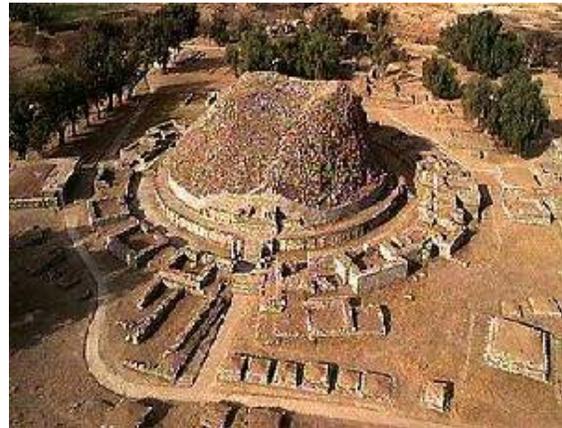
forest of Nandana on the banks of the river Malini, in today's Uttarakhand, the famed teacher Śaunaka's *āśrama* in the Naimiṣa forest, the great teacher Agastya's near the



river Godavari, and Bharadvāja's on the banks of the Yamunā. Women had access to education; a few women savants of the age, such as Gargī, Maitreyī or Lopāmudrā, find mention in the Upaniṣads as leading *ācāryās* and dialecticians.

### **Vihāras and Universities**

During the Buddhist period, *vihāras* (monasteries) emerged as the chief centres of learning. Buddha encouraged the setting up of *vihāras*, for monks and nuns to meditate and the learned to pursue their quest. Gradually the *vihāras* grew into centres of education that attracted students from far and wide. The great Indian universities of Nālandā, Vikramaśilā and Valabhi may have evolved around *vihāras* and the initiative of creating these came entirely from the society.

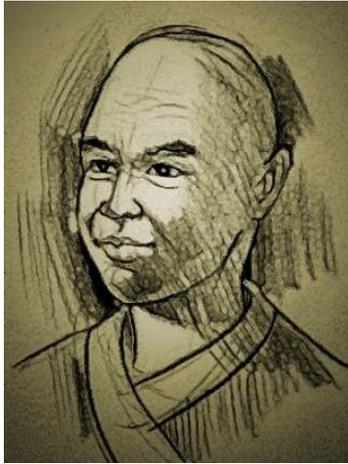


A partial view of the university of Taxila  
(source: Wikipedia)

Taxila or Takṣaśilā (c. 600 BCE–500 CE) near Rawalpindi in present-day Pakistan, Nālandā (5<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> CE) and Vikramaśilā (8<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> CE) in present-day Bihar, and Valabhi (5<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> CE) in Gujarat were among the world's first universities. Taxila University's different Schools taught many subjects. Medicine was given special attention; there were also schools of painting, sculpture, image-making, handicrafts and astronomy. Tradition has it that the legendary Indian grammarian Pāṇini (7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> cent BCE) was a student there, as was Cāṇakya (c. 3<sup>rd</sup> cent BCE) the well-known exponent of statecraft. Jīvaka (5<sup>th</sup> BCE) one of the most renowned physicians in ancient India, is also said to have learnt medicine at Taxila.



The Chinese scholars I-tsing (Yijing, *left*) and Hsüan-tsang (Xuanzang, *right*) visited Nālandā in the 7<sup>th</sup> century



CE. According to them, the university had eight separate halls, 300 apartments, meditation halls and classrooms, all surrounded by lakes and parks. Education was free and there were more than 5,000 students and 1,500 teachers. A hundred lectures

were conducted every day and the practice of learning through debates and discussions was highly developed.



A view of the ruins of the ancient Nālandā University, Bihar (courtesy: Michel Danino)

Nālandā had an imposing library called 'Dharmagañja' which consisted of three multi-storey buildings, 'Ratnasāgara', 'Ratnarañjaka' and 'Ratnodadhi', the last being nine-storey high; it contained lakhs of manuscripts. The university was set on fire in 1193 by Bakhtiyar Khilji. By then, it had had great teachers such as Nāgārjuna, Sthiramati, Śīlabhadra and Śāntarakṣita whose fame travelled as far as Tibet and China.

### Community-Supported Education

Education in India was supported by the community. A gift in support of education was seen as the highest donation (*dāna*). All members of society supported the cause of education by offering food, gifts, shelter, etc. The wealthier sections of society substantially supported education by building hostels and making educational endowments (*adhyāyanavṛttis*).

Education was free and no fee was levied. It is recorded that wealthy students who came to study at the University of Nadiā in Bengal supported themselves while the university supported those of limited means. Kings supported the centres of learning through grants. In the South, whole villages, known as *agrahārams*, were dedicated to learning and teaching.

### The Continuing System

The Indian education system had such resilience that it continued to function till the pre-colonial age. British administrators documented the wide network of schools and institutions of higher learning in various parts of India. William Adam's reports on indigenous education, collated between 1835 and 1838, record how the system was even then supported by local resources, including voluntary donations from interested and wealthy citizens, with even illiterate peasants pitching in their bit.



An Indian school, Agra, 1871 (source: British Library Online Gallery).

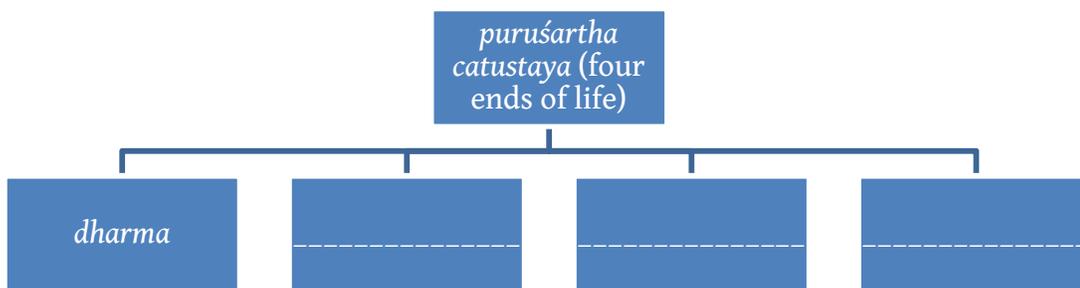
These records reveal that in Bengal and Bihar alone, indigenous village schools numbered between 100,000 to 150,000. In the 1820s, the Collector of Cuddapah (Kadapa in Andhra Pradesh) noted how villagers supported students who came to study under teachers in the vicinity. There were many institutions of higher learning in most districts of Bengal and southern India: the district of Coimbatore alone had over 700 indigenous schools. Significantly, in many districts of south India 78% to 80% of the students in such village schools were from the disadvantaged sections of society.

In summary, the Indian concept of education was not focused on the intellect alone: it focused on the students' inner as well as outer development and prepared them to face the vicissitudes of life. In many ways, the wide and decentralized network of education centres was the foundation of India's rich cultural contributions in intellectual, artistic and spiritual spheres.

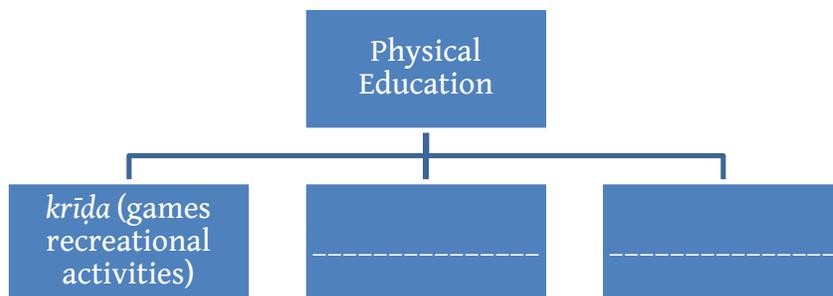
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### Comprehension

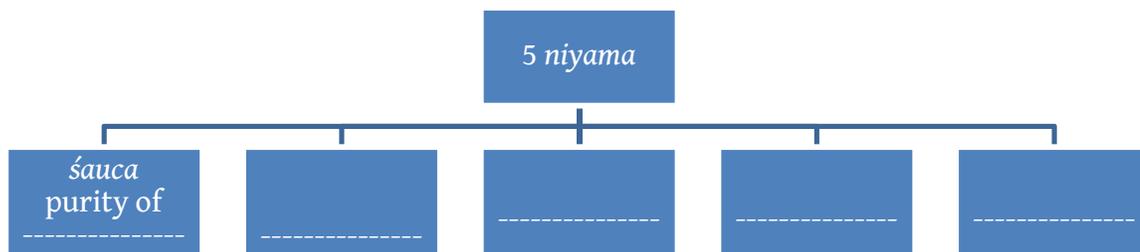
1. What were the goals of education in ancient India? Complete the visual below with information from the text.

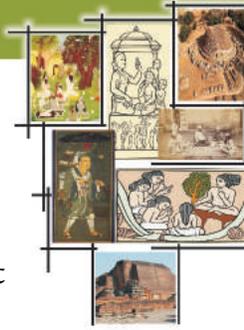


2. Examine the following table highlighting aspects of physical education. You may need to modify the chart. After you have completed the table, discuss the merits of physical education.



Complete the table below listing the 5 *niyama* / observances of *brahmacārins*:

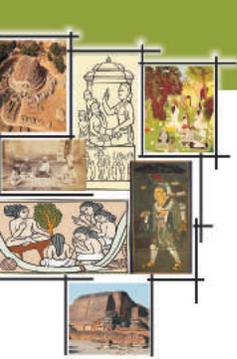




3. What processes did the guru use to teach his students? Make a list and comment on the appropriateness of these processes.
4. It is often said that rote learning is the bane of education today. Was rote learning the foundation of learning in ancient India? Give evidence from the text to support your argument.
5. Reflect upon your own education right from the initial stages to the completion of class 10, i.e. secondary level. Complete the table below by jotting down ideas about each of the two periods (you may like to add to the list of features).

Features of education systems	ancient	modern
objectives / motto		
curriculum		
pedagogy (teaching methodology)		
teacher-student relationship		
process of teaching-learning		

- Compare and contrast the two systems of education. Do you think some features of the ancient education system could be incorporated into the modern education systems? Give specific points.
- During this stage your Group Reporter will make your presentation in front of the whole class. You may like to make a collaborative multimedia presentation wherein each member gets an opportunity to participate actively.

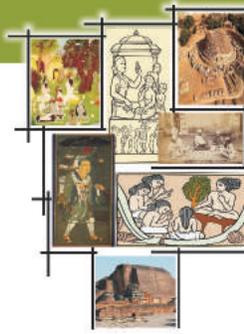


### Activities

- Make a list of mottos of various schools / universities / educational institutes. Your group has been given the task of designing a motto complete with the logo for a new model school you are setting up. The new school will use features of the ancient Indian education system as well as of the modern education beliefs and systems.
- Do you have a Roll of Honour to recognise deserving students / alumni? What is the criterion for selection? Who were the eminent scholars of the ancient Indian universities? In what ways was their contribution remarkable?
- Name a few of the dignitaries and foreign visitors to ancient Indian universities. Find out more about their life and work and findings about the India.
- Imagine that some of the ancient education traditions of the *guru-śiṣya paramparā* are to be integrated in today's system. You have been given the responsibility of framing two sets of suggestions: one for the Student's Handbook and one for the Teacher's Handbook. These will be incorporated as valuable advice for students and teachers. Using the information from the survey article to write the two sets of suggestions.

### Extended Activity

- What were the findings of the British reports on the existing Indian education system? List three main features. Do they have any relevance to the issues that we face in education today?
- What considerations led the British to introduce the English education system in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries?
- In your opinion what have been the long-term implications of the British system of education in India?

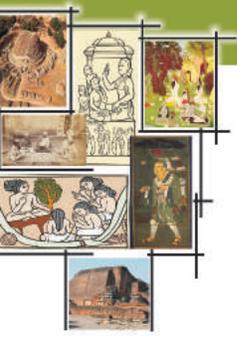


### Project Ideas

- Find out about some major policy decisions on education taken by the Indian government from 1980. How far have they been successful? Give reasons for their success or failure. Make constructive suggestions on how the situation can be improved. You may like to consider some of the following:
  - New Education Policy
  - Value-based education (inner dimension / outer dimension)
  - Sarva Shiksha Andolan
  - Opportunities for the economically disadvantaged sections / girl child / women.
- Organize a seminar on 'Indian Education Today: The Road Ahead'.
- An International Summit on Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is being held. Leading educationists are to present their views on education. Find out more about other leading educational philosophies.
- You are a representative of one of the four ancient Indian universities. Highlight the salient features of your university: its philosophy, goals, ethos, faculty, student profile, infrastructure etc. Explain your university's contributions to the society around.

### Further Reading

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2. Radha Kumud Mookerjee, *Ancient Indian Education*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, 1969.
3. D.G. Apte, *Universities in Ancient India*, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, undated.
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- D.G. Apte, *Universities in Ancient India*  
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[www.samanvaya.com/dharampal/](http://www.samanvaya.com/dharampal/)
- H.D. Sankalia, *University of Nālandā*  
[www.new1.dli.ernet.in/scripts/FullindexDefault.htm?path1=/data2/upload/0058/951&first=1&last=344&barcode=4990010204799](http://www.new1.dli.ernet.in/scripts/FullindexDefault.htm?path1=/data2/upload/0058/951&first=1&last=344&barcode=4990010204799)





## Primary Texts on Education in India: A Selection

### Two Types of Knowledge and the Right Pupil

Śaunaka, the great householder, approached Angiras in the proper manner and said: Revered sir, what is that by the knowing of which all this becomes known?

To him he said: Two kinds of knowledge must be known — that is what the knowers of Brahman tell us. They are the higher knowledge and the lower knowledge.

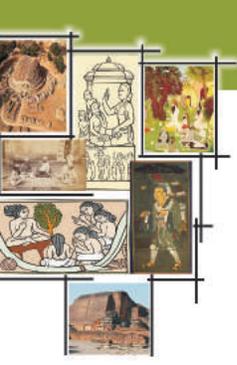
Of these two, the lower knowledge is the Rig Veda, the Yajurveda, the Sāmaveda, the Atharvaveda, *śikṣhā* (phonetics), *kalpa* (rituals), *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), *nirukta* (etymology), *chandas* (metre) and *jyotiṣ* (astronomy); and the higher knowledge is that by which the Imperishable Brahman is attained.

To that pupil who has duly approached him, whose mind is completely serene and whose senses are controlled, the wise teacher should indeed rightly impart the Knowledge of Brahman, through which one knows the immutable and the true Purusha. (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 1.3.4.5.13, tr. Swami Nikhilananda)

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### Mere Intellectual Knowledge Is Not Enough

A mere intellectual apprehension of truth, a reasoned conviction, is not sufficient, though it is necessary as the first stage as a sort of mark at



which to shoot. (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, II.2.24, tr. Radha Kumud Mookerjee, *Ancient Indian Education*)

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### The Link between Teacher and Pupil

With reference to knowledge – the preceding word is the teacher, the following word is the pupil, their union is knowledge, and their link is instruction. (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* I. 3, tr. Patrick Olivelle, *Early Upaniṣads*)

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### Teachers Invite Students to Come to Them

May *brahmacārins* (students) come to me variously!

May *brahmacārins* come to me!

May *brahmacārins* practise self-control!

May *brahmacārins* enjoy peace!

As waters flow downward, as the months merge in the year, so may *brahmacārins* come to me from all directions! (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* IV, 2, 3, tr. Swami Nikhilananda)

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### Controlling the Mind and the Senses: the Goal of Indian Education

When a man lacks understanding, and his mind is never controlled;

His senses do not obey him, as bad horses, a charioteer.

But when a man has understanding, and his mind is ever controlled;



His senses do obey him, as good horses, a charioteer.

(*Katha Upaniṣad* III 5, 6, tr. Patrick Olivelle, *Early Upaniṣads*)

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### Teacher's Directives to Students on their Completion of Study

After the completion of ... study, the teacher admonishes his resident pupil:

“Speak the truth. Follow *dharma*. Do not neglect your private recitation of the Veda. After you have given a valuable gift to the teacher, do not cut off your family line. ... Do not neglect the truth. Do not neglect the *dharma*. Do not neglect your health. Do not neglect your wealth. Do not neglect your private and public recitation of the Veda. Do not neglect the rites to gods and ancestors. ... Treat your mother like a god. Treat your father like a god. Treat your teacher like a god. Treat your guests like gods. ...

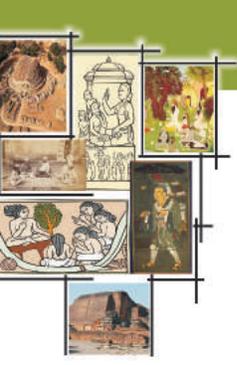
“You should give with faith, and never without faith. You should give with dignity. You should give with modesty. You should give with trepidation. You should give with comprehension.”

(adapted from *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, I. 11, 1, 2, 3,  
tr. Patrick Olivelle, *Early Upaniṣads*)

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### What Is a Useful Life?

[One who leads a useful life is one] who in all his lifetime thinks of the well-being of others, considers others' wealth as of no consequence



(*tuccha*), is possessed of acknowledged virtues (*sadguṇa*), such as truth-telling, acts thoughtfully, respects those who are worthy of respect, is indifferent (*udasīna*) to others, serves, devotedly the learned and the aged, controls his passions, is constantly involved in sharing his knowledge, his wealth, sees all beings in his own self, accepts good advice.” (*Cāraka Saṃhita*, 1.30.23, 26)

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### Hsüan-tsang’s (Xuanzang) Impressions of Indian Education

To educate and encourage the young, they are first taught [led] to study the book of twelve chapters [*siddhavastu*].

After arriving at the age of seven years and upwards, the young are instructed in the five *vidyās*, *sāstras* of great importance. The first is called the elucidation of sounds [*śabdavidyā*]. This treatise explains and illustrates the agreement [concordance] of words, and it provides an index for derivatives.

The second *vidyā* is called *kiau-ming* [*śilpasthanā vidyā*]; it treats of the arts, mechanics, explains the principles of the *Yin* and *Yang* and the calendar.

The third is called the medicinal treatise [*cikitsāvidyā*]; it embraces formula for protection, secret charms, [the use of] medicinal stones, acupuncture, and mugwort [a medicinal plant].

The fourth *vidyā* is called the *hetuvidyā* [logic]; its name is derived from the character of the work which relates to the determination of the true and false, and reduces to their last terms the definition of right and wrong.



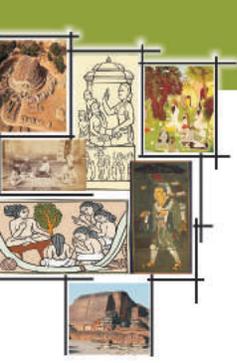
The fifth *vidyā* is called the science of *adhyātmavidyā* [“the interior”]; it relates to the five vehicles, their causes and consequences, and the subtle influences of these. ...

[Role of the Teachers:] The teachers [of these works] must themselves have closely studied the deep and secret principles they contain, and penetrated to their remotest meaning. They then explain their general sense, and guide their pupils in understanding the words which are difficult. They urge them on and skilfully conduct them. They add lustre to their poor knowledge and stimulate the desponding. ... When they have finished their education, and have attained thirty years of age, then their character is formed and their knowledge ripe. When they have secured an occupation they first of all thank their master for his attention. There are some, deeply versed in antiquity, who devote themselves to elegant studies and live apart from the world, and retain the simplicity of their character. These rise above mundane present, and are as insensible to renown as to the contempt of the world. Their name having spread afar, the rulers appreciate them highly, but are unable to draw them to the court. (From: Hsüan-tsang (Xuanzang), *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Vol. I. Translated by Samuel Beal. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906)

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### Hsüan-tsang’s (Xuan Zang) Description of Nālandā University

The whole establishment is surrounded by a brick wall, which encloses the entire monastery from without. One gate opens into the great college, from which are separated eight other halls, standing in the middle (of the *Saṅghārāma*). The richly adorned towers, and the fairy-like turrets, like



pointed hilltops, are congregated together. The observatories seem to be lost in the vapours (of the morning), and the upper rooms tower above the clouds. From the windows one may see how the winds and the clouds (produce new forms), and above the soaring eaves the conjunctions of the sun and moon. And then we may add how the deep, translucent ponds, bear on their surface the blue lotus, intermingled with the Kie-ni (*kanaka*) flower, of deep red colour, and at intervals the Āmra groves spread over all, their shade.

All the outside courts, in which are the priests' chambers, are of four stages. The stages have dragon projections and coloured eaves, the pearl-red pillars, carved and ornamented, the richly adorned balustrades, and the roofs covered with tiles that reflect the light in a thousand shades, these things add to the beauty of the scene. The *saṅghārāma* (monasteries) of India are counted by myriads, but this is the most remarkable for grandeur and height. The priests, belonging to the monastery, or strangers (residing therein) always reach to the number of 10,000, who all study the Great Vehicle (a major Buddhist sect), and also (the works belonging to) the eighteen sects and not only so, but even ordinary works, such as the Vedas and other books, the *hetuvidyā* (logic), *śabdavidyā* (grammar), the *cikitsāvidyā* (medicine), Atharvaveda (the works on Magic), the *Sāṅkhya* (a major system of philosophy); besides these they thoroughly investigate the "miscellaneous" works. There are 1,000 men who can explain twenty collections of *sūtrās* and *śāstras*; 500 who can explain thirty collections, and perhaps ten men, including the Master of the Law, who can explain fifty collections. Śīlabhadra alone has studied and understood the whole number. His eminent virtue and advanced age have caused him to be regarded as the chief member of the community. Within the Temple



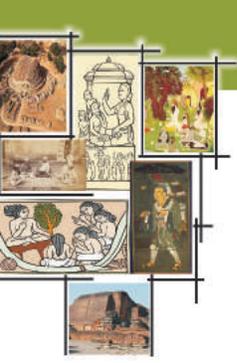
they arrange every day about 100 pulpits for preaching, and the students attend these discourses without any fail, even for a minute (an inch shadow on the dial). The priests dwelling here are, as a body, spontaneously dignified and grave, so that during the 700 years since the foundation of the establishment, there has been no single case of guilty rebellion against the rules. (Adapted from *The Life of Hiuen Tsang* by the Shaman Hwui Li, Samuel Beal, ed., Kegan Paul, Trench & Trübner, London, 1911)

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## Narratives of Indian Education in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries

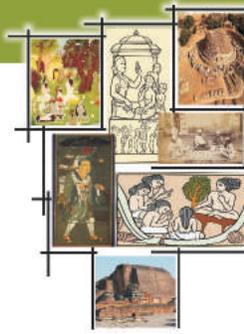
### An Italian Explorer's Record of Indian Education in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century

They [Indians] are particularly anxious and attentive to instruct their children to read and to write. Education with them is an early and an important business in every family. Many of their women are taught to read and write. The Brahmans are generally the schoolmasters, but any of the castes may, and often do, practice teaching. The children are instructed without violence, and by a process peculiarly simple. The pupils are the monitors of each other, and the characters are traced with a rod, or the finger on the sand. Reading and writing are acquired at the same time, and by the same process. This mode of teaching however is only initial. If the pupil is meant to study the higher branches of learning, he is removed from these primary schools, where the arts of reading, writing and accounts are acquired, and placed under more scientific



masters. It is to these elementary schools that the labouring classes in India owe their education. ...

I entertained myself in the porch of the temple, beholding little boys learning arithmetic after a strange manner, which I will here relate. They were four, and having all taken the same lesson before the master, to get that same by heart, and repeat likewise their former lessons, and not forget them, one of them singing musically with a certain continued tone (which has the force of making a deep impression in the memory) recited part of the lesson; as for example, “one by itself makes one”; and whilst he was thus speaking, he wrote down the same number, not with any kind of pen, nor in paper, but (not to spend paper in vain) with his finger on the ground, the pavement being for that purpose strewed all over with fine sand; after the first had wrote what he sung, all the rest sung and wrote down the same thing together. Then the first boy sung, and wrote down another part of the lesson; as, for example, two by itself makes two, which all the rest repeated in the same manner; and so forward in order. When the pavement was full of figures, they put them out with the hand, and if need were, strewed it with new sand from a little heap which they had before them wherewith to write further. And thus they did as long as exercise continued; in which manner likewise they told one, they learnt to read and write without spoiling paper, pens or ink, which certainly is a pretty way. I asked them, if they happen to forget or be mistaken in any part of the lesson, who corrected and taught them, they being all scholars without the assistance of any master; they answered me, and said true, that it was not possible for all four to forget or mistake in the same part, and that they thus exercised together, to the end, that if one happened to

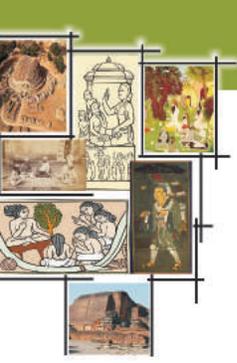


be out, the other might correct him. Indeed a pretty, easy and secure way of learning.

**Note:** From Pietro Della Valle's account of education and literature in Malabar. Pietro Della Valle (1586-1652) was an Italian explorer who travelled in India between 1623 and 1624 and visited Surat, Goa, and the Malabar coast. Source: Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree*.

### A Description of Indian Education in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

The education of youth in India is much simpler, and not near so expensive as in Europe. The children assemble under the shade of a coconut tree; place themselves in rows on the ground, and trace out on the sand, with the fore finger of the right hand, the elements of their alphabet, and then smooth it with the left when they wish to trace out other characters. The writing master ... who stations himself opposite to his pupils, examines what they have done; points out their faults, and shows them how to correct them. At first, he attends them standing; but when the young people have acquired some readiness in writing, he places himself cross-legged on a tiger's or deer's skin, or even on a mat made of the leaves of the coconut-tree, or wild ananas [pineapple], which is called Kaida, plaited together. This method of teaching writing was introduced into India two hundred years before the birth of Christ, according to the testimony of Megasthenes, and still continues to be practised. No people, perhaps, on earth have adhered so much to their ancient usages and customs as the Indians.



### The Teacher's Subsistence

A schoolmaster in Malabar receives every two months, from each of his pupils, for the instruction given them, two Fanon or Panam. Some do not pay in money, but give him a certain quantity of rice, so that this expense becomes very easy for the parents. There are some teachers who instruct children without any fee, and are paid by the overseers of the temple, or by the chief of the caste. When the pupils have made tolerable progress in writing, they are admitted into certain schools, called Eutupalli, where they begin to write on palm leaves (Pana), which, when several of them are stitched together, and fastened between two boards, form a Grantha, that is, an Indian book. If such a book be written upon with an iron style, it is called Granthavari, or Lakya, that is, writing, to distinguish it from Alakya, which is something not written.

### Respect for the Teacher

When the Guru, or teacher, enters the school, he is always received with the utmost reverence and respect. His pupils must throw themselves down at full length before him; place their right hand on their mouth, and not venture to speak a single word until he gives them express permission. Those who talk and prate contrary to the prohibition of their master are expelled from the school, as boys who cannot restrain their tongue, and who are consequently unfit for the study of philosophy. By these means the preceptor always receives that respect which is due to him: the pupils are obedient, and seldom offend against rules which are so carefully inculcated.



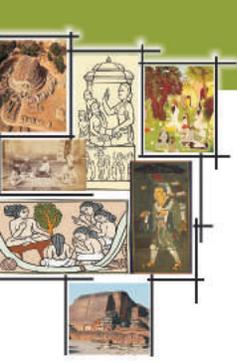
## Physical Education and Sports

The management of the lance, fencing, playing at ball and tennis, have been introduced into their education on good grounds, to render their youth active and robust, There are particular masters for all these exercises, arts and sciences; and each of them, as already mentioned, is treated with particular respect by the pupils. Twice a year each master receives a piece of silk, which he employs for clothing; and this present is called Samanam.

**Note:** Extracts from Fra Paolino Da Bartolomeo's *Voyages to the East Indies* (1796). Da Bartolomeo (1748-1806), an Austrian Carmelite missionary and author of the first Sanskrit grammar published in Europe, came to Malabar in India in 1774 and spent the next fourteen years there. (From Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree*)

## Description of the University at Navadveep (Nuddeah) in Bengal in 1791

The grandeur of the foundation of the Nuddeah University is generally acknowledged. It consists of three colleges — Nuddeah, Santipore and Gopulparrah. Each is endowed with lands for maintaining masters in every science. When ever, the revenue of these lands, prove too scanty for the support of pandits, and their scholars, the Rajah's treasury supplies the deficiency: for the respective masters have not only stated salaries from the Rajah, for their own support; but also an additional allowance for every pupil they entertain. And their resources are so ample, there are at present eleven hundred students, and one hundred and fifty masters. Their numbers, it is true, fall short of those in former days. [Earlier] ... there were at Nuddeah, no less than four thousand students, and masters in proportion.



The students that come from distant parts, are generally of a maturity in years, and proficiency in learning, to qualify them for beginning the study of philosophy, immediately on their admission; but they say, that to become a real pundit, a man ought to spend twenty years at Nuddeah, in close application.

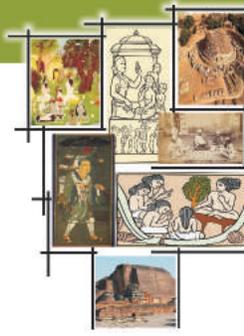
Any man that chooses to devote himself to literature will find maintenance at Nuddeah, from the fixed revenues of the university, and the donation of the Rajah. Men in affluent circumstances, however, live there at their own expense, without burdening the foundation. By the pundits system of education, all valuable works, are committed to memory; and to facilitate this, most of their compositions, even their dictionaries are in metre. But they by no means trust their learning entirely to this repository: on the contrary, those who write treatises, or commentaries on learned topics, have at Nuddeah, always met with distinguished encouragements and rewards.

Their method of teaching is this; two of the masters commence a dialogue, or disputation on the particular topic they mean to explain. When a student hears anything advanced, or expressed that he does not perfectly understand, he has the privilege of interrogating the master about it. They give the young men every encouragement, to communicate their doubts, by their temper and patience in solving them.

It is a professed and established maxim of Nuddeah, that a pundit who lost his temper, in explaining any point to a student, let him be ever so dull and void of memory, absolutely forfeits his reputation, and is disgraced.

(From Dharampal, *Archival Compilations*, vol. 9)

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### Love of Learning and Support for Education among Indians

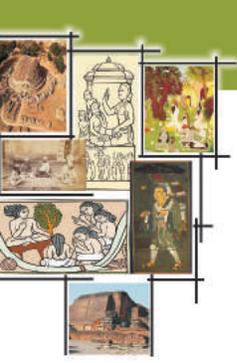
Respect for learning has always been the redeeming feature of 'the East'. To this the Panjab has formed no exception. Torn by invasion and civil war, it ever preserved and added to educational endowments. The most unscrupulous chief, the avaricious money-lender, and even the freebooter, vied with the small landowner in making peace with his conscience by founding schools and rewarding the learned. There was not a mosque, a temple, a dharmasala that had not a school attached to it, to which the youth flocked chiefly for religious education. ... There was not a single villager who did not take pride in devoting a portion of his produce to a respected teacher. ... The lowest computation gives us 3,30,000 pupils (against little more than 1,90,000 at present [1882]) in the schools of the various denominations who were acquainted with reading, writing, and some method of computation.

Note: Extract from G.W. Leitner's report, *History of the Education in Panjab since Annexation*, 1882. G.W. Leitner (1840-1899), a British Orientalist appointed principal of the Lahore Government College in 1864, was involved with Indian education and studied Indian culture until his retirement from service in 1886. (From Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree*)

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### A Widespread Pre-Colonial Network of Indigenous Schools

The estimate of 100,000 such schools in Bengal and Bihar is confirmed by a consideration of the number of villages in those two Provinces. Their number has been officially estimated at 150,748 of which, not all, but most have each a school. If it be admitted that there is so large a proportion as



a third of the villages that have no schools, there will still be 100,000 that have them. ... The system of village schools is extensively prevalent; that the desire to give education to their ... children must be deeply seated in the minds of parents even of the humblest classes. (Extracts from William Adam's report on the State of Education in Bengal 1835-38, in Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree*)

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I need hardly mention ... that there is hardly a village, great or small, throughout our territories, in which there is not at least one school, and in larger villages more; many in every town, and in large cities in every division, where young natives are taught, reading, writing and arithmetic, upon a system so economical from handful or two of grains, to perhaps a rupee per month to the school master, according to the ability of the parent, and at the same time so simple and effectual, that there is hardly a cultivator or petty dealer who is not competent to keep his own accounts with a degree of accuracy, in my opinion, beyond what we meet with the amongst the lower orders in our own country; whilst the more splendid dealers and bankers keep their books with a degree of case conciseness, and clearness I rather think fully equal to those of any British merchants.

(Note by G.L. Prendergast, senior council member of the Bombay Presidency, House of Commons Paper: 1831-32, vol. 9. From Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree*)

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### Comprehension

1. What were the virtues that Indian students were encouraged to inculcate and adopt in ancient times?
2. What are the chief features of India's school systems recorded by European travellers / officials before or at the start of the colonial era?

### Extended Activity

1. Based on your reading of the primary texts, highlight the fundamental principles of education in ancient India through the use of drama and PowerPoint presentations.
2. Work in groups. Each group must:
  - have a *sūtradhāra* or narrator;
  - introduce the theme / event / situation;
  - provide a commentary on individual episodes;
  - give a suitable conclusion.

#### Suggestions for dramatization:

- Teacher's farewell speech to students on completion of their study
- Tapping Hsüan-tsang's impressions for an improvisation; situation: a principal / headmaster addressing parents on the education offered to the student
- A Student teacher's valedictory address highlighting the role of a teacher
- PowerPoint presentations on records of Indian education in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

