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Education:

The *Brahmastra*¹ of the Human Race.

“Education is the best friend. An educated person is respected everywhere. Education beats the beauty and the youth” (Chanakya).

Education is the fundamental sense of learning. Education is not limited to formal textbook knowledge, but is open to an ocean of informal skills, values, beliefs and habits, which gets transferred from one generation to another. It is impossible to imagine a world without schools and colleges. For a better standard of living, to uplift the poor, for self-respect and for a peaceful and safer society, education is the most important pillar.

All ancient civilizations laid heavy emphasis on education. Education began in the earliest prehistory, as adults trained the young in the knowledge and skills deemed necessary in

¹ In ancient Sanskrit writings, the Brahmastra was a weapon created by Lord Brahma, along with its more powerful versions like Brahmashirsha astra and Brahmanda astra. Brahmastra and Brahmashirsha astra are said to be mythical and is far more any equivalent of modern day weapons, so powerful that they can destroy multidimensional physical region at once. It was considered as a very destructive weapon (Brahmastra).

their society. In pre-literate societies this was achieved orally and through imitation. The best example is the Hindu *Vedas* which even today are transferred vocally. Story-telling passed knowledge, values, and skills from one generation to the next. As cultures began to extend their knowledge beyond skills that could be readily learned through imitation, formal education developed. Schools existed in Egypt at the time of the Middle

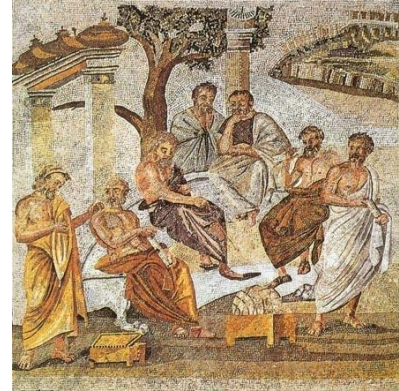


Figure 1 Plato's Academy depicted in a mosaic

Kingdom. Plato founded the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in Europe (Encyclopedia Britannica). The city of Alexandria in Egypt, founded in 330 BCE, became the successor to Athens as the intellectual cradle of Ancient Greece. There, mathematician Euclid and anatomist Herophilus constructed the Great Library of Alexandria and translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek (Blainey). Mathematics, Astronomy, Medicine and Literature emerged from India. Indian mathematicians made early contributions to the study of the concept of zero as a number, negative numbers, arithmetic, and algebra. In addition, trigonometry was further advanced in India, and, in particular, the modern definitions of sine and cosine were developed there. From pre-historic to modern times, Indian astronomy continues to play an integral role. Some of the earliest roots of Indian astronomy can be dated to the period of Indus Valley Civilization or earlier.

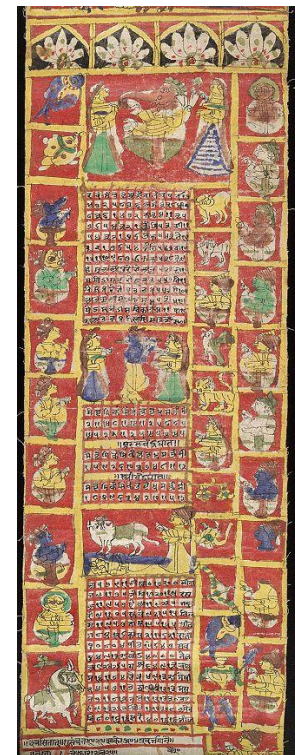


Figure 2 Saka (Hindu Lunar Calendar)

Originated in prehistoric times, some of the concepts of *Ayurveda* have been discovered since the times of Indus Valley Civilization and earlier. *Ayurveda* significantly developed during

the Vedic period and later some of the non-Vedic systems such as Buddhism and Jainism also incorporated in the system (Pankaj Gupta). Some of the oldest known Ayurvedic texts include the *Suśrutha Saṃhitā* and *Charaka Saṃhitā*, which are written in Sanskrit. Ayurvedic practitioners had developed various medicinal preparations and surgical procedures by the medieval period (Girish Dwivedi).

Today, we see a global problem of illiteracy, lack of schooling, lack of formal education and violence against education, albeit our ancestors focused only on education. One of the worst and inhuman attack against education occurred on December 16th, 2014, in Peshawar's Army Public School, when nine gunmen affiliated with a terrorist organization brutally massacred about 150 innocent people, including 130 children ranging between eight through eighteen years of age. The motive behind the attack was to retaliate the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to Malala Yousafzai, who was also a victim of violence against education.

Malala Yousafzai is a human rights advocate for Education for Women and Children, in her native Swat Valley, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, where the local extremists had banned girls from attending schools. On the afternoon of 9th of October 2012, Yousafzai boarded her school bus in the northwest Pakistani district of Swat. A gunman asked for her by name, then pointed a pistol at her and fired three shots. One bullet hit the left side of Yousafzai's forehead, travelled under her skin through the length of her face, and then went into her shoulder. In the days immediately following the attack, she remained unconscious and in



Figure 3 Malala Yousafzai in the UN General Assembly

critical condition, but later her condition improved enough for her to be sent to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, England, for intensive rehabilitation (Rebecca Winthrop).

On 12th of October 2012, a group of 50 Islamic clerics in Pakistan issued a *fatwa* (legal opinion) against those who tried to kill her, but the Taliban reiterated their intent to kill Yousafzai and her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai (Boone). The assassination attempt received worldwide media coverage and produced an outpouring of sympathy and anger. Protests against the shooting were held in several Pakistani cities the day after the attack, and over 2 million people signed the Right to Education campaign's petition, which led to ratification of the first Right to Education Bill in Pakistan. Pakistani officials offered a 10 million Pakistan Rupees (US\$105,000) reward for information leading to the arrest of the attackers. Responding to concerns about his safety, Yousafzai's father said, "We wouldn't leave our country if my daughter survives or not. We have an ideology that advocates peace. The Taliban cannot stop all independent voices through the force of bullets" (Ghosh). On 12th July, 2013, while addressing the UN General Assembly, she quotes, "...Let us wage a global struggle against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism and let us pick up our books and pens. One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world" (Nations). Superstition is the belief in supernatural causality – that one event causes another without any natural process linking the two events and contradicts natural science. Illiterate and uneducated people often tend to hold certain superstitious beliefs. Education and awareness are the best ways to combat superstitions and replace such beliefs with reason and logic.

Illiteracy often breeds ignorance and this ignorance may prove to be dangerous when it comes to healthcare. Educated people know better about preventive methods which protect them from a number of diseases. An illiterate and ignorant person is more likely to ignore the symptoms and avoids seeking medical aid unless the problem becomes very serious. Hence education enables people to take better care of yourself as well as your family (Kidwai).



Figure 4 Children suffering from Marasmus - A disease due to mal nutrition (Farrell)

An educational degree is considered as a proof of your knowledge by many. If one is educated they have more chances of being heard and taken seriously. Generally, an uneducated man will find it harder to express his views and opinions owing to lack of confidence. Even if she/he does so, people may not take him/her seriously. Education gives the confidence to express one's views and opinions. Everybody likes a wise and knowledgeable person. Educated people are considered highly reputable in the society. The more educated one is, the more respect she/he is likely to get (Kidwai).

In this society has its own set spoken/unspoken rules and one of them is education. The society expects every person to go to school followed by college, get a job, settle down etc. In fact education helps one become a useful member of the society. An educated member certainly has a greater chance to contribute to his community. It helps you become an active member of the society and participate in the ongoing changes and developments. Education saves one from being exploited and fooled. It is easier to take advantage of innocent and illiterate people. They may be trapped into signing false documents or be deprived of some fundamental rights which

they have as citizens, unlike an educated person, they are not well aware of their rights and freedom (Kidwai).

If we want to see the world as a just and fair place where everyone is given equal opportunities, education is what we require and, is a must if we want to do away with the existing differences between different social classes and genders. It opens a whole world of opportunities for the poor so that they may have an equal shot at well-paying jobs. Education also plays a major role in women empowerment. Australia, the United States of America and Japan are few countries with very high literacy rates. These countries are extremely prosperous and the citizens have a high per capita income. On the other hand there are underdeveloped and developing nations, where literacy rate is not as high and a number of people are still living below the poverty line. With the essence of education, more people would have high paying jobs, which improves the nation's economy. Education is vital for the economic prosperity of a nation (Kidwai).

Education majorly affects the understanding of the difference between right and wrong. An educated person is well aware of the consequences of wrong or illegal actions and he is less likely to get influenced and do something which is either legally or morally wrong. Also, a number of uneducated people who live a poverty stricken life owing to lack of opportunities often turn to illegal ways such as theft and robbery to solve their problems. If you are educated, you are well aware of your rights, the law and your responsibilities towards the society. Hence, education is an important factor which contributes in social harmony and peace. (Kidwai)

An educated person has more chances of landing in a good high paying job. Everybody wants a good life which may be called as the "root of all evil" but most people will agree that money is important for survival in today's world. The more educated you are, the better career

options you have. If you want to lead a happy life and enjoy the good things the world has to offer, you certainly need to get educated. A great job and a good social reputation are few of the many benefits of being an educated person. Education is a must for a promising and secure future and a stable life. (Kidwai)

Child labor refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives children of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school, and that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful. This practice is considered exploitative by many international organizations (“What is child labor?”). Legislations across the world prohibit child labor. Lack of meaningful alternatives, such as affordable schools and quality education, according to ILO, is another major factor driving children to harmful labor. Children work because they have nothing better to



Figure 5 Child Labor in India (Shaw)

do. Many communities, particularly rural areas where between 60–70% of child labor is prevalent, do not possess adequate school facilities. Even when schools are sometimes available, they are too far away, difficult to reach, unaffordable or the quality of education is so poor that parents wonder if going to school is really worth it. Anees Jung, in her short story “Lost Spring” writes, “I see two distinct worlds – one of the family, caught in the web of poverty, burdened by the stigma of caste in which they are born; the other a vicious circle of the sahkars (the wealthy), middlemen, policemen, the keepers of law, the bureaucrats and the politicians. Together they have imposed the baggage on the child that he cannot put down” (Jung). In many cultures the education of girls is less valued or girls are simply not expected to have formal schooling, and these girls are pushed into child labor such as providing domestic services

(“International and National Legislation - Child Labor.”). Children are employed in brick kilns, bangles (glass bracelets) manufacture, silk weaving, firework manufacture, etc. Certain occupations are hazardous and have a deadly impact on the physical and mental health of the child. The only method to prevent the exploitation of children is providing free and good education. In Africa, the International Labor Organization estimates that 38.7 million children aged between 5 and 17 are employed in the worst forms of child labor. The International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor launched a project titled Tackling Child Labor Through Education (TACKLE) along with the European Commission with the aim of eliminating child labor in twelve countries across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific group of states (Office). In India, *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* was passed, which ensured free education to all under privileged children under the age of 14 years. In 1988, the National Child Labor Project was initiated and the government funded ₹ 6 Billion (\$ 100 Million) towards this project to rehabilitate children. Despite these efforts, child labor remains a major challenge for India and certain Asian and African countries (Labor).

The question that arises now is, “How do tackle this problem?” The answer is Education. It is the responsibility of the developed nations to help the developing nations to introduce good and effective education system. All nations must provide free and quality schooling to all children, who are under the age of 18 and cannot afford formal education. It is the responsibility of all governments to ensure an all-round development of the child, regardless of gender, caste, creed and religion. Good nutrition, time to time vaccination, etc. must be made available to all the disadvantaged. Schools make every individual aware of sanitation, the poor are treated effectively, which indirectly controls the human mortality. Schools should promote holistic development, cleanliness, co-existing and working together. The government of India came up

with “Mid-Day Meal Scheme,” where lunch was made free for all children who attended government schools. The aim was to improve the nutritional status of school-age children nationwide. It has also come with “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan” (The Education for All Movement) and was mandated by the 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India, making free and compulsory education to the children aged between 6 and 14 (about 205 million children, as per the 2001 census) a fundamental right. The present goals of the Indian Government is to open and upgrade schools, address the low teacher numbers and provide elementary education to all children (Development).

Similarly, Africa suffers from the problem of child labor and low literacy. Education participation rates in many African countries are low. Schools often lack many basic facilities, and African universities suffer from overcrowding and staff being lured away to Western countries by



Figure 6 Education in Africa (Lawrence)

higher pay and better conditions. The main reason for the low education rates in Africa is the lack of proper schooling facilities and unequal opportunity for education across countries. There have been certain initiatives to improve education in Africa. For example, NEPAD’s E-School program is an ambitious plan to provide internet and computer facilities to all schools on the continent. SACMEQ is a consortium of 15 ministries of Education in Southern and Eastern Africa which undertakes integrated research and training activities to monitor and evaluate the quality of basic education. The information generated can be used by decision-makers to plan and improve the quality of education (III). For 10 years, the Benin Education Fund (BEF) has provided scholarships and education support to students from the Atakora province in

northeastern Benin. Over 450 students have been able to stay in school because of their programs. British Airways, in collaboration with UNICEF, opened a model school Kuje Science Primary School in Nigeria in 2002 (British Airways). The Volkswagen Foundation has been running a funding initiative called “Knowledge for Tomorrow – Cooperative Research Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa” since 2003 (Svenja Czapek). It provides scholarships for young African researchers and helps to establish a scientific community in African universities. The following initiatives have been taken up by the African governments is to review and regulate school and district financial record-keeping, more comprehensive training of head teachers, administrators in economical administration, regular inspection of schools, proactively help parents to know their rights and empower and mobilize local watchdog organizations (“Corruption Stifles Learning in Africa”).

Despite significant progress, education coverage remains a challenge in Latin America. The region has made great progress in educational coverage; almost all children attend primary school and access to secondary education has increased considerably. Adolescents complete on average two more years of schooling than



Figure 7 School's in Latin America (O'Neill)

their parents' generation. Most educational systems in the region have implemented various types of administrative and institutional reforms that have enabled reach for places and communities that had no access to education services in the early 90's. However, there are still 23 million children in the region between the ages of 4 and 17 outside of the formal education system. Estimates indicate that 30% of preschool age children (ages 4 –5) do not attend school, and for the most vulnerable populations – poor, rural, indigenous and afro-descendants - this calculation

exceeds 40 percent. Among primary school age children (ages 6 to 12), coverage is almost universal; however there is still a need to incorporate 5 million children in the primary education system. These children live mostly in remote areas, are indigenous or Afro-descendants and live in extreme poverty (BID/EDU Stakeholder Survey). With so many people out of school, the society is poverty stricken. This can be conquered through education.

Among people between the ages of 13 and 17 years, only 80% are enrolled in the education system; among those, only 66% attend secondary school. The remaining 14% are still attending primary school. These percentages are higher among vulnerable population groups: 75% of the poorest youth between the ages of 13 and 17 years attend school. Tertiary education has the lowest coverage, with only 70% of people between the ages of 18 and 25 years outside of the education system. Currently, more than half of low income children or people living in rural areas fail to complete nine years of education (BID/EDU Stakeholder Survey).

The results of the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (SERCE) indicate that almost two-thirds of Latin American students do not achieve satisfactory reading and math scores. There is a significant learning gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds, those who live in rural areas and those who belong to indigenous and Afro-descendant groups. Research indicates that student in 3rd grade belonging to the poorest quintile has a 12% probability of obtaining a satisfactory reading score while a student in the wealthiest quintile has a 56% probability of doing so. In mathematics, the probability differs between 10% and 48%. Data from surveys conducted to employers in Argentina, Brazil and Chile developed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) show that a significant proportion of employers face difficulties in finding workers with relevant skills for good job performance, especially behavioral skills (UNESCO).

At this juncture, it becomes clear that the pen is mightier than the sword. So, the power of education must not be underestimated. The United Nations (and the UNICEF) must be applauded for their consistent and hard work to educate every child on this earth. The governments of so many



*Figure 8 Children rehabilitated by the UNICEF
("UNICEF Happy Children")*

nations who are offering free and compulsory education to all deprived children must be much-admired. So many Non-Government Organizations, who are working day and night to free children from child labor and exploitation must be respected. This resilient weapon, as quoted by Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (Mandela), can be used to change this world for the good, for liberty, for democracy and for the 7 Billion people who regard this planet as their home.

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