

The Psychological Basis of Hindu Education

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Abstract

The psychological basis of Hindu Education is rather of a technical nature. It contributes a critical discussion of the educational programme of the growing child upto the dawn of puberty. The importance of the physical atmosphere on the purity of the mind of the growing child is discussed. It is clear from the records extant that the parents in ancient India took a scientific care for the health and diet of the prospective mother, the foetus and the child. This wise line of conduct on the part of the guardians of the household is distinctly referred to by Megasthenes in the fourth century before Christian era.

Keywords: Ancient, Psychological, Nursing, Child, Education, Caraka, Susruta Etc.

Introduction

The ancient Hindus knew that the mental and physical traits are hereditary and as the best means of preserving these they recommended the selection of brides of superior intelligence, born in a family with rich hereditary stock. An ideal environment facilitates of the mind, a poor environment retards them. The parents in ancient India took a scientific care for the health and diet of the prospective mother, the foetus and the child. The prospective mother used to be provided with a special diet and a suitably healthy house. During the pre school period, the young infants and the little children of both sexes used to spend their time in sense and motor activities especially under the direction of the trained nurses. Instruction of children through playful activities is recommended by Garuda Purana. It is evident that the educators of ancient India took into account the problem of providing an ideal programme for the education of the children before they were fit to go to school.

Objective of the Study

The ancient Hindus took care of the child in its embryonic stage. Immediately after birth, the new-born infant was handed over to the charge of a duly qualified nurse, especially trained for the purpose. This, however, did not happen all on a sudden: it was a thing of slow growth. Nursing does not figure as a profession during the Rigvedic period, when the mothers were the nurses of their own children. In course of time, however, especially during the time of Buddha, nursing came to be recognized as a distinct profession. It was also during this period that the practice of rearing children became complex, demanding from the nurses the knowledge of a specialist. Then nursing was practically elevated to the status of a science. Special qualifications were naturally demanded of the nurse, both personal and professional, such as efficiency in taking care of children and maturity of years.

In plain English, the nurse, in the ideal, is to be thoroughly fit for the noble profession she means to adopt, by reason of qualifications due to birth, education, physical, mental, and moral excellencies.

Susruta prescribes the following qualifications for a nurse: "For the healthy growth of the child a wet-nurse should be selected from among the matrons of its own caste (Varṇa), and possessed of the following necessary qualifications. She should be of middle stature, neither too old nor too young (middle aged), of sound health, of good character....

She should be of respectable parentage and consequently possessed of many good qualities. In a word, the nurse should come of a very respectable family, and she should possess the hereditary traits mentioned above. Over and above, the nurse should enjoy sound health and should be free from disease or mental fatigue. The following extract lends further support to our contention: "A child should not be allowed to take the breast of a hungry, aggrieved, fatigued, too thin, too corpulent,



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fevered, or a pregnant woman, nor of one in whom the assimilated food is followed by an acid reaction, or of one who is fond of incongenial and unhealthy dietary, or whose fundamental principles are vitiated." This is indicative of the thoroughly comprehensive foresight and insight on the part of the authorities who undertook the task of giving instruction in the vitally important art of child-education or child-training. For the supply of profuse milk for the new-born baby the nurse should take nourishing diet consisting of the following items : "For the purpose of establishing a flow in her breast, her equanimity should be first restored, and diets consisting of sali-rice, barley, wheat, shashtika, meal-soup, wine (sura), souviraka, sesamum-paste, garlic, fish, kaseruka, Sringataka, lotus stalk, Vidari-kanda, Madhuka-flower, satavari, Nalika, Alavu, and kala-Saka, etc., should be prescribed." This goes very deep into the matter-a consideration of the welfare of the child leading to a consideration of the health of its foster-mother or the nurse.

The Agnipuranam prescribes the following diet for boys for the development of their speech, wealth of beauty, longevity, and intelligence. According to this authority the menu for the breakfast of the boy includes vaca, agnisikha, bala, sunthi, krsna, nisagada, yaṣṭi, sankhapuṣpi. The relevant extract from this authoritative work runs as follows :

These provisions are indicative both of wisdom and insight. The classification of childhood and the special rules relating to the diet referred to above are indicative of the profound attention paid by the scientists of India in those days of remote antiquity. Lord Buddha himself knew full well the retarding influence of malnutrition on the physical growth of the human being.

Asvaghosa, the famous Buddhist scholar of the first century A.D. prescribed moderate diet for the upkeep of health, for, in his opinion, deficiency in diet exerts a damaging influence on the physical and the mental growths of the child. The Jaina Sutra and the Kathasaritsagarah also hold a similar view.

Susruta recommends a clean and purified chamber for the infants and the rubbing or ointment of their body as well. Mention is also made in the Rgveda of rubbing the limbs of the infants to ensure healthy growth and physical vigour. "They foster the tender infant, (Agni), with worship, as people rub (the limbs of a child to promote his) existence. Sleep in the day time for all seasons of the year is essential for the physical growth of the growing child, as is evident from the recommendations in the Syainika Sastram.

In addition to profuse sleep in the day time sun-bath in the early morning in the open air is essential for a child's health and physical growth. We have clear evidence of it in Lalita –vistara.

Thus we see in this connection that the ancient Indians were thoroughly cognisant of the salutary effect of the exposure to the rays of the rising sun. The practice of exposing infants as well as pregnant ladies to the morning sun was prevalent, the obvious motive being to ensure the health-both of the infants that were and the infants that were to be.

Education Psychology

Juvenile punishment received scientific and elaborately careful attention with the child psychologists and educationists in ancient India. Both Susruta and Bhsvamisra warn the parents and the guardians of the children not to handle them roughly, not to scold them too severely, and not to rouse them from sleep. 'All these, elaborate rules are intended to ensure the welfare of the children. They hold that to make the child cheerful, it should be fondled and be given coloured toys and other apparatus of play for its amusement. This being done, the child becomes physically, emotionally, and mentally healthy and sound. This all round care for the welfare of the child should be, as happily it was, the paramount concern of the true child-educator.

Caraka, a famous physician of the first century A.D. also prescribed toys of diverse colours, light and sound producing, capable of stimulating sense-activities of the little children, especially the senses of sight, sound, and touch: the coloured toys stimulate the senses of sight, the sound-producing toys the auditory sense and the pointed toys the sense of touch. Thus the process of education had a sound scientific background in psychology. The extract quoted below supports our contention:

"The child should also be given such toys as are well-coloured, productive of sound, delightful, light, not having pointed ends, incapable of being swallowed, not destructive of life, and incapable of exciting fear."

Speech develops in the child in its experimental and erect stages when informal education commences under the fostering care of the nurse or upamata.

It is evident that the educators of ancient India took into account the problem of providing an ideal programme for the education of the children before they were fit to go to school.

In the Vedic as well as in the post-Vedic periods, education began at home with parents as teachers.

The education of the growing child – formal or informal, whether imparted in the family or in the vedic or in the art school was based on the physical, the emotional and the mental growths of the growing educand. The curriculum was psychologically sound, carefully planned out to fit it well into the growing child. In truth, 'child-life' was the standard of education. Let us now turn our attention to the discussion of the educational programme of the growing educand in his adolescent and post-adolescent periods.

A typical programme of studies in the Brahmanic or Vedic School (includes the three Vedas, the eighteen sciences, and the arts as is evident from the Jatakas regarding the programme of studies in the famous university of Taxila. The curriculum in the Brahmanic School was not, however, universally the same all over India. The curricula varied from place to place to fit them into the growing needs of the locality. At a much later date, especially during the period of Jaina ascendancy the Brahmanic education was

thoroughly assimilated into the Jaina system; and the educational programme of the Jainas also was varied at different places to meet the local conditions. The ideal curriculum in a Jaina monastery at Moderapura in Guzerat, provided for the education of prince Ama, son of Yasovarman, king of Kanauj and for Bappabhatti. This ideal curriculum was carefully prepared by Siddhasena Suri. It included seventy two arts, physical and military education, fine arts, sciences, vernacular languages, religious literatures, modern dialects, and pseudo sciences etc. The whole of this excellent scheme was meant for the growing child from the age of eight up to the full vigour of his youth in the adolescence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we may say that, the ancient educators of India realised the importance of an ideal environment or nurture for the fullest development of the intelligence of the children. To ensure this development in an ideal environment, they prescribed proper nourishing diet not only for infants but also for adolescents. It was raised in a typical environment to ensure its physical, emotional and mental developments.

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