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Excellence of Ancient Indian System of Education

*Punar Vittham Punar Mithram Punar Bharya
Punar Mahi
Ethath Sarvam Punar Labhyam Na Sareeram
Punah Punah*

*(If money is lost, one need not be worried about
it, for one can earn it again.*

If a friend is lost, one can have another.

If wife is lost, one can marry again.

*If one loses one's piece of land, one can purchase
another.*

*All these can be regained. But if the body is lost,
one cannot get it back.)*

(Sanskrit Verse)



ONE may lose one's wealth but it can still be earned back; one may lose friends but better ones can be befriended later; one may lose one's wife but remarriage is still possible; one may lose land and property; but these also can be regained. All these can be recovered somehow or the other but the body once lost, the same body can never be regained. One can have the experience of bliss so long as the body exists. So, one should make every effort to experience bliss while the body lasts. Our ancients made relentless efforts to protect and safeguard their bodies so as to experience bliss. But they were not able to retain their bodies permanently. Since the body is not permanent, one should spare no effort to attain the state of bliss in one's lifetime.

Ideals of Education in Ancient India

Since time immemorial, this sacred land of Bharath has been the birthplace of all branches of knowledge and education. Numerology, grammar, music and fine arts, etc., had their origin in India. In fact, that which is not found in India cannot be found anywhere else. It is therefore said, "*Yanna Bharathe, thanna Bharatha*". This sacred land is the birthplace of many men and women of pristine virtues and high ideals.

"This land of Bharath has given birth to many noble women like Savitri who brought her dead husband back to life; Chandramati who extinguished a wild

fire with the power of truth; Sita who proved her chastity by coming out of blazing fire unscathed and Damayanti who reduced an evil-minded hunter to ashes with the power of her chastity. This land of piety and nobility attained plenty and prosperity and became the teacher of all the nations of the world because of such women of chastity." (Telugu Poem)

However, some foolish people are deluded to think that they would find in foreign countries what is not available in India. What is it that you cannot obtain in this sacred land? It is the treasure trove of all knowledge and wealth. Unfortunately, people lack determination. If one is determined and makes sincere efforts, there is nothing that one cannot achieve or obtain in Bharath.

The Indians in the past made strenuous efforts to conduct experiments and research in the field of education and devised an original system of education. In those days, each university specialized in one area of learning or the other. Kasi University specialized in the area of *Vyakarana Sastra* (grammar). *Alankara Sastra* (rhetoric) was the speciality of the University of Kashmir. Ujjaini University imparted knowledge in the specialized area of *Nyaya Sastra* (law). The science of law was taught and preserved in its pristine and pure form there. Today's laws are distorted into illegalities. On the other hand, at Ujjaini, no scope was given for anything that was unlawful to enter its portals. Bharath

was famous for propagating and teaching such lofty ideals and for its dedicated teachers and students. The science of *Ayurveda* (health sciences and medicine) was very well developed in the kingdom of Bharatha. In this way, each university specialized and taught a particular subject and popularized it. There were several such reputed universities in ancient Bharath.

Ujjaini, Kasi, Takshashila (Taxila) and Kashmir – these were all great centres of learning. Navadvipa was a reputed centre for learning logic and law. The tenets of law that could not adequately be interpreted elsewhere were easily explained and expounded here. Unfortunately, modern students are unaware of the great wealth and power of the fund of knowledge of India and are going all over the world in search of wealth and knowledge. This is a highly unworthy and mistaken outlook. Such ignorance should be dispelled. We should have the light of wisdom in us. Only then can we realise the Divine and experience bliss.

Embodiments of Love!

What you need to know today is that India is the repository of all knowledge and power. Spiritual science, physical sciences and fine arts like music, literature and poetry had their birth in India. They were all discovered by ancient Indians. Why are the students neglecting such a sacred land? This is the mark of extreme ignorance. Students are unable to recognize this

truth and are running after worldly pleasures. These can never give happiness. Even if some pleasures is obtained, it will not last long.

Ideal Student-teacher Relationship

The universities of yore did not have huge buildings and infrastructure. The residence of the teacher itself was the university. The tree under which they sat was the classroom. The soft words of the teacher wafted over like cool breeze and were imprinted on the minds of the students. The students were few in number. However, the capacity of the teacher to impart knowledge was immense. The teacher taught in such lucid and simple terms that students could easily understand the higher sciences and grasp advanced subjects. Such educational institutions flourished in ancient Bharath. When the Britishers came to India, they were much impressed by our system of education and attempted to investigate the cause for the high standards of ancient Indian universities. They however failed in their endeavour.

The ancient system of education in India was based on *Sabdapramana*, i.e., the word of mouth. The practice of writing everything was not the main mode of teaching. The students listened to the teachings imparted by the preceptor with utmost interest which got imprinted on their heart straightaway. This was the main reason of high standards of education in ancient

India. The entire process of communication was oral. There was no rigid timetable, or even curricula and syllabi. The teachers taught the student any science or subject that he was keen to learn. There was no interference from the government. The teaching-learning process was entirely heart-to-heart. The students kept their hearts open and the teachers filled them with knowledge. It was this heart-to-heart learning that enabled India to propagate wisdom and knowledge throughout the world. Lessons were taught at any time; it never mattered whether it was day or night. The hearts of the teachers were highly pure and sacred. They did not charge any fee from the students for imparting knowledge to them. It was the responsibility of society to look after the needs of the teachers. Depending on their capacity and capability, the citizens contributed towards the livelihood of the teachers and provided them with all comforts. But never was any fee collected from the students. Thus, the education system of India was deeply sacred, highly valuable and profoundly blissful. But, unfortunately, the Indians are neglecting their ancient system of education and hence are losing an invaluable heritage of knowledge and bliss.

What were the duties of the students in those days? They would rise early in the morning, perform their ablutions and prayers before commencing their studies. The students went from house to house and collected food for themselves and the teachers. The teacher

would then take whatever was required for him and the rest would be partaken of by the students as sanctified food. The teachers and students were totally selfless and pure-hearted. It was in such a sacred atmosphere that the knowledge of scriptures, epics and sacred texts was taught and learnt in ancient India.

The teachers were highly dedicated and selfless. Every nectarous thought and word that originated in their heart was transferred to the students in a loving way. As education today has been made into a commercial activity, the mind of man has become perverted. In those days, food or education was never sold. Education was made available free of cost. Goddess Saraswathi was not bound by the shackles of commerce and trade. She was worshipped by grateful teachers and students for her grace as the bestower of the sacred knowledge to the teachers and learners.

*“Saraswathi Namastubhyam Varade Kamarupini,
Vidyarambham Karishyami Siddhir Bhavatu Mey
Sada.*

*Padma-patralakshmi Padma-kesara Varnini,
Nityam Padmalaya Devi, Sa Maam Patu
Saraswathi.”*

(I begin my education with salutations to myriad-formed Saraswathi, the bestower of boons. May she always grant me success! That goddess with eyes like lotus

petals, coloured like the pollens of the lotus, ever residing in the lotus, may she protect me! *Saraswathi, Bhagawati, Bharathi, Poornendubimbanana* were her various names. Daily prayer was offered to the goddess Saraswathi before starting teaching and learning. But the name of Saraswathi is conspicuous by its absence in the modern system of education. Goddess Lakshmi was worshipped by her many names, viz., *Indira, Lokamatha, Ramamangaladevata, Bhargavi, Lokajanani, Ksheera Sagara Kanyaka*, etc. Prayers invoking the goddesses and extolling them by their various attributes lent purity and sweetness to the teachings of ancient *Bharathiyas*.

The Aim of Education is God-realisation

It is in such a sacred land that God has repeatedly taken human form. God is not some incomprehensible figure or entity. He can be most easily experienced. *Daivam Manusha Rupena* (God takes the form of man) God incarnates in human form. Today, however, man is not ready to accept this reality of God's incarnation in human form. Our ancients followed the paths of Karma (action), Upasana (worship) and Jnana (knowledge) to realise God. They offered prayers to God and worshipped Him in many ways.

*“Yasya Jnanadayasindho
Agadhasya Anagha Guna*

Sevyatham Akshayo Dheera

Sa Sriye Cha Amrutaya Cha.”

(That Lord who is the ocean of knowledge and compassion, fathomless, changeless and replete with all pure attributes is worshipped by the earnest seekers of prosperity and immortality.)

The sacred knowledge was offered free of cost. There was no discrimination on the basis of caste, community, race or religion. All were considered equal. Music, literature, dance and fine arts were all encouraged and fostered. Carpentry, pottery and various branches of smithy were also encouraged and taught with dedication. The aim was to make the students self-reliant through proper education. The teacher was the repository of all knowledge. Every student received knowledge directly from the teacher. Without the teacher, there could be no learning. The teachers in those days were noble and virtuous.

The science of medicine was highly developed in ancient India. Charaka was a highly reputed and well-known name in the field of medical science. Today the heart-lung machine and several other complicated and sophisticated equipments are required to treat heart disease. No such gadgets were required in those days. Charaka treated the patients while chanting Mantras in praise of God to invoke His grace. The heart disease

would vanish without a trace. For that matter, every disease can be cured by invoking God's grace. One can achieve physical, mental and spiritual strength by chanting the Divine Name.

Efficacy of Namasmarana for Man's Liberation

Embodiments of Love!

It is impossible to achieve anything without the grace of God. Sadly today, man is steeped in injustice and unrighteousness. All his thoughts are selfish and evil. His vision lacks the warmth of love. Idealism has reached rock bottom. First of all, man needs to grow the crop of love in the field of his heart. This was the teaching of Charaka. God is not in some distant land but resides in your very heart. He is with you, within you, above and below you and also around you. With such faith, man should chant the Divine Name. Discarding such an easy path, man is subjecting himself to needless agony and suffering. On the other hand, people in ancient days would instantly get rid of any suffering – all by chanting the sacred Name of the Lord. *Harer Nama Harer Nama Harer Namaiva Kevalam, Kalau Nastyeva Nastyeva Nastyeva Gathiranyatha* (chanting of the Divine Name is the only path to liberation in this Age of Kali).

In Kali Age, *Namasmarana* (chanting the Lord's Name) is the panacea for all our suffering. There is no

greater power than the Divine Name. Chanting the Lord's Name bestows infinite bliss on man. No one can estimate the power of the Lord's Name. In *Krita yuga*, meditation was the chief means of man's liberation. In *Treta yuga*, it was *Yagna* and in *Dwapara yuga*, worship. But in *Kali yuga*, *Namasmarana* is the most potent spiritual practice to earn God's grace. That is why the practice of *Namasmarana* has been spreading to all parts of the world.

Students!

If you make a proper enquiry, you will realize that all powers are present in you. The tremendous power of magnetism that is latent in man cannot be found anywhere else. All the powers of the world are immanent in man. Though man is such a powerful entity, he considers himself to be a weakling and hence suffers. You are all the embodiments of Divinity. God is not separate from you. He resides in your heart. You can have a blissful glimpse of God if you turn your vision inward. You are unable to see Him because you lack faith.

Poems and Plays Written by Swami in his Childhood

During my childhood, I used to compose several songs with deep meaning and gave joy to the villagers by having them sung. It was the time when Hitler invaded Russia in the Second World War. Some people

organised a meeting and approached me with a request to compose some songs which could inspire our freedom fighters. A doll was placed in a cradle on the stage. I then composed a song extempore in the form of a lullaby to the doll.

“Do not cry, my child, do not cry.

If you cry, you will not be called a valiant son of Bharath.

Go to sleep, my child, go to sleep.

Did you get scared because the terrible Hitler has invaded the invincible Russia?

Go to sleep, my child, go to sleep.

Do not cry, my child, do not cry.

For the Red Army is marching under Stalin.

They will put an end to Hitler.

All the countrymen shall unite and fight to win freedom;

Go to sleep, my child, go to sleep.” (Telugu Song)

The villagers listened to the song with appreciation and amazement. Many of them wondered as to how this young boy Sathyanarayana Raju had come to know about Hitler and Stalin. These names were unknown to the people in this region. There is nothing that Sai does not know. Yet I pretend as if I am not aware. I ask you, “When did you come?” You may think that Sai Baba is not even aware when you have arrived! I do know. But I

still ask the question to give you happiness. My only intention in asking such questions is to make you happy that Swami spoke to you. I do not think that you entertain any doubt about my knowledge of your arrival.

One day some school students came to me. They all used to address me as Sathya. They said, “Sathya! We are planning to enact a play in the school. We want you to write the story and some songs for it.” I agreed and prepared the script for the drama. In this connection, I wrote a song, taught it to two of the students and asked them to sing in public.

What are these times that have descended on us!

Oh folks! What are these times that have descended on us!

The face powder has formed a cheap substitute for the turmeric powder;

Oh folks! What are these times that have descended on us!

Gold necklaces have given way to cheap trinkets and chains;

Oh folks! What are these times that have descended on us!

(Telugu Poem)

In this way, I used to teach the people lessons that needed to be taught. In those days, sporting a wristwatch was considered a fashion.

People hang silver medallions from leather strap on their left wrists – and call it fashion!

Grotesque appearances are made that cannot be seen by the eyes – and they call it fashion!

Long moustaches are cut to tiny patches under the nose – and they call it fashion! (Telugu Song)

I used to compose such songs that made fun of modern fads and tried to draw the attention of the public, particularly the youth, towards ancient customs and traditions.

Karanam Subbamma was a noble and pious lady. She loved me very much. I was then just seven years of age. She often came to me, calling “Sathya, Sathya”. I did not respond immediately. Whenever she called me, she kept asking, “Child! Why do you not come to my house?” I would respond, “I am not a beggar to keep visiting others’ houses. I shall come only if invited and not otherwise.” One day she prayed, “Son! My husband is taking to immoral ways and ruining himself. Can you help me in correcting him?” I replied, “If you do not think otherwise, I will teach him a lesson. I will compose a few songs with suitable wordings and make the boys sing them in his presence.” Subbamma was worried that her husband would get angry with me. I comforted her, saying, “A person’s anger is his own enemy. It cannot harm me.” I then trained some boys to sing a song with the objective of correcting the evil-doer. This was a task that could not be achieved by mild and soft words. Only hard-hitting words could correct him and make

him feel guilty. The children were scared. I gave them courage by saying that I would be with them. The Karanam’s name was Narayana Rao. I wrote a song specially to correct him, passages of which ran as follows:

“You will become an outcaste in your own community;

Your relatives will not entertain you and will drive you out;

Your friends will beat you with their slippers if they see you!” (Telugu Song)

I used such harsh words to make him give up his misdirected ways. I was able to hit the mark! The Karanam learnt a good lesson and gave up his vices. Subbamma was thrilled. Though I was a small boy, she ran and fell at my feet and thanked me profusely. She said, “Raju! You are small only in appearance but there is an enormous divine power hidden in you. There is none else who could be so daringly forceful and set right so powerful a person as the Karanam!” She then told the father of this boy, “Venkappa! You are mistaken if you consider your son an ordinary boy. He is very powerful. He will set ideals for the whole world in future. Do not get deluded with the feeling that he is your son. Send him to my house.” He declined her request and said, “It is not customary in our family to give our children for adoption. Whatever be our limited capacity, we shall

look after him ourselves. I cannot send him to another house.”

In this way, I lived a life of freedom and courage. I did not allow anybody to have control over me. I have no defects or shortcomings. So, why should I fear? I led my life cheerfully and fearlessly.

I wrote some dramas also. I had several small plays staged by small children. One such drama was entitled: “*Cheppinattu Chestara*” (Do they act as they speak?)

Develop Divine Feelings from your Childhood

There lived one *Panchagam* (almanac) Ramappa. Kameswari was his mother. She used to conduct *Satsang* in the evening for a few ladies in which she preached philosophy after reading from sacred books. Whenever she discoursed, I sat there. She read highly philosophical Vedantic texts and explained their meaning somehow, though she herself found it difficult to understand these. She had even the handicap of not knowing the words properly. So, she tried to teach in her own way. She explained to the group of ladies that God is omnipotent, omniscient and protector of Dharma. Taking a suitable opportunity, I used to tell her the correct meaning of these verses so as to help her to explain this to other ladies.

Women were hardly educated in those days. They used to gather in the evening around such literate ladies and spent their time listening to sacred hymns and

stories about God. I was organizing such groups right from those days. I used to tell them the efficacy of *Satsang*. I assembled little children and organized a *Pandhari* bhajan group. With anklets that tinkled and cymbals that clanged, they enthusiastically sang and danced along the streets early in the morning, waking up slumbering villagers. Earlier, villagers did not get up till 7.00 a.m. But when I started organizing *Pandhari* bhajans with the help of children, they started rising at 5.00 a.m., and also started offering prayers to God after their morning ablutions and bath.

*“Taking cymbals in hand,
Tying them up firmly to hand,
Clanging them together to beat out
desire and anger from within,
Let us take the path to Shirdi,
Let us sing ‘Jai Jai Ranga’
Let us sing ‘Jai Jai Sai’
and hurry towards the Lord.”* (Telugu Song)

Thus began the idea of *Nagar Sankirtan*. I started *Nagar Sankirtan* when I was seven years old! Subamma would quietly join the group as well, enthusiastically playing the cymbals.

Right from childhood, I have always been engaged in imparting knowledge and propounding sacred teachings to the people. The *Pandhari* bhajan group

was so popular that people from neighbouring villages also came to participate in it. All those who took part in it experienced ecstasy and bliss. Subbamma felt very happy. For two rupees, a sackful of puffed rice could be bought. She arranged to have it distributed as prasadam to all. It is essential to develop divine feelings right from your childhood.

I was sent to Kamalapuram for studies. Kamalapuram lies between Cuddapah and Tadipatri towns. There in Kamalapuram a businessman named Kote Subbanna somehow found out that I had the capability to write poetry. He came running to me and said, "Raju! I hear that you compose excellent poems." I told him, "It is not that I compose poems. Whatever I utter is itself poetry!" He said, "I shall get a pair of shirts and trousers stitched for you if you write some poems for me." I told him at once that he must not approach me with such cheap bartering offers. "I am not waiting for you to give alms to me. There is no need to talk to you if you do this!" In this way, I admonished him.

He then explained that he had stocked a brand new medicine in his shop. He wrote down and gave me a detailed list of its benefits. It was called "*Bala Bhaskara*". He requested that I compose a song on the "*Bala Bhaskara*" and teach it to a group of children, and make them go round the streets singing the song. I told him to come back in an hour! The classes were going on. I did not want to shirk my responsibilities. I

therefore told Kote Subbanna to come an hour later, after the classes and collect the poem. I then set the tune and composed the song. It ran as follows:

"There it is! There it is! Oh, children! come, come!

There is the medicine Bala Bhaskara;

Be it an upset stomach or a swollen leg;

Be it a joint pain or flatulence;

Be it any ailment, known or unknown;

Take this Bala Bhaskara for an instant cure!

If you wish to know where it is available:

There is the shop of Kote Subbanna;

It is in that shop that you can pick it up.

Come here boys! come here!

It is an excellent tonic

Prepared by the famous physician

Gopalacharya himself,

Come here boys! come here!" (Telugu Song)

Kote Subbanna's joy knew no bounds when he heard the song. He brought a big basket of laddoos and placed it before me with gratitude. I directed that these be distributed to everyone present there. I never took sweets right from my childhood. Why do I need to have sweets when I have all the sweetness within me? My mind is sweet, my love is sweet. Why then do I need sweets? In this way, my primary task was to help

everybody, make them happy and remove their suffering.

Embodiments of Love!

Our Vice Chancellor has prayed that I should speak about the sacred source of joy, the *Ramayana*. Truly speaking, I am not satisfied with the present educational scenario. Today people can study as much as they wish. But what is the use of this education? They are engaged in *Dhanarjana* (earning money) and not *Gunarjana* (imbibing virtues). Money is no doubt essential but it is not the be all and end all of life. Virtues are of prime importance. All that you learn is forgotten at some point of time or the other. What is needed today is spiritual education. It is said: “*Adhyatma Vidya Vidyam*” (spiritual knowledge is real knowledge). It is this knowledge that needs to be imbibed in the heart. This sacred knowledge is available in the *Ramayana*. The *Ramayana* is an ancient text. It has survived the vicissitudes of time, ups and downs of history and several other turbulences, and still stands high as a great ideal for humanity. There are several subtle secrets in the *Ramayana* that are not understood by many. I shall take these tiny saplings, develop them into huge trees and make you sit and relax under their cool shade. This shall be my endeavour from tomorrow onwards.

**Summer Course, Brindavan, 16-05-2002
(Evening)**