

# **Sanskrit–Distance Education in Modern Context**

## **(With Special Reference to Vedic Education System)**

**Aparna Dhir**

**Key words-** [Distance education, Learning Technology, Educational institutions]

### **Abstract-**

[Under mentioned interactive ways of learning should be encourage in present Sanskrit based distance education system. Vedas recognize discourses and conferences as an integral part of learning. To formulate teaching more interesting, appealing and self-motivated, the dialogue format should be incorporate in study materials. In context of Sanskrit, these kind of interactive sessions or study materials not only highlight the valuable subjective knowledge but also help in developing communication skills of the learner. Apart from this, it (Vedas) informs that even temporary association with teachers can turn fruitful, if one maintains a habit of self-learning. Moreover, it should be noted that in distance learning process the material meant for study is called as ‘Self-Study-Material’ which is just the synonym of *Sva-dhya-ya*. Hence, in modern times too, we should follow our Vedic way of teaching to promote distance education system.]

### **Introduction**

The present education system comprises of both regular and open learning methodology for imparting knowledge to students. In modern times more and more people are becoming conscious towards education especially in the field of higher education. Today, to enhance skills one wants to learn more than one stream of knowledge at same time. But the problem they are acrossing is of lack of time & of less opportunities. Hence, the concept of distance education comes into existence. Distance education is a field of education that focuses on delivering teaching, often to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting such as a classroom.

### **Distance Learning**

One can say that Distance Learning Technology is a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both.<sup>1</sup> The types of available technologies used in distance education are divided into two groups: [synchronous learning](#) and [asynchronous learning](#). Synchronous distance

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance\\_education#cite\\_note-1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distance_education#cite_note-1)

learning technology is a mode of delivery where all participants are "present" at the same time. It resembles traditional classroom teaching. It requires a timetable to be organized. [Web conferencing](#), [video conferencing](#), [educational television](#), [internet](#), [live streaming](#), [telephone](#) are examples of synchronous technology. The asynchronous learning mode of delivery is where Students access course materials on their own schedule and so is more flexible. Students are not required to be together at the same time. Mail correspondence, [message board](#) forums, [e-mail](#), [video](#) and [audio recordings](#), print materials, [voicemail](#) and [fax](#) are the examples of an asynchronous distance learning technology. One should remember that distance learning system not only make education flexible for learners (with lack of time) but also it helps in expanding access (more and more students can join), provides education to disabilities, handicaps, or sick people and also equal opportunity to all regardless of their socio-economic status, gender, race, age.

### **Sanskrit through Distance Education System**

Currently, in India Sanskrit through distance education system is being taught in various Sanskrit, centralized and open universities. Many courses and new methodology of teaching such as virtual learning environment (VLE), e-learning etc are being introduced under this system. A virtual learning environment can also include students and teacher “meeting” online through web-based application. The teacher is able to present lessons through video, Power Point, or chatting. The students are able to talk with other students and the teacher, as well as collaborate with each other, answer questions, or pose questions. E-learning applications include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, [virtual education](#) opportunities and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the Internet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CD-ROM. It also refers to educational web sites such as those offering learning scenarios, worksheets and interactive exercises for children. These days in India, to develop more than one skill learners opting for distance learning programs that includes virtual learning environment (VLE), e-learning etc.

Today student of Sanskrit language want to restrain the gap of traditional and modern way of learning Sanskrit. A traditional way includes courses like Prak-Shastri, Shastri, Acharya whereas a modern way includes courses like B.A., M.A in Sanskrit. Apart from regular degree courses both modes of learning includes some diploma or certificate courses as well. So, for becoming a skillful student of Sanskrit in both the approaches, this distance education program provides a

great help. So, now-a-days in the field of Sanskrit too, many distance education programs are running in various Sanskrit, centralized and open universities such as Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, IGNOU, Delhi University etc. These days approach to distance learning is very popular, even in ancient times people were curious about acquiring knowledge.

## Education in Ancient India

The following agencies of learning were in ancient India – (a) Teachers, (b) Authors, (c) Regular students, (d) Travelling scholars, (e) Educational institutions – *Aśrama*, *Carana*, *Vidyalaya*, *Śikṣālaya*, (f) Learned assemblies and conferences, (g) Discourses, (h) Expositions and literature.<sup>2</sup>

## Concept of Distance Learning in Vedas

The introduction of distance learning concept appears not too old but one can trace its roots in Vedic period. Today everyone thinks that during Vedic era “*Gurukula-Parampara*” was the only way in education system. Whereas, the methodology find in Vedic scriptures are much more prominent and can be applied easily. The approach of Vedic philosophy towards distance learning is based upon the following –

- Family as institute
- Self-learning
- Discourses
- Debates
- Conferences

## Family as Institute

Family is the first institute for education. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* narrates in a passage that a father is expected to instruct his own son.<sup>3</sup> This reflects a family should instruct their child with basic, moral or cultural education.

## Self-Learning

The importance of self study is repeatedly insisted upon by Vedic texts, for which the technical name *Sva-dhyaya* is applied. The concept of distance learning too chiefly depends upon ‘self-

<sup>2</sup> *Education in Ancient India*, Veda Mitra, Arya Book Depot, Delhi, 1967, Pg. 18

<sup>3</sup> अनुच्यते पितैव पुत्राय ब्रह्मचारिणे। *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.6.2.4

learning'. Hence, relevance of *Sva-dhya-ya* pointed out in a way that, by practicing *Sva-dhya-ya* one becomes independent of others, the best physician for himself, growth of intelligence, fame and the power of perfecting the people.<sup>4</sup> This idea reflects a student have to concentrate himself. In the whole process of education the main work is of student and not of the teacher. A student has to concentrate on the content being taught. This can be learn from *Brhadaraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, where *śravanā*, *manana* and *nididhya-sana* are consider as the three major steps to be followed by the student i.e. Firstly it should be heard of from a teacher or learnt through scriptures, then reflected on through reasoning or discussion, and finally by meditation.<sup>5</sup>

## Discourses

Style of expression used in Vedas actually conveys the method of instructions or giving directions by the preceptor, so that a disciple can discover himself the exact characteristics of the content being taught. There are examples which point out to temporary association between teachers, and elderly pupils or householders, for imparting of knowledge of some special doctrines and truths.<sup>6</sup> There were plentiful passages in Vedic literature that indicates that formal pupilage (*Carana*, *Vidya-laya*) was not absolutely binding in earlier period. Evidence of instructions without formal pupilage is found in various verses of Vedic texts. Such as in the *Brhadaraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, we find *Ya-jñavalkya* as the leading participant in all the discourses, *Ya-jñavalkya-Janaka*, *Ya-jñavalkya-Gaṅgi*, *Ya-jñavalkya-Śaṅkalya*, *Ya-jñavalkya-Maitreyi* etc. These all were not strictly his students. He imparts knowledge on the deepest problems in all these dialogues. Discourses leave a space for a pupil to think out for himself. *Manana* or cogitation as a means of convincing oneself of the truth and also to clear himself against future doubts. Same phenomenon can be applied in case of distance education i.e. more and more discourses can be introduced among students during counseling-classes or live-chats. In this way, one can discuss each and every step through rational examples.

## Debating Circles / Parishads

During Vedic era, the types of institutions were different from regular system of education. People were more interested in debates, mutual discussions or academic meetings that improve

<sup>4</sup> स्वाध्यायप्रवचने भवतो युक्तमना भवत्यपराधीनोऽहरहरार्थान्त्साधयते सुखं स्वपिति परमचिकित्सक। Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.5.7.1;

स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः। Taittiriya Upaniṣad 1.11.1

<sup>5</sup> Brhadaraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.4.4

<sup>6</sup> Ancient Indian Education (Brahmanical and Buddhist), Radha Kumud Mookerji, MLBD, Delhi, 2003, Pg. 98

disciple's knowledge.<sup>7</sup> The science of disputation by which 'Tarka-Śāstra' evolves, is another popular way of distance education. This approach was there in Vedic period, the method of explaining a subject by an intelligent and graduated series of question and answers.<sup>8</sup> One may consult this from Vedic literature; we find that pupils asked questions with no lack of boldness.<sup>9</sup> In this context some of the technical terms are found in the *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*<sup>10</sup>, *Praśnin* (questioner or the one who makes queries in discussions), *Abhi-Praśnin* (cross-questioner) and *Praśna-Vivaṅka* (answerer). In distance education too, students should be encouraged for debates through Video-conferences.

## Conferences

Besides the small circles of academic discussions, Vedic scriptures illustrate some examples of occasionally summoned national gatherings, where invited group of thinkers exchange their views. Like in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* king Janaka Vaideha invited Brāhmins of the Kuru-Pāṇchaṭa.<sup>11</sup> In distance education too, conferences can be organized through internet, where invited or participated candidates can discuss their views using internet facility.

## Conclusion

These above mentioned interactive ways of learning should be encouraged in present Sanskrit based distance education system. Vedas recognize discourses and conferences as an integral part of learning. To formulate teaching more interesting, appealing and self-motivated, the dialogue format should be incorporated in study materials. In context of Sanskrit, these kind of interactive sessions or study materials not only highlight the valuable subjective knowledge but also help in developing communication skills of the learner. Apart from this, it (Vedas) informs that even temporary association with teachers can turn fruitful, if one maintains a habit of self-learning. Moreover, it should be noted that in distance learning process the material meant for study is called as 'Self-Study-Material' which is just the synonym of *Sva-dhyāya*. Hence, in modern times too, we should follow our Vedic way of teaching to promote distance education system.

<sup>7</sup> Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.4.1.2, 11.6.2

<sup>8</sup> *Ancient Indian Education (Brahmanical and Buddhist)*, Radha Kumud Mookerji, Pg. 112

<sup>9</sup> तस्मै स होवाचतिप्रश्नान्पृच्छसि...। Praśna Upaniṣad 3.2

<sup>10</sup> आशिक्षायै प्रश्निनम्। उपशिक्षाया अभिप्रश्निनम्। मर्यादायै प्रश्नविवाकम्। Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa 3.4.6.1

<sup>11</sup> जनको ह वैदेहो.....कुरुपञ्चालानां ब्राह्मणा अभिसमेता बभू। Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 14.6.1.1