

CHAPTER-02

HISTORICIZING THE ASHRAM SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

“Purity of personal life is the one indispensable condition for building up a sound education”

(Mahatma Gandhi)

Education is the most essential component of all which makes a base for civil society to secure its future. The skilled and proficient human power can accelerate the momentum of economic development. Despite committed attempts made by the government and other stakeholders, our pedagogical refinement has not matched the demands of the time or that of the future. The future world of education is one where the forces of transnational's, technology and cutting edge demand an environment that might cause stress to all the stakeholders and specifically children. It is important to prepare the next generation for the future, but the primary aim of our education should be on all-round development of a child. As Confucius, a Chinese philosopher said, “Study the past, if you would divine the future, hence it is apt to study the past and evaluate the Ashram system of education.”¹

The purpose of this chapter is to acquire an understanding of education in ancient and medieval periods generally in India and specifically in Gujarat. It is widely known that in India there was a rich tradition of learning. In fact, the ancient education system evolved as ideal as it corresponded with life, ethnicity, and values. The ethical and traditional values were handed down from one generation to another through the oral or written medium. Both ancient and medieval periods were influenced by religion and not so much by political and economic

¹Wan, Helena. (1980) ‘The Educational Thought of Confucius’.Dissertations.

changes. The educational structure mostly focused on the enrichment of culture, character, and personality development along with providing basic occupational training.

Ancient India had been the land of contrivance; it boasted of the establishment of the world's first university in Takshila c. approx. 400-500 BCE to 550 CE. It was believed to have consisted of more than 10,500 students all over the world studying more than sixty subjects in Takshila University.²

Altekar in his work respects the ideas of imperialists but at the same time also talks about the uniqueness of this education institution. He says, "it may be observed at the outset that Takshila did not possess any college or university in the modern sense of the term. It was simply a centre of education. It had many famous teachers to whom hundreds of students flocked for higher education from all parts of India. Every teacher, assisted by his advanced students, formed an institution himself. Similarly, the ancient Indian educational tradition talks about scientists who made important discoveries. For instance, Aryabhata, one of the ancient Indian scientists, invented the digit zero. The ancient Indians were known to value research and were continuously experimenting.³ The value of 'pi' was calculated for the first time by a mathematician known as Budhayana, later he gave the world the Pythagoras theorem alongside with his studies in Trigonometry, algebra and calculus studies had originated in India. There are many such inventions and pedagogies that can be mentioned here which were the success stories of the ancient Indian education system.⁴ These examples clearly prove that the education system of ancient India was culturally and spiritually enriched and advanced. Many claim that the foundation of the ancient education system was religious in nature. However, that is true for all

²Mookerji, R. (1963). *Hindu civilization*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.111

³Pandya, D. R. N. (2014). *Indian education system—a historical journey of Education*, 3(3).

⁴Bokil, V. P. (1925). *The history of education in India: part I, (Aryan period)* (Vol. 1). Labour Press.8.

the ancient civilizations. Dharma or duty had indeed played an important role in the Indian education system.⁵ It was believed that the aim of life according to the ancient text was “*Moksha*” or freedom from the cycle of life and death. The educational structures strived to achieve that end. It was not an easy task, as it was believed that every human being had to undergo a learning process which would determine how far or near, they were to their goals in the end. The responsibility was taken by both the states and society. Hence education was not the responsibility of an individual, but it was a communal responsibility.⁶ Education emerged as the most important tool for creating a society's scientific temperament, and making the society ready for a change.

Brahmanical System of Education and Ashrams

As is mentioned earlier, the ancient Indian education had evolved on the foundation of philosophy that investigated the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. It centered on the idea of life, culture, and moral values. The concept of ultimate death and attainment of “*Moksha*” was part of Indian tradition. It is believed that great Indian sages often acted as researchers and educators since the knowledge system was to be transferred to younger or next generation. The transference was sacrosanct and hence sages were actively involved in the educating process and became teachers. They strove to evolve a special form of education whereby a perfect balance was established between materialism and spiritualism.⁷ This was called the *ashram* system of education. There was a very strong realization of the fact that life was not going to provide comforts of home and it was considered important that the students be trained to live a hard life in their initial years. It was deemed important to give life lessons to

⁵Altekar, A. S. (1957). Education in Ancient India, Nandakishore & Bros. Varaneshi 1965.

⁶Bokil, V. P. (1925).⁸

⁷Sinha, S. (2018). *Fundamentals of Education*. Lulu. com.71-89.

students and not merely theoretical knowledge. The focus had to be laid on practical education. Not all the students had the same caliber; therefore, the great gurus had to work hard with the weaker students. They believed that every individual has a place in society. All they needed to do was to find out their temperament and train them accordingly. The ancient Indian texts are replete with stories of the students who performed great deeds after their guru's showed faith in them.

Since, the *gurus* played such an important role in the society, they were held in great esteem in ancient India. They in fact sometimes were believed to be more important than the parents and even gods. It was believed that the main objective of the teacher was to remove the darkness from the life of the pupils to guide them towards the light of knowledge. Quite often the student would be able to choose their gurus, but mostly it was the gurus who chose their students. The students or their parents usually would approach a guru who had a great reputation for their character and scholarship. The gurus selected students after carrying out tests (something like an entrance test of today's times). The selection also was dependent on how the students performed and more than that, attention was paid to their moral character. Once the selection process was complete the students had to live with the teacher, in what was called a *gurukul* or *ashram*. The gurus lived in the *ashram* with their families. The students lived with them and often established an affinity with them. It was not uncommon for the Gurus to marry off their daughters to their students. However, the relationship mostly remained communal in nature.⁸

Gurus had great responsibility, the greatest of it however was to inculcate the spirit of fulfilling social duties. This was taught by way of examples and hence the gurus lived that life themselves. It really did not matter what the social status of the student was, whether he belonged to the

⁸Altekar, A. S. (1957). *Education in Ancient India*, Nandakishore & Bros. Varaneshi 1965.48-69.

upper or lower caste or class, the student was required to perform tasks assigned to him. For instance, since the student was residing at the teacher's house, he was to carry out the household chores like collect wood for cooking, bring drinking water, clean the premises and help in the kitchen along with whatever work that was assigned by the teacher's wife. This taught the students the dignity and equality of labour. When these students grew up to become householders or rulers, they followed the rules of community living and lived in peace and harmony. Most important aspect of the *ashram* system of education was that all the jobs were considered important and a care was taken that the gurus prepared each batch to assume official positions in the atmosphere.⁹ Discipline was also an important component of learning and education in ancient times. It meant that the student was required to keep control and follow rules and regulations or else they were liable to punishments and sometimes expulsions.¹⁰ The discipline gave control and power to the gurus. In the words of Bernstein, it was called an “Invisible form of control”. It made students more aware of their responsibilities and duties. They had to follow strict rules and regulations.¹¹ In the *ashram* the student was trained to overcome lust, anger, greed, vanity, conceit and joy. They were not to gamble, gossip, lie, backbite, or hurt the feelings of others, dance, sing, look or talk or touch the other sex and kill animals.¹²

Historically, it was in the Vedic period that we first find mention of commercial education. For the first time in the known history of education literary training was imparted in the Vedic age.¹³

The word ‘*Veda*’ means knowledge. The Vedas are ancient texts that throw a great deal of light

9Altekar, A. S.(1944) Education in Ancient India. (Second Ed.).Nand Kishor and Bros. Benares.48-69.

10 Cdadmin. (2020, April 4). Importance of discipline in a student's life. The Asian School.<https://www.theasianschool.net/blog/importance-of-discipline-in-students-life/>.

11Bernstein, B. (2003). Class, codes and control: Towards a theory of educational transmission (Vol. 3). Psychology Press.116-56.

12 *ibid*.

13Besant, A. W. (1925). Indian Ideals in education, philosophy and religion, and art. 26-27.

on the Indian education system. The imperialists such as Wilson wrote that, “When the core concept of *Rig Veda* and *Yajur Veda* are complete, we will have enough material at that time, that will be able to properly evaluate the conclusion drawn from them and know that the true position the Hindu in the political and religious and educational spheres.”¹⁴

According to the Vedic texts, the *ashram* system played an important role in the Vedic society. The texts mention that the life of a human (man) was divided into four stages, i.e. the twenty years of life was called as *brahmacharyaashram*. During this time the man was to observe celibacy and dedicate his life to the pursuit of knowledge, learn to fulfill societal expectation and learn to conduct duties. Getting this sort of training was mostly the prerogative of the upper three ‘Varnas’. Induction into the education world began with a ritual known as ‘*Upnanyaan Sanskar*’. It was regarded as the second birth; therefore, the term ‘*dwija*’ was used. The lowest age to be included into the Gurukul was eight years. The student was called *brahmachari*, *Brahma-Brahmin* (Veda) – *Chari* (Behaviour). In the second stage, the person was required to live the life of a householder for the next twenty-five years. Although all the restrictions of the *brahmacharya* were removed, still the man was expected to follow the teachings of the guru and live a duty bound life. The next stage of a man’s life was the *Vanprastha ashram*, here, the man was expected to leave all the worldly gains behind and live the life in seclusion. This meant that the man again went to the *ashram*’s way of life. In the last stage of a man’s life i.e. from seventy five years to hundred years, there was an engagement only with the spiritual and material aspect was to be completely eliminated.¹⁵

¹⁴Radhakrishnan. (1966). *Bharatiya Darshan*. Delhi: Rajpal & Sons Publication. 6

¹⁵ Majumdar, Ramesh Chandra. (1977). *Ancient India*. Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass.43

In this cycle of life of a man, society played an important role. Both men and women had a set of duties and responsibilities which were laid out to them. The society was divided into castes and classes, however, despite strict caste observations; social mobility from one caste to another was not unknown. It was prominently seen in the *gurukuls* or *ashrams*. Those who wanted to learn often found the way to enroll into *ashrams*. Irrespective of their castes, the students were treated equally in the *ashrams*, implying that the caste system was not as rigid in the ancient times as it is made out to be.

The equalizing process began from the very beginning. Once the ceremony was performed the student had to leave with the guru in the clothes that were suitable for the *ashram*. The *Gurukul* or *ashram* would mostly be situated far away from a student's house. Since urbanization was limited in the Vedic age it is fair to assume that most of the land was covered with forests. The *ashram* was mostly located in the forest. Once the child entered the *ashram*, he became the responsibility of the guru who would fix his daily routine. Sometimes, this would include begging on the streets for food for the *ashram*. Asking the students to beg was considered important as it encouraged the idea of charity, simple living and high thinking. Most important idea was to build a strong character, where 'ahem' (ego) had to be set aside. As a result, despite the lineage of the student, *ashram* rules were strictly followed. The Ashram system in the Vedic age was required to inculcate the spirit of equality among the students. The teachers believed the students to be like their children and therefore familial ties were established.¹⁶

As has been mentioned earlier, the teacher played an important role in the *ashram*. Teachers were also known as: gurus were called 'Acharya', the one who taught the student how to behave; the Brahmin, who taught a part of Vedas (Brahmin part) and the Vedangas (education, kalpa,

¹⁶ Das. S. K., (1930). *The Educational systems of the Ancient Hindus*. Calcutta: Dearden. 203

grammar, nirukta, astrology and verses); ‘Upadhyaya’ were the lecturers; those gurus who imparted education of scientific nature were called ‘Adhyapak’; ‘Shrotriya’ were those who memorize the branches of the Veda and then educated their students. Sometimes, the students who graduated with stellar success were appointed as *gurus* and gave training to the students.¹⁷

अशिक्षायै प्रशिननम -उपशिक्षायै अभिप्रशिननम(Education is required by curiosity).The Vedic system represented a very unique tradition, it was a classroom without books as the teaching was carried out orally. This was because the emphasis was not merely to impart education but also to develop the overall personality of the *Shishya* or the student. In the ancient age the state did not control education as it does today, but rather the control was with individuals who were connected to the course of education.

In ancient India the teaching method was of two types: oral and *chintan* (which mean thinking). Through oral methods students had to memorize the *mantras* (sacred utterance). The Vedas were taught to the students through memorization. In the *chintan* or the thinking method, an attempt was made to analyse the *mantras*. The *guru* recited the *stotras* and students were expected to repeat them loudly. The *guru* also kindled inquisitiveness among students through the method of question and answer. The *gurus* ensured that the students carried out their memorization with the single mind focus. On their part the *shishya* student worked equally hard. It was a natural way of living. Although if the *gurus* found certain students were not worthy enough, the student could be expelled. Besides the question- answer method, the students were expected to engage in debates over important topics. Gurus encouraged the students to prepare their points and for that they had to carry out research. These were called ‘*Brahmodaya*.’ *Brahma* is knowledge and *udaya* is to awaken. It was believed that this method led to spiritual awakening. Besides focusing

¹⁷Radhakrishnan. (1966). *Bharatiya Darshan*. Delhi: Rajpal & Sons Publication. 6

on the spiritual aspect of education, attention was also paid to material aspects. For that the students had to undergo vocational training.

The ancient Indian texts do not furnish much information about industrial and technical education or vocational education. However, what is known is that India was a chief exporting country which supplied luxury and other items to other civilizations. Making India a prosperous civilization. As it is already discussed earlier, the children in ancient India often ended up following the occupation of their father and hence it was hereditary in nature. The training was provided by a uniform method of apprenticeship. This facilitated more attention being paid to vocational education. There were many activities which provided vocational training which in turn provided the students with an opportunity to interact with the public life. The caste and class barriers were flexible as there are many examples of non-Brahmin engaging in teaching and learning process and *brahmins* fighting alongside *kshatriyas*. However, ancient society had its own mechanism which cannot be judged in terms of rigidity or flexibility. Each caste had its occupational responsibilities, and it was the responsibility of the *gurus* to identify that and train young men to accomplish excellence and serve their motherland. Hence imparting knowledge of how to wield weapons and military skill was given. According to Kautilya's 'Arthashastra', there are four types of sciences that should be given to princes and other members of the royal family. Apart from that 'Anvikshiki' (Comprising the Sankhya, Yoga, and Lokayata philosophies), the 'Vedas', 'Varta' (Includes knowledge of agriculture, cattle-breeding, and trade), and 'Dandaniti' (Science of Government) were made part of the curriculum.¹⁸

¹⁸Keay, F. E. (1918). *Ancient Indian education: An inquiry into its origin, development, and ideals*. Oxford University Press, H. Milford.48-49

With regards to Vaishyas, the trade, rearing cattle and agriculture were regarded as their vocations. They were not a part of *ashram* education directly, but a care was taken by the civil society to train young boys in their crafts so that they would be ready to develop it when they grew old. It was also unknown for the *gurus* to send the students to well-known craftsmen to further learn through practical knowledge. In ancient Indian literature there are many references to trade guilds, and it seems likely that they may have made arrangements for the training under a teacher in some subjects of those who were apprentices. At the present time, moreover, there exists in India what are called Mahajani schools. They teach the special kind of writing used by the Mahajans and arithmetic and give sufficient education to enable a boy to help his father afterwards in trade.¹⁹ Apart from these, the industrial apprenticeship was contractual in nature and contained various stipulations. Radhakumud Mukerji, in his work states that, there was a stipulation fixing the time limit of training; fixing of obligations of both the master and the student, such as, the master was to treat the apprentice like his son, instead of a hired labour and should arrange for his lodging and boarding; the apprentice should be trained in the craft of the trade without holding back any secret; a penalty was instituted if the apprentice was employed for some other work than the training of his craft. If such a case arose, then the apprentice had the right to move to another master.²⁰ The apprentice on his own account also had obligatory responsibilities such as, the student should not leave his training half way, and in case if this happens, then the student was to be punished severely.²¹ In case if the apprentice had finished his training, he could not leave the master, till the contractual period was over. He was to work for his master, free of charge in the time, he was to work for his teacher.

¹⁹Keay, F. E. (1918). *Ancient Indian education: An inquiry into its origin, development, and ideals*. Oxford University Press, H. Milford.62

²⁰Ibid. 65

²¹Ibid.66-68

“krita-iilpopi nivasei krita-kdlam guror grihe-”(payback to the master for his lodging and boarding) (translation mine)²²

Such a system was another version of the Ashram system of education, where a teacher’s house became an *ashram* for the student. This arrangement had many advantages, gaining theoretical knowledge as well as practical experience.

As far as medical studies are concerned, there was considerable development in the area of medicine in the period of 250 BCE to 800 CE. However, the knowledge could not reach everyone in society as the books and information was in Sanskrit. Hence, the access to this science was only to select few. Later, many branches of the subject evolved. The students were encouraged to specialize in one or more branches. These were for higher education and mainly these subjects taught at university level at Takshila and Nalanda.

As the ancient society settled the castes came to be divided into subcastes. This meant that there were many occupations for people to pursue. The caste system became broad to incorporate other occupations in its fold. It was difficult to absorb these into the *ashram* system of education and hence the civil society in general took up the responsibility of training the younger generation. It can be believed to be a form of communal education. The merchants' groups would undertake the responsibility to train the students from within the caste as apprentices. This later went on to form guilds.²³ The guilds were also called as *Sreni* and laid down their own laws for the administration of the interests of the particular craft belonging to it.²⁴ The ancient texts of ***Smritis***, mention guilds such as that of cultivators, herdsmen, traders, moneylenders, and artisans

²²Mookerji, R. (1989). *Ancient indian education: Brahmanical and Buddhist* (Vol. 11). Motilal Banarsidass Publication.351

²³Thaplyal, K. K. (1996). *Guilds in ancient India: A study of guild organization in northern India and western Deccan from circa 600 BC to circa 600 AD*. Taylor & Francis.p. 111-134

²⁴Mookerji, R. (1989).353

present in the ancient times. *Brihaspati* adds more guilds such as dancers and artists. There are also references of the presence of guilds such as musicians, priests and military adventurers.²⁵ Different traders and artisans such as carpenters, tailors, and goldsmiths etc formed guilds. There are also references to cobblers' guild, the oil millers' guild, potters' guild, weavers' guild, and hydraulic engineers' guild.

Buddhist method of Education

History of Gautama Buddha and his teachings is too well known to be repeated here. What is important is the attention paid by Buddhists towards the educational environment. Gautama Buddha was a teacher and dedicated his life to the spread of ideas on enlightenment. He continued to teach and spread these ideas till he lived and instructed his disciples to do the same even after his death. 60 The medium of instruction that was followed by the Buddhist monks was in Pali language, which was a language for the masses. All castes except Chandalas (lowest caste group) had the right to get education.

The Buddhist education centered on the monasteries as the Brahmanical education centered around the Ashram system. According to Radhakamal Mookerji, the Buddhist education was in the hands of Buddhist monks. They had the monopoly of education, and they were the only custodians and bearers of Buddhist culture.²⁶ As a result the rules of Buddhist education were those of the Buddhist order. The induction into education was based on the *brahmanical* tradition of the Ashram system. The student had to find a teacher and apply formally for admission. If the teacher would accept then a girdle was tied around the student and a staff was given. Bodhisattva

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Mookerji, R. (1989). 394

had to be present for the ceremony and induct the student.²⁷ The student had to take three oaths: he had taken refuge with the Buddha; taken refuge with the religion; and taken refuge with the Order. Apart from this the student also took oaths of abstinences which resemble the oaths taken by the students before going to the Ashram.²⁸ Focusing on spirituality, Buddhism emphasized on the self-education of mind. The students or *Bhikkhus* or monks lived in residential schools called *viharas*. Altekar says “Teachings given by the Buddha is to cure the mind; the teachings are in vain without mind.” It meant that instead of focusing on vocations, the teachings focused on the morality of issues. However, it did not mean that practical knowledge was not given. In fact, the very genesis of Buddhism was based on the principle of non-violence, where warfare receded into the background in favour of prosperity and peace. In Vinay Pittaka, the parents freely discuss profession and callings that their son might choose such as writing (*lekham*) or accountancy (*gananam*), and currency-conversion (*rupam*)²⁹. Buddhist common and philosophy vocational training was also given such as medicines and craft training. Education was encouraged and the doors of higher education were open for all eligible candidates irrespective of their caste.³⁰

Jain tradition of education

The Jain education system was not different from that of Brahmanism and Buddhism. The state and the civil society played an important role in dissemination of education. The basic education began from home and hence a family assumed the role of the primary educators. The Jain educators taught the students in *chaityalayas* and *jinalayas* which resemble the *ashram* system of

²⁷Mookerji, R. (1989). *Ancient indian education: Brahmanical and Buddhist* (Vol. 11). Motilal Banarsidass Publication..395

²⁸Ibid.396

²⁹Ibid.352

³⁰Ibid.462

education. According to Arun Kumar, the teachers initially moved from one place to another but later ashram-like structures were created for the teachers to settle down to impart education.³¹ These monastery-like structures were scattered over a wide region from Magadha to Gujarat. The curricula of the Jain monks were wider in scope offering instruction both of religious as well as secular subjects. The curricula were framed with great care considering the needs of different sections of the society. This only meant that a lot of attention was paid to vocational education. The students could partake in education irrespective of their social status.³² The teaching was classified into two distinct groups: religious and secular. The Jain monks had to engage in daily studies apart from engaging in debates and discussions. Intra-monastic debates also were common, where learned monks from far off regions came to participate in debates. Rich libraries were also maintained by the Jain monks. The education was supported by rulers, merchants and people in general. They made liberal grants to the Jain monks for the upkeep of their educational institution. Dasgupta in his work talks of organized institutions such as schools under the Jains.³³ These organized schools were patronized by the rulers. Like Brahmanism and Buddhism, the Jain students also followed the tradition of living with their teachers. In the schools the students received education as per their castes. For instance, Kshatriya princes received mental and physical training as a preparation for the princely duties.

The ultimate goal of education, according to the Jain worldview, was freedom or emancipation from the cycle of life and death. According to this philosophy, there were two levels of liberation: *Jivan Mukti* and *Dravya Mukti*. Education was to facilitate the students to do their duties or *karmas*. This in turn led to *Jivan Moksha*, and later the higher degree of *Dravya*

³¹ *Jaina education in early India: A historical outline*. (2019, December 14). International Journal of History, 2(1), 28–31. <https://historyjournal.net/article/19/2-1-6-291>.

³² Dasgupta, D. C. (1999). *Jaina system of education*. Motilal Banarsidass. 2

³³ Ibid. 4

Moksha.³⁴ Teaching methods included experiments, discussion and debates and group activities. Self-study was given significant consideration, and a pupil is seen reading a palm-leaf book intently. The old technique of studying diverse subjects was memorizing, repeating, and replicating. The major platform of the Jaina system was *vada*, or conversation, and teaching was delivered through oratory.³⁵ The greatest Jain teachers in the historical past were Kondakunda, Samantabhadra, Pujiyapada, Jinasena, Puspadanta, and Somadeva.³⁶

The above account clearly shows that there were a lot of similarities between Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism methods of teaching. One common element located was the presence of residential schools in the three traditions of learning. The Ashram school like system was seen in both Buddhist as well Jain traditions. The civil society and the state played a prominent role in the education structure. The end aim of the educational structure was to have a young generation who would make great contributions to society. The ancient period was followed by the medieval period which was infused with Islamic tradition of learning.

Education in Medieval period

The Indian subcontinent in the medieval period differed from the ancient one when it came into contact with the Islamic culture. Mostly this took place in the seventh century CE onwards. This contact was established when there were migrations that took place from various parts of Central Asia along with the victors, who later went on to form Delhi Sultanate. They brought elements of Islamic culture with them along with Islamic education. However, recent research has shown that

³⁴Dasgupta, D. C. (1999). *Jaina system of education*. Motilal Banarsidass.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶<https://jeyparvathi11.blogspot.com/2019/12/vedic-buddhist-and-jain-system-of.html?m=1>

the ancient educational institutions continued very much into medieval times.³⁷ For instance in medieval Tamilnadu education continued to be considered a sacred profession. According to Justin Wilson, “.... it (education) had a close connection with the temples and mathas whose control was vested with the Brahmans and the rulers. In that respect, brahmadeyas were centres of learning, both material and spiritual and, in rare cases, marital and moral. Gifts to brahmans of brahmadeyas as patrons and preservers of education are found mentioned in the inscriptions down to the end of the Vijayanagara Empire (1665 A.D.) in the South.”³⁸ Similarly, in Kerala also the Ashram system or *gurukula* system of education was prevalent.³⁹ The famous *gurukuls* of Kerala were Thrissur Brahmaswam Madham, Tirunavaya Samuha Madham, Kudallur, Tiruwallala, etc.⁴⁰

When one travels from South to west, there are studies which show that there were institutions which were run by *gurus* of great repute and were maintained by land grants made by rulers and rich patrons. For instance, in Rajasthan, there were institutions which served as the model of the highest level of education and clearly shows that the Ashrama system of education had continued to function.⁴¹ There are instances of young princes studying and getting trained as warriors in the *ashrams*. For instance, the young prince of Jodhpur studied at the *ashram* of Gunashasha Chitra.⁴² Towards East of India, Bihar had held an important position in the field of education in ancient India especially in the later Vedic age. Mithila in Bihar was known as a great centre of

³⁷Beniwal Anju.(2021). *Education in India: Perspectives, Opportunities and Challenges*. Nova Science Publisher. New York. 12

³⁸Wilson, J. (1998, January). *Education In Medieval Tamilnadu: An Epigraphical Peep into its nature*. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress (Vol. 59, pp. 1057-1064). Indian History Congress.

³⁹Vijayalekshmy, M. (2007, January). *Astronomy And Mathematics In Medieval Kerala-The Social Background*. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress (Vol. 68, pp. 482-489). Indian History Congress.

⁴⁰Ibid. 486

⁴¹Sharma, G. N. (1967, January). *Educational Institutions in Medieval Rajasthan*. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress (Vol. 29, pp. 368-373). Indian History Congress. 370

⁴²Sharma, G. N. (1967). 370

education even in the medieval times.⁴³ These points towards the continuity of the Ashram system of education.

So far as Islamic learning is concerned, systemic dissemination began only once the Islamic invaders settled. Initially education was confined to the elites but later a system developed which focused on giving education to the converts as well. This was promoted by local rulers and later by Sultans of Delhi and the Mughal emperors. New institutions of learning were established in *maktabs* and *madrasas*. The primary schooling was conducted in the *maktabs*.⁴⁴ The child (at a tender age of four years, four months, and four days) was inducted into the system with the ceremony called as *bismillah*.⁴⁵ gained admission in the *maktab* with the ritual of Bismillah by the *sahib*. The education was also carried out in the *madrasas*. [23] The purpose behind imparting education was to train the young mind with social convention. It was also to ensure the preservation of Islamic culture and tradition. The primary education was imparted through the 'Maktab' and which was attached to the mosque. Secondary and higher education was imparted in the 'Madrasa' The term 'Madrasa' is derived from the Arabic word 'Dars' (a lecture) and means a place where the lecture is given. There apparently was no tradition of fixed examination but the students were evaluated based on practical knowledge.

Education was brought under state control during Akbar's reign.⁴⁶ Emphasis was placed on secular curriculum and the education was to be imparted both to the Muslims as well as non-Muslims. For the Hindus, Banaras had emerged as an important seat of learning in the Mughal

⁴³Jha, A. K. (2008). *Hindu Education System in Medieval Mithila* (1000-1600 AD). In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress (pp. 1260-1261). Indian History Congress.

⁴⁴Jafri, S. Z. H. (2012). *Education and transmission of knowledge in medieval India*. Intellectual Discourse, 20(1). 84

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Rezavi, S. A. N. (2007, January). *The organization of education in Mughal India*. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress (Vol. 68, pp. 389-397). Indian History Congress.

period. Tavernier, a French merchant, and a traveller, talks about an ashram-like system in Benaras.⁴⁷ Apart from rulers, the Islamic civil society patronized the Muslims and often funded it. Big Islamic landlords also gave them some wealth in the development of institutes.

The curriculum as mentioned previously was both secular and religious in nature. In the absence of a printing press, the books had to be written by hand. As a result, good handwriting was greatly valued, and it was seen as an essential constituent of literary accomplishments.⁴⁸ The students were required to write on the '*Taktis*' (wooden plank) which means wooden plank. In the primary stage, the curriculum comprised learning the basics of reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic. In the secondary and higher stages range of subjects were added such as ethics, divinity, astronomy, the art of administration, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, physics, medicine, natural philosophy, rhetoric's, law, rituals, accounts, agriculture, economics, and history.⁴⁹ Besides legal-rational education theosophy was also added, for instance, in their early ages students were taught to recite the first thirteen chapters of the Quran as a poem.⁵⁰ Ibn Sina, an Islamic Persian scholar, and a teacher writes that students from the age of fourteen should be given the choice of selecting their favourite subjects for skill acquisition purposes. For example, reading, manual skills, literature, medicine, geometry, trade, and commerce. Calligraphy and grammar were also stressed upon, and the language of instruction was Arabic and Persian.⁵¹ This was especially considered important for those who wanted to apply for the posts.

Quran was an important part of the curriculum, the recitation of the '*Quran*' was made compulsory, and the students had to learn the '*Quran*' by heart. Hence a deep and detailed study

⁴⁷Ibid. 392

⁴⁸Jaffar, S. M. (1973). *Education in Muslim India: being an inquiry into the state of education during the Muslim period of Indian history*. IAD oriental (reprint) series.10-11

⁴⁹Ibid. 21

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid

of the '*Quran*', Hadith, and Fiqh (theology) had to be carried out. Like the ashram system of education, the most important component of the Islamic model of education was also to prepare students for further employment. As a result, technical training was imparted and was infused with the work of the system of apprenticeship. There were thousands of Karkhanas or workshops, wherein students often apprenticed with the craftsmen and received instruction. The methods of learning in the Islamic system of education were also the same as the ancient ashram system of education. The teaching-learning process was carried out through oral methods which involved discussion as well. The recitations of the lessons taught were also similar to that of the ancient Ashram system of education. In a similar pattern, no examination was conducted and the students were evaluated on the basis of practical situations of life. Just like ancient India, many important centres of higher learning had emerged in the medieval period as well.⁵²

In Delhi, Nasiruddin who was a Islamic philosopher established Madarsa-i-Nasiria in the reign of Alauddin Khilji and established many *madrasa*. Mughal emperor Humayun had established institutions of astronomy in Delhi.⁵³ He also introduced institutions where subjects like Arabic, Persian, Grammar, Philosophy, and Astronomy were taught. In Agra Sikandar Lodi had established many '*Madrasa*' and '*Maktab*s' in Agra which had attracted students from other countries.⁵⁴ Emperor Akbar had made Agra the centre of culture, fine arts, and crafts. In Jaunpur Sher Shah Suri completed his education in one of the educational institutes of Jaunpur city. The main subjects of teaching were political science, warfare, history, and philosophy, Ibrahim Sharki set up many '*Madrasa*' in Jaunpur. In Bidar Mohammad Gawan had established many '*Madrasa*' and '*Maktab*s' in this city and it became the famous centre of learning. The city

⁵²Patwardan, C. N. (1939). *History of Education in Medieval India*. Bombay: The Author. 45

⁵³Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

consists of a library that contains 3000 books on subjects like Islamic theology, culture, philosophy, medical science, astronomy, history, and agriculture.

To conclude the medieval Indian education system was culturally rich and showed traces of continuity from the ancient ashram system of education. In order to get a micro-level understanding of the educational structure in both ancient and medieval Indian history, it is important to carry out a region-based study. The following section focuses on the ashram system of education in Gujarat in the pre-colonial times. At the very most it has to be made clear that in the historiographical traditions much attention has been paid to the patronization offered by rulers and hence the following account by and large focuses on the patronization given as a central idea. The attention indeed gets diverted slightly from the Ashram system of education in Gujarat, but it can be stated that the system continued with certain degree of change.⁵⁵

Ashram system of Education in pre-colonial Gujarat

Gujarat being a peninsular region divided into four parts, Saurashtra, Kutch, South Gujarat, North Gujarat.[28]⁵⁶ The mention of Gujarat is found in many texts in the literature in the Vedic period, such as Rigveda, Samhita, Brahmanas, etc. At the time ancient texts mention the existence of the *ashram* system of education in Gujarat, for e.g. there is a reference to the Gautameshwar Mahadev's *ashram* on the banks of the river Gautami in Shihor (Bhavnagar). Gujarda Ashram in Junagadh, Chyavan Rishi and Saubhari Rishi Ashram in Morbi Machhu riverbank Ashram have been mentioned and Bhrigukuch (Bharuch) and Patan had emerged as Centre of education.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Ray, K. (1984). *Education in Medieval India*. Stosius Incorporated/Advent Books Division. 220

⁵⁶Campbell, J. M. (1880). *Gazetteer of the Bombay presidency*. (Vol. V).Bombay: Government Central Press.1

⁵⁷ Rajgor Shivrashad B. (1966). *Gujratno Kelvanino Itihas*. Ahmedabad: Anada Book Depo.6.

The earliest archeological evidence of the kind of educational system in Gujarat was found in an inscription at Junagadh left by the Mauryas. In his Junagadh inscription he wrote about the importance and development of language. He made Junagadh a main centre of education. The rulers of Gupta dynasty gave importance to the Sanskrit language and encouraged the students to teach and learn Sanskrit. He honoured good scholars by calling them to his court. Due to this, education centres emerged in Dwarka, Singhpur, Anandpur and Bharuch.⁵⁸ The inscriptions in Junagadh indicate that the people were able to read and write. Like the rest of the Subcontinent, the development of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit languages is also seen. Besides Brahmanism, Buddhist and Jain literary traditions were also promoted and spread in Gujarat. Various educational institutions were established in different parts of Gujarat like Bharuch, Anandpur, Vallabhi, Kutch, Palitana, and Junagad etc.⁵⁹

Maitrikas ruled over Gujarat in the post Gupta age from 470 BCE to 789 CE. There are many small kingdoms present at the time in Gujarat for example Trankutvansh, Gurjarvansh, and Chalukayas.⁶⁰ In the Maitrika period education was given importance. Sources reveal that the writing had become common in the Maitrika period unlike the previous period, where more importance was given to oral learning. The elementary education was, and the students were taught to write a script or *Lipi*. The *Upadhay* (teacher) taught through experimentation and other traditional methods. It is also possible that separate priests were appointed for the education of the children of *rajkutumb* (Royal family). There are many instances, where the *brahmans* were paid to teach. Its importance is found in a work known as Okitak.[32]⁶¹ Besides basic education, the centre of higher learning was also established during the Maitrika period, for instance

⁵⁸Rajgor Shivrash B. (1966). *Gujratno Kelvanino Itihas*. Ahemdabad: Anada Book Depo.9

⁵⁹Ibid.34

⁶⁰ Ibid. 78

⁶¹Munijin, Vijayay. *Prachin Gujarati Gadhyah Sahitya*, Acharya Girjashankar, *Gujaratana Historical Accounts*, Part 1, 172-178

Vallabhi Vidhyapith was established. Vallabhi emerged as a centre for learning and education in Gujarat. The Maitraka rulers gave utmost importance to education, which can be made out from the titles adopted by them, for example, Dhruvsena-I called himself ‘Avbodha Tattbanam अवबोधशास्त्रार्थतत्त्वानाम which means the ‘knower of the element’. Shiladitya- I adopted title दर्शयताश्रीसरस्वोरिकाधिवासरस्य (the one who foresees). Dhruvasena-II called himself अधिगतकलकलाप, राजयशालातुरियतत्रयोरुमयोरपिनिष्णात.

In Vallabhi subjects taught mainly were related to *shashtras* (ancient texts) and *tatvagyan* (essential knowledge) as mentioned by Chinese traveller Hsuan-tsang stated in his travel in 627 CE. He had travelled overland from China to India.⁶²

When the Maitrika rule weakened the smaller rulers in Gujarat re-established their control. Succeeding Rajput rulers such as Pathira kings of Kannauj (638 to 920 CE) took interest in educational activities. The Shri Mal Purana written at the time records that there were a hundred Brahmin schools and four thousand Buddhist schools in Gujarat. It is difficult to believe such a number, but records do state a large number of schools present in Gujarat. The next power rulers i.e., the Rashtrakutas also encouraged and promoted education. They were known to have patronized the *ashram* of Acharya Kamaliya in the region of Navsari.⁶³

Many new centres of education emerged in Gujarat and the older one continued to function. The main centres of learning were Patan. Chandravati, Karnavati, Somnath, Khambat, Modhera, Bharuch, Dholka.⁶⁴ Maharaja Sidhraj Singh patronized many scholars in Patan such as Ashesh Vidhyaparag, Tapornidhi, Kavidharma, Sheelkancharya, Veeracharya, Govindacharya,

⁶² Rajgor Shivrashad B. (1966). 9

⁶³ Dosaji Edalji. 1894. *History of Gujarat, From Earliest Period to the Present Time*. Bombay: Khan Bahadur G. M. Munshi & Sons, Anglo-Oriental Book-Depot. 14

⁶⁴ Ibid. 18

Suracharya, Shantayacharya, Munichandra and Abhydevsuri. The scholars were considered as ornaments of *Vidhyasabha* of Patan. Pandit Kavikal Sarvayagaya Hemchandracharya, a great intellectual of age of Chalukyas made significant contributions and created masterpieces like *Shabd Anushasan*, *Chhand Anushasana*, *Kavya Anushasan*, *Abhidhan*, *Chintamani*, *Desi Nammala* and Sanskrit and Prakrit *Davyashrya* poetry. In one of his writings Hemchandracharya while describing the Sahasralinga lake of Patan mentioned that thousands of students came to take education around that lake. It was believed to be the golden age of literary activities in Gujarat.

It is quite clear from the above assessment that the ancient institution of education in Gujarat was very rich and vibrant. The formal education process started from the *ashram* which in turn gave the students not only employment opportunities but also provided a platform of higher and continued learning. The education was open to all, and the only qualification was merit and a zeal to learn.

Just as was the case with the rest of the Indian Subcontinent, Gujarat also faced the onslaught of the Islamic invaders. However, it had little impact on the educational activities in Gujarat. Thus, the Muslim invasion in Gujarat took place in 1297 but the educational activities continued to grow a large extent till Gujarat came under their control. Each successive Sultan or later emperor made contributions to the field of education. The Ashram system of education continued to a limited extent. Very little information is available as to what happened to this ancient *ashram* system. It is unclear whether the system continued or was it lost in time. Most of the sources focus on the new rulers and their contributions. This is the problem of Indian historiography that much attention was paid to the rulers and the ethics. The experience of the common people and their institutions have not been recorded. However, as was the case with the much larger Indian

system of education the infusion of Islamic ideas did influence the ancient Indian tradition and one can give an example of emergence of syncretic tradition even in medieval Gujarat.

From 1407 to 1573, independent sultans ruled over Gujarat. According to Professor Dhar: “The fame of the sultan of the Gujarat as generous patrons of learning had reached all the Muslim lands and consequently attracted a large number of Savants and scholars from different part of Islamic world. Learned men from, Yenen, Hejaz, Egypt and Persia adored their courts, dedicated their books to them and received liberal presents”⁶⁵

During the time of Ahmad Shah, the founder of Ahmedabad, there were many ‘*Madrasas*’ in Ahmedabad, as one of them was Sarkhej. During the time of Mahmud Begada, he invited many Persian scholars to his court and got Arabic books translated into Persian language. Along with this, he got the ‘*Madrasas*’ established and developed a library.⁶⁶

During the time of Mughal emperor Akbar, there was a little change in the mechanism of teaching. However, he enabled the translations of ancient Indian texts like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vilvati converted into Persian language. Mainly the subjects of ethics, mathematics, Namu, economics, politics, Pardartha law, jurisprudence, natural science, religion, history were taught.⁶⁷ Many Hindu temples and schools were destroyed during the Aurangzeb period, but innumerable schools were established for both the Hindus and Muslims. At that time, Diwan Marmat Khan of Gujarat ordered that every student from primary education to higher

⁶⁵M. S. Commissariat. (1938). *A History of Gujarat*. Vol.I. digitallibraryindia; Jai Gyan. 302

⁶⁶Ibid.25

⁶⁷ Rajgor Shivrash B. (1966).27

education was given financial help. Surat Bharuch Ahmedabad, Patan Dholka Junagadh in Gujarat emerged as centres of Islamic culture and education.⁶⁸

The Solanki period can be believed to be the last flicker before the flame went out. The Solankis had ruled over Gujarat and Kathiawar before they were defeated by Allaudin Khilji. The most significant aspect of the Solanki period was the patronization that they had offered to the development of literature. The Solankis had established their capital at Anhilwada Patan (modern). The most important contribution made by the Solanki's was patronizing scholars of repute and giving encouragement to younger scholars.

Conclusion

Examining the historicity of the Ashram System of Education in Gujarat, one fact proves to be true that this type of education system has continued from ancient times to the present day. There were various types of ashram education systems such as Brahminical, Buddhist, and Jain and even during the rule of Islamic rulers the continuity was there in the education system. Yes, with time and space some of the principles may differ then each other but more over it's similar.

⁶⁸Rajgor Shivrasad B. (1966).