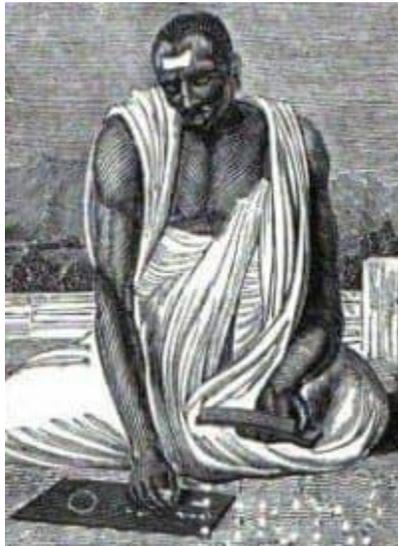


India has produced great mathematicians, and astronomers like Varahamihira, Aryabhata, Bhaskaracharya, Acharya Chanakya, Brahmagupta, etc. Brahmagupta's book when translated by Al-Khwarizmi, a mathematician at the library of Baghdad wisdom house, made the Arabian world acquainted with Indian mathematics. This helped the Arabian world under Abbasid Caliphate achieve a lot of technological advancements e.g. Damascus steel, etc.

This gave Arabian forces the upper hand during their power struggle with Christians in the following centuries during crusade wars. These Arabian advancements were the inspirations of the European renaissance of the 16th century with the translation works of the "Toledo School of Translators" during the 12th and 13th centuries. Much of Indian knowledge through Arabian sources reached Europe thereby giving rise to the age of scientific discoveries.

Do you know how India produced such geniuses? Shouldn't we take some cues from the great Indian **gurukul system of education** which was at the center of Vedic as well as Hindu society?





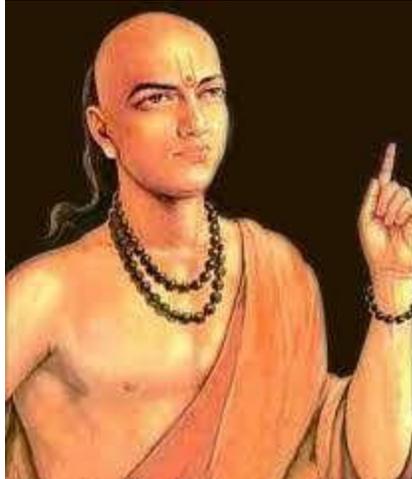


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What is a Gurukul?

Gurukul is a type of residential schooling system in which the *shishya*(students) lives with the acharya or guru. The acharya feeds him, teaches him, and treats him one with the family. The *shishya*(student) helps the guru in his day-to-day work and learns from his conduct as well. This is the way education was imparted

to everyone during the Vedic period and Mahabharata period well up to the 18th century till the British introduced an alternative day-boarding system.

Gurukul system is the indigenous education system of the Indian subcontinent. It was prevalent throughout the Indian subcontinent till the advent of the day-boarding system that was introduced by the British to impart English education to the Indian upper classes. It was used to impart religious as well as secular teachings in India. Gurukuls were started in the Vedic age when learning was imparted through oral traditions and the system was kept alive with the help of guru-shishya tradition. Slowly these gurukuls took institutionalized forms and the system started functioning to impart knowledge of every kind.

The gurukul system has been recorded historically as the earliest form of imparting education in an organized way that too at a scale. Gurukuls always enjoyed state patronage under most dynasties till about the 1200s. With the advent of Muslim rule in India, the system faced a lot of systemic destruction i.e. the system that supported Gurukuls sustained major damage. But it kept on working albeit in a very distorted format while facing systematic destruction campaigns till the British took control of India.

History of the gurukul system

The word “Gurukula” or “Gurukulam” is made up of two words “*Guru*” and “*kula*”. It translates literally to ‘the lineage/clan of the guru’. But it has been used for centuries in the sense of educational institutions in India.

The history of Gurukuls is the history of India’s education system and how it gave birth to subjects like astronomy, mathematics, science, economics, history, etc. In the development of Indian culture, the system of 4 *Purusharthas*, [4 Varnas](#), and [4 Ashrams](#) were not only interdependent. But Gurukuls acted as a great support system for them.

Gurukul system of education in the Vedic period

The Gurukul system of education in India flourished during the Vedic period.

Gurukuls acted as the main center of learning in ancient times. In gurukuls, Brahmacharis(students), or *Satyanveshi Parivrajakas* from far-off places used to come to complete their learnings. Those Gurukuls were of all kinds, small or big.

मुनीनां दशसाहस्रं योऽन्नदानादि पोषाणात्। अध्यायपति विप्रर्षिरसौ कुलपतिः स्मृतः।

Sages who nourished ten thousand sages or students and gave education were called the *Kulpati* (Vice-Chancellor)

It is clear from the use of the word 'Smrita' quoted above that the tradition of taking this special meaning of the Vice-Chancellor was very old. The general meaning of the patriarch was the owner of a clan. This clan could be either a small and undivided family or a large and many small families of the same origin.

The *antevasi* student was a member of the great academic family of the *Kulpati*. The responsibility for his mental and intellectual development rested with the *Kulpati*. The *Kulpati* was also concerned about the physical health and well-being of the students. Nowadays the term is used for the 'Vice Chancellor' of the university.

Mention in Pali literature

Many such discussions are found in the Pali literature, from which it is known that kings like Prasenjit donated many villages to those Brahmins who were involved in the field of Vedas. They used to run Gurukul for the distribution of Vedic education and helped in the study of Vedic literature. This tradition was often continued by most of the rulers and there are many inscriptions of the Gurukul running in the villages donated to the Brahmins of South India. The developed forms of such Gurukuls were Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Valbhi University.

It is known from the [travel records](#) of Xuanzang(Hiuen Tsang), Faxian(Fa-Hien), and many other references that in those universities, students from far-off places used to come to study. *Varanasi* was the main center of education since ancient times and till recently there have been hundreds of Gurukuls, Pathshalas and Annakshetras kept running for their sustenance.

Gurukuls mentioned in Ramayana & Mahabharata



gurukuls in ancient India

Some of the famous rishis/gurus who find mentioned in the Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata also ran famous gurukuls. Rama and Krishna also studied in Gurukuls under Vashishtha and Sandeepani respectively.

Maharishi Vishwamitra

He wrote the Gayatri Mantra and was also the teacher of Lord Ram and Laxman. He taught them the usage of celestial weapons (Devastras) to be used in warfare. He guided them in defeating the powerful demons like Tataka, Maricha, and Subahu.

Maharishi Valmiki

Sita took refuge at his ashram and gave birth to Luv and Kush, he taught them shastras and the art of using weapons. He also wrote Ramayana.

Maharishi Vashishtha

He was one of the great Saptrishis. He was a teacher to Dashrath's sons Ram, Lakshman, Bharat, and Shatrughan.

Guru Dronacharya

He was the guru of all the Kauravas and Pandavas, who learned under guru Dronacharya. His gurukul was situated somewhere near the present-day “Gurugram” which also gets its name from.

Naimisha

It was one of the most important hermitages. It was more like a university. *Saunika* rishi was the Kulapati of this hermitage which means at least 10,000 disciples and acharyas used to reside in this hermitage at one time.

Kanva Rishi Hermitage

Kanva rishi’s hermitage is described in vivid detail in Mahabharata. It was situated on the banks of the river Malini, a tributary of the Sarayu River. This hermitage was not a stand-alone but many other hermitages were there in its vicinity.

Vyasa’s hermitage

It was one of the most famous seats of learning. Vyasa compiled all the Vedas in this hermitage.

Education Beyond the Gurukul i.e. universities of ancient India

Some of these gurukuls evolved organically into what we call universities nowadays. The reasons may have ranged from the spread of their fame far and wide and students might have started flocking to these well-known places giving rise to universities. These served as centers/institutions for advanced learning.

According to one estimate, there were well over 50 universities in ancient India at one time. Some of these famous ones are Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Valbhi University, Odantapuri, Mithila University, Telhara University, Sharda Peeth Temple University, Pushpagiri University, Somapura University, Bikrampur University.

Some of the famous alumni of Takshashila(Taxila) were the noted grammarian Panini, who wrote the famous book Ashtadhyayi, and Acharya Chanakya, who wrote Arthashastra.

Why Gurukul system decline?

But as everything has to come to an end, the gurukul system also faced challenges from foreign rulers. Foreign invader brought their education systems with them and forced them on the indigenous population.

Muslim rule

Following the destruction of Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Udyantpuri. The continuous persecution and destruction at the hands of Muslim rulers.



A painting titled “The end of Buddhist Monks” shows the destruction of Nalanda by Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1193. Besides Nalanda, he destroyed Vikramshila and Odantapuri universities as well. The destruction has been recorded by *Minhaj-i Siraj Juzjani* in *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*.

British rule

After winning the debate with “[Minute on Education\(1835\)](#)“, Thomas Babington Macaulay, a British Politician brought radical changes to education in India. After that, the company stopped all funding to the gurukuls. Societal apathy mixed with sustained

attacks from Muslim rulers compounded their decline. But it was the British who delivered the death blow to the already dying Gurukul system. Soon it becomes fashionable to send your child to your convent school and the rest is history.

In the aftermath of British policies, the 19th century saw a steep decline in the number of gurukuls all over India. India, from being one of the biggest economies in the world in the 1800s to being one of the poorest in the world in 1914 made education unaffordable to most Indians. So remaining gurukuls were shut down too.

We have analyzed the data collected by various British officers between 1820 – 1880 and published our research titled [How many gurukuls were there in India before British rule?](#) Also, do check out our [critical study of Macaulayism in India](#)

Revival in the 19th Century

First Swami Dayananda Saraswati and then Swami Shraddhanand set up many gurukuls in India by the end of the 19th century and starting of the 20th century. Since then, Arya Samaj has been running many Vedic gurukuls all over India.

In the era of the Indian national and cultural renaissance of the 19th century, many Gurukuls were established. These gurukuls were based on the tradition of ancient Gurukula. These gurukuls played an important role in spreading the national spirit. Although the system of ancient Gurukuls cannot be re-established in modern conditions, their ideals can be adopted with necessary changes.

But again after independence Gurukul system fell out of the favor of the govt. The government of independent India didn't pay attention to Gurukuls at all. Nowadays, even the gurukuls set up by Swami Shraddhanand have become nothing more than residential convent schools.

Download this article in PDF form "ancient Indian Gurukul learning system".

The unbecoming of gurukuls in independent India

The abovementioned gurukuls too in the latter half of the 20th century kept on losing their gurukul traits and went on becoming name-sake gurukuls only. Some of the problems they have faced are

- CBSE pattern subject i.e. no Indian knowledge being imparted
- Providing an option of day boarding
- Too many facilities
- Gurukul doesn't mean residential school
- High fees

Present status of Vedic gurukuls in India

There are some Vedic gurukuls still functioning in India. Though these gurukuls do not compare well to the glory of ancient gurukuls. Still, it is heartening to see some of them functioning defying all the odds. We have prepared a [list of all the Vedic gurukuls](#) currently functioning in India and [categorized by state](#). We do not claim this list to be completely exhaustive. But we'll try to keep it as extensive as we could.

Scholarly works on Gurukul System

- Dharampal, authored a book titled "The beautiful tree: Indigenous Indian education in the eighteenth century" in which he presents and analyses the data collected by British officers(in official as well as personal capacity) mostly in the first half of the 19th century.
- Prof. Marmar Mukhopadhyay compiled a book titled Total Quality Management in Education deriving insights from the ancient education system. He also devised the concept of Multi-Channel Learning based on gurukul's pedagogy.
- Ankur Joshi authored a research paper titled – Elementary education in Bharat (that is India): insights from a postcolonial ethnographic study of a Gurukul and A post-colonial perspective towards education in Bharat
- [The speech was given by Kum.B.Nivedita](#), Secretary, Educational Wing, Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari at IIT-Madras

- “Educational heritage of ancient India(2017)” and “Revisiting educational heritage of ancient India(2022)” by Sahana Singh.

Relevance of Gurukul system in present times

Gurukul’s system of education was the foundation due to which ancient Indian society was able to make so many materials as well as spiritual advancements. If India wants to again become the knowledge house for the world, then we have no other option but to look into it.

We have done a lot of research and found that the gurukul system is much more innovative, and resilient, and provides social justice and flexibility compared to the modern education system. But to suit the conditions of today, we should tweak it a bit.

Do we need the Gurukul system back in India?

From the above discussion, we can see the shortcomings of the present education system. To progress as a society we need to remove its shortcomings and retain its positive points. So the best way is to fuse both the systems together and create a hybrid containing the best of both worlds.

Modern gurukuls need not carry the baggage that bogged them down. But it must carry forward all the great things it had to offer. The openness of the educational environment can only be made permanent with the Gurukul system. Its holistic approach will give it an unfair advantage.

A gurukul is the ideal option for a child’s complete development because it doesn’t just give academic knowledge but prepares them for every part of life. It is a system of producing full-fledged human beings rather than the half-baked minions that we are producing with the current system.

How does the gurukul system work?

Gurukuls had an important contribution to the development of Indian civilization and culture. Gurukuls were often run by Brahmin householders both inside and outside the villages or cities. Grihastha scholars and sometimes even Vanprasthi would attract learners from far and wide. They keep them in their family for many years (ideal and legislation was up to twenty-five years) and educated them.

Constituents of a Gurukul

The analogy of the human body fits perfectly on a Gurukul. Acharya is like the head of a gurukul who runs a gurukul.

- Acharya
- Building or location
- A pattern (method) for delivering education
- Subjects taught e.g. Vedas, Vedangas, Mathematics, Language, etc

Methods of teaching in the gurukul system

Gurukul's system of learning employs many methods. Some of these methods are very well known and employed extensively like learning by memorization. But Gurukul education system goes much beyond the traditional methods of learning/teaching. It employs experiential learning, natural learning, practical learning methods, etc.

In the traditional system, a student has very limited avenues of learning. He learns mostly inside the rooms. In contrast, a student in a gurukul is not limited by the walls of the classroom. Instead, the whole environment around him is treated as a laboratory. He learns from the conduct of the acharya. He learns from everything around him/her.

Gurudakshina

As a reward, the Brahmachari child either offered his services to the Guru and his family. They could also pay off the fee at the time of completion. But gifts containing such financial rewards and other things were given as *Dakshina* only after initiation and

before starting the Guru Vidya Daan. The doors of the Gurukuls were open to all the deserving students, rich and poor.

Disciple's, as well as Acharya's life, was simple, reverent, devotional, and based on renunciation. The disciple would learn from the Guru's personality and conduct by staying with the acharya. In the Gurukuls, all the scriptures and sciences known till then were taught. Upon completion of the education, the Guru would test the disciple and give initiation.

After completing the *Samavartan Sanskar*, the acharya would send him/her to their respective family. The disciples would then give Dakshina to the guru according to their power. But poor students could also be freed from it.

Types of institutions

Various types of institutions that were used for knowledge sharing and learning in ancient India:

- **Gurukul** – where students stayed in the ashram and studied with the Guru
- **Sabha** or **Council** – where experts would discuss & share the knowledge attained by them.
- **Tapasthali** – These were big gatherings and discourses held here yielded knowledge. *Naimisharanya* was one such place.
- **Shashtrarth**: Not an institution but a tradition that helped in the refining of knowledge. India has a tradition of *Shashtrarth* of at least 18000 years.

The system of Gurukuls continued for a long time in India. The state considered it its duty to make all arrangements for the maintenance of the acharyas and gurukuls. When Kautas, the disciple of Varatantu, despite being very poor, urged him to get some Dakshina, the Guru got angry and asked for an impossible amount of fourteen crores of gold coins. Kautas considered it right to get that money from King Raghu, and that unfortunate king who donated everything in the *Yagya* decided to attack Kubera to fulfill the demand of that Brahmin child.

Ujjain's world-foremost astronomical observatory attracted great astronomers like Aryabhata, Vrah Mihira, Brahmagupta, etc.

Admission process in Gurukuls

Upanayana Sanskar

Upanayana sanskar or the sacred thread ceremony is usually performed at the age of 8 to 12 years. The student is taken to the acharya and if the acharya accepts him to be his shishya, he performs an Upanayana Sanskar also known as *Yajopavit sanskar*.

Upanayana ceremony is usually held on [Shravani Parva \(Raksha Bandhan\)](#) which falls on the *Purnima* of *Shravana* month which marks the beginning of a period of learning. The month of *Shravana* is named after *Shravana nakshatra* but is also related to *Shruti* (Vedas). *Shravana* month is dedicated to learning, reading, and hearing scriptures like Vedas, Ramayana, etc.

Read more about [16 Sanskaras of Hindus](#) in our post.

A typical day in gurukul

The routine followed in Gurukuls is very rigid. A typical day in a gurukul starts in the early hours of sunrise usually 3:45 am and includes Yoga, martial arts, Yagya, learning & daily chores like cleaning, cooking, etc.

[What is taught in gurukul?](#)

It is widely assumed in society that gurukuls only prepare brahmins who can perform some rituals. Instead, in addition to the study of Vedas, many subjects are taught in a gurukul.

The gurukul system takes care of the holistic learning of a child. The **main subjects offered in the gurukul system** are as follows:

1. Astronomy
2. Darshan (Philosophy)
3. Mathematics
4. Science
5. Dharmasutras (Study of Laws)
6. Brahmanas
7. Arthashastra (Political Science)
8. Ayurveda (Medicine)
9. Dhanurvedam (Defense Studies)
10. Vedas
11. Vedanga

These are just a few subjects that used to be taught in gurukuls. There are many more like music, pottery, etc. Skill development is one of the main advantages of the Gurukul system. The flexibility of the gurukul system makes it a viable option in these modern times of fast-changing requirements.

Gurukul system of education Vs Modern Education

Objectives of the gurukul system of education

Gurukul system was started way back to share knowledge that has been achieved till then. In addition, gurukul's other objectives were:

- Transmission of knowledge
- Preparing children for their future
- Instilling knowledge and affinity towards science and knowledge in general
- Passing on of knowledge and culture through generations
- Disciplined life
- Guru shishya tradition

[Advantages of the gurukul system of education](#)

Gurukuls system, in addition to being flexible & innovative, provides many advantages over the modern education system. Its holistic learning potential makes it a much sought-after alternative to traditional modern education. While living with the acharya, students learn from the conduct of the acharya. Other main advantages include:

- Holistic & Experiential learning
- Wide variety of subjects to study in & Choice-based system
- Mental and spiritual development
- Student-centric education & Value-based
- Humanity and equality
- The whole society is responsible for the education and the student doesn't depend on their parents.
- Doing their daily chores makes students independent and helps them gain skills needed for sustenance.

The ancient Indian Gurukul system produced [great mathematicians](#), astronomers, and lots of knowledge of [Science and Technology were generated in ancient India](#).

Disadvantages of the gurukul system of education

Gurukul's system of education has many benefits but just like everything, it also has some drawbacks. The main drawback of the gurukul system can be its simplicity. In this day and age when things sell based on their outside appearance, gurukuls can be at loss. In addition, there are some more disadvantages given below:

- Gurukul system emphasizes simple living and high thinking principles which may not appeal to the upper class.
- Materialism is kept under check in gurukul settings so that there is a limited distraction.
- Students are made to survive with minimum means, which may not be liked by some.

Flaws in the Modern Education System

The concept of Gurukul has now disappeared. The modern education system encourages students to compete with each other and be involved in a rat race with no end. There is no emphasis on personality development, ethical training, or moral conscience development.

Education has become very commercial. Thus, instead of being a tool to empower the youth of the world, it has become a tool for making money. The lack of stress on the importance of **mental** and physical health is very concerning as well. Education is becoming a tiresome process where students need to sit in one place for a long time. This has caused **stress**, **anxiety**, and **depression** episodes to rise.

Vedic gurukuls currently functioning in India

These are some of the gurukuls that follow Vedic pattern:

- [Gurukul Kurukshetra](#)
- [Gurukul Indraprastha](#)
- [Gurukul Karalmanna, Palakkad](#)

There is 4500+ gurukuls function in India, though most of them fail miserably when we compare them to the gold standard of gurukuls that operated during the Vedic age. We have compiled a [comprehensive gurukul list](#) if you want to check them out.

Frequently Asked Questions

How is the gurukul education system different from the modern one?

The gurukul system was started in the Vedic age. Over time, these smaller gurukuls evolved into big universities like Takshashila, Nalanda, etc. The modern education system, on the other hand, has its roots in 19th century England when Sunday schools

were opened for educating the masses. Refer “Gurukul system of education Vs Modern education” section for more detail.

Education in ancient India

Education in ancient India used to be imparted through Gurukuls. A *shishya*(student) used to live with the guru and the guru will feed him, teach him, and treat him like a family.

What are the disadvantages of studying in a gurukul?

There are not many disadvantages besides the student having to live with the guru and away from his family. The student’s life is full of *tapas*(austerity) which prepares him for any situation. The student has to spend some time doing his daily chores which creates an independent temperament.

What was taught in Gurukul?

In addition to learning basic literacy. A student learns languages particularly Sanskrit, mathematics, physical sciences, Ayurveda, yoga, meditation, and social sciences. The student also gets practical knowledge of agriculture, sustainability, animal husbandry, etc. It caters to the wholesome needs of a student.

Is Gurukul illegal in India?

No, opening or running a gurukul is not illegal in India. But due to the apathy of the government as well as society, the gurukul system is in a pathetic state.

Is the Gurukul system still available?

Yes, there are many gurukuls still functioning in India. We have created a [list of gurukuls by state](#).

Where can I study Vedas in India?

To study Vedas you either need to join a gurukul or you can start studying on your own. Learning Vedas on your own can be a herculean task. So we have gathered [some resources](#) which can help you with your endeavor.

What is the Vedic education system?

Gurukul's system of education is the Vedic education system. It is the indigenous education of India which flourished till 1200 AD but slowly declined after that.