

# **Role of Fine Arts Education in Entire Development of Human Being from Ancient Centres of Learning to Present Day Education System**

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## **Abstract**

Since time immemorial, when even language was not developed, fine arts have been a powerful medium of self-expression and creativity in human life; and when the languages developed, gradually they were used in learning and teaching, whose sequence is continuously flowing from the Gurukul education of the Vedic period to the present education system. When we contemplate and reflect on the role of education in human development, the relevance of fine arts education in enhancing the overall personality of a human being seems to have its roots in the ancient education system. Unveiling the layers of this serialization is the basis of this research paper.

**Keywords:** Ashram, Gurukul, Tols, Pathshalas, Chatuspadis, Buddhist Monasteries, Ancient Vishva Vidyaalay, Maktabas, Madrassas, Fine Arts, Crafts, Humility.

## **Introduction**

When we peel back the glorious ancient education system of our nation, they were replete with innumerable references in various ancient texts and travelogues of foreign travellers, which confirm that, since ancient times travellers from different countries had started coming to different parts of India. India was a land of wonder for him! Along with **Indian culture, wealth, religion, philosophy, arts, unique architecture**, the fame of our education methods had spread to faraway countries. It was such an education system which was considered to be a source of **knowledge, human values, traditions, practices and creative skill** development which played an important role in guiding and promoting humanity and social harmony.

This work of study has been divided into four sections and has been expanded step-by-step, from which the education system of ancient period **ashrams, contribution of Buddhist monasteries** in Indian education system, **British period education system** and **modern employment-oriented** education system. Along with this, the comparative discussion of all these education methods will be its basic basis.

## **Indian perspective**

The historical perspective is noteworthy that traditionally India has always been a follower of the oral tradition of imparting education under the somewhat unstructured, but highly advanced "**Guru-Shishya Parampara**" (teacher-disciple tradition) institution. Followed thousands of years ago in the Vedic era, the practice ensured that every aspect of the guru's teachings were passed down orally. With its diverse social and cultural ethos, India finds community of educationists, philosophers, sages and students coming together in many different ways in its many-glorious philosophy. In the country's traditional ethos, formal schooling was deeply rooted in the Guru Shishya Parampara. Students were exposed to a wide variety of subjects ranging from **language, culture, arts and crafts, environment, archery, horse riding, chanting**, etc. and each discipline emphasized memorization and reading of teachings as the technology of writing was not yet prevalent. This practice (oral tradition) was not limited to the field of education, but in virtually every form of fine arts, this mode of learning was practiced.

If we refer to the subjects taught in the Vedic period, then it becomes sure that the 64 branches of fine arts were a separate part of the Indian culture at that time. Similarly, there are many such evidences like **murals, cave paintings, clay tablets**, etc., which reflect how the arts were natural human expressive outlets, and were prevalent far and wide. In the visual arts too many creations evolved during the developmental stages of our culture, from rocks to clay to architecture, it was all visual that evolved into spectacular structures. The techniques used were also at par with the rest of the world and conformed to the beauty standards.

With the changing times, our traditions and culture have also evolved and modified. This bag full of treasure of human endeavour, human awareness, achievements, and self-

development is the essence of various art forms. Aesthetically, Indians have diversified themselves manifold from antiquity to the present in a wide range of disciplines such as drawing, painting, sculpture, jewellery-design, pottery, weaving, clothing, music, dance, theatre etc., and this is also reflected in the various mediums of his creativity. Thus art education has always been an integral part of our lives and thus education through art forms has always been an inherent style of Indians.

Art education is a specialized educational discipline in India, with government and private institutions providing specialized training in the arts. Religious paradigms such as Hindu ashrams and Muslim madrasas, Buddhist monasteries etc. were used to build ancient Indian educational systems until the British followed their system of elementary schools under the Cambridge system to promote the service of the British Empire. Schools were not established. Art in India, like the rest of the world, has gone through many changes, resulting in what we see today is a unique amalgamation of sensibilities from the West as well as from across Asia. The country's diversity, like its art, is an experience in itself. It is the core of the new modern India and its emerging art.

### **Highlights of Ancient Education System**

From the time of Vedic period, the ancient Indian system of education evolved over time, with the basic premise of holistic development of the individual's conscience and practical knowledge. The education system basically focused on the **moral, physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects** of human life. In which values like **humility, truthfulness, discipline, self-reliance** and respect for all **creations** were emphasized. The students were also taught to establish harmony between human beings and nature. Teaching and learning followed the principles of Vedas and Upanishads while fulfilling duties towards self, family and society, thus all aspects of life were covered. Another fundamental feature of the Ancient education system was that it focused on both **learning and physical development**. In other words, the emphasis was on a healthy mind and a healthy body. You can see that education in India has a legacy of being practical, achievable and complementary to life.

### **Sources of Education in Ancient Era**

The ancient education system focused on the knowledge contained in the **Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads** and **Dharma-sutras**. The texts written by *Aryabhata, Panini, Katyayana* and *Patanjali*, and the medical treatises of *Charaka* and *Sushruta* were also some of the sources of learning. A distinction was also made between **Shastras** (learned disciplines) and **Kavyas** (imaginative and creative literature) in the ancient education system. Sources of learning from various disciplines such as **Itihas** (history), **Anvikshiki** (logic), **Mimansa** (interpretation), **Shilpashastra** (architecture, sculpture and painting), **Arthashastra** (polity), **Varta** (agriculture, trade, commerce, animal-husbandry), **Dhanurvedya** (archery), and **Craftsmanship, Physical education** were taken an important curricular area and pupils participated in **krida** (games, recreational-activities), **vyayamaprakara** (exercises), **Dhanurvedya** (archery) for acquiring martial skills, and **yoga-sadhana** (training the mind and body) among others. The Gurus and their pupils worked conscientiously together to become proficient in all aspects of learning. In order to assess pupils' learning, shastrartha (learned-debates) were organised. Pupils at an advanced stage of learning guided younger pupils. There also existed the system of peer learning, like you have group/peer work.

### **Ancient Indian Education System- A Way of Personality Development**

The education system of ancient India had a unique combination of both **formal and informal** modes of learning. Swadeshi (naturally arising or occurring in a particular place) education was imparted in **homes, monasteries, temples, schools, tolas, chatushpadis** and **gurukuls**. There were people in homes, villages and temples, monasteries, etc. who guided budding children to imbibe the pious ways of life. Temples were also centers of education and played an important role in spreading the knowledge of our ancient system. After initial education, students used to go to **Viharas** (Buddhist monasteries) and **universities** for higher education. Teaching was largely **oral** and students memorized and reflected on what was taught in class.

## Significance of Gurukuls or Ashrams

These were basically residential centers of learning. Many of these Gurukulas were named after sages. They situated in forests, in a serene and calm environment, hundreds of students used to learn together in Gurukuls or Ashrams. *Women also had access to education in the early Vedic period.* Among the prominent women Vedic scholars, we can refer few names such as **Maitreyi, Vishvambhara, Apala, Gargi and Lopamudra**, etc.

In ancient times, the **gurus** and his **shishyas** lived together, supporting each other in day-to-day life, and the main aim was to learn thoroughly, lead a disciplined life and enrich their inner potential. The students lived away from their homes for years until they achieved their goals. Gurukul used to be such a place, where over time, the mutual relationship between the teacher and the shishyas was bound in a thread. While pursuing one's education in various disciplines like **history, art of debate, law, medicine** etc., the special emphasis was laid on enriching not only the **outer dimensions** of the discipline but also the **inner dimensions** of the versatile personality.

## Significance of Mathas or Viharas

During that period many **mathas/viharas** (a place where monks live and worship) were established for monks and nuns to meditate, debate and discuss with scholars for the pursuit of knowledge. Around these viharas, other educational centers of higher learning developed, which attracted students from faraway countries like **China, Korea, Tibet, Burma, Ceylon, Java, Nepal**, etc., apart from India.

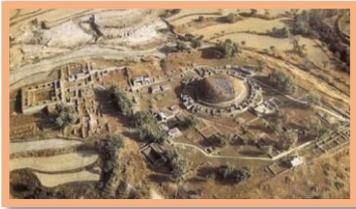
## Contribution of Ancient Universities & Mathas

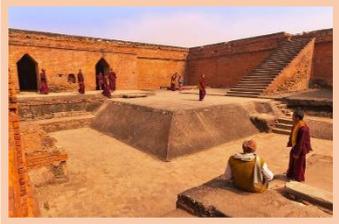
Quotations from the '**Jataka**' tales and accounts by Chinese scholars such as **Xuan Zang** and **I-Qing**, as well as other sources, suggest that kings and society took an active interest in promoting education. As a result of which many famous educational centres came into existence. Among the most notable universities that developed during this period were **Takshashila, Nalanda, Valabhi, Vikramshila, Odantapuri, Jagaddala**, etc. These universities were developed in relation to Buddhist monasteries.

These institutions catered to the needs of advanced level students. Such students joined centres of higher learning and developed their knowledge through mutual discussions and debates with eminent scholars. Not only this, there was also the occasional summoning (summon: to officially arrange a meeting of the people) by a king in which scholars from various viharas (monasteries) and universities of the country would meet, debate and used to exchange their views and ideas.

In this section we will give you a glimpse of some globally well-known universities of ancient times. Which were considered among the best centres of learning in the whole world. Among them some universities have recently been declared as heritage sites by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The historical background, salient features and a brief description of the subjects taught in some of ancient Universities are as following in the blow table:

Sl. No	Centre	Founder	Duration	Location	Principal Subjects of Teaching
1.	<b>Takshashila University</b>	It is believed that the <b>Kuru</b> prince <b>Duryodhana</b> founded it, at the birthplace of his mother, <b>Gandhari</b> . But, it another reference, the <b>Ramayana</b> , <b>King Bharata</b> founded the town in the name of his son, <b>Taksha</b> .	It was founded in the <b>10th century BC</b> and was destroyed by the <b>Huns</b> in the <b>5th century AD</b> .	It was a located on the eastern bank of the <b>Indus River</b> . (In the <b>Gandhara</b> region of ancient India, presently in <b>Rawalpindi, Pakistan</b> )	It was a famous <b>Buddhist study centre</b> in the early days; This was a higher education center and offered over <b>60 courses</b> in a variety of subjects such as <b>Vedas, Vedanta, Vyakaran, Ayurveda, Surgery, eighteen crafts (Sippas), Military education, Philosophy</b> including <b>warfare</b> and <b>archery, Astronomy, Agriculture, Commerce, Politics, Astrology, Commerce, Warfare, Fine Arts, Music, and Dance</b> and other subjects were taught. University imparted specialization in over <b>64</b> different fields. 

2.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Nalanda University</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Kumaragupta</b> (Shakraditya) of the Gupta dynasty</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>5<sup>th</sup> century to 12<sup>th</sup> century.</b> (427 AD to 1197 AD).</p>	<p>It was located in the ancient <b>kingdom of Magadha</b>, now its ruins can be found seven miles north of <b>Rajgraha</b> district in <b>Bihar State</b>.</p>	<p>The courses of study offered by this University covered a wide range, almost the entire circle of knowledge then available. It was primarily dedicated to <b>Buddhist studies</b>, but it also provided education in <b>fine arts, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, politics</b>. All four Vedas, logic, medicine, <b>samkya, yoga, nyaya</b> and the <b>art of battle</b>. Even though it taught about all sects of Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism was the primary subject of instruction, although other secular disciplines like <b>grammar, logic, epistemology</b>, and <b>science</b> were also covered.</p> 
3.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Odantapuri University</b></p>	<p>It University was founded by <b>Gopala-I</b>, the founder of the Pala dynasty.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mid-8<sup>th</sup> century to by the end of 11<sup>th</sup> century.</b></p>	<p>This University was located in <b>Magadh</b>, now <b>Bodh Gaya</b> district of Bihar State</p>	<p>It was one of the main centers of learning in ancient India and regarded as the second oldest of India's Mahaviharas after Nalanda. Various subjects were taught at this University that included Vedic scriptures and even Buddhism. <b>Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji</b> destroyed this monastery.</p> 
4.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Vikramshila University</b></p>	<p><b>Dharmapala</b> (783-820 AD), The ruler of <b>Pala dynasty</b> founded it.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Late-8<sup>th</sup> century to till Around 1203 AD.</b></p>	<p>It was located in the northern <b>Magadha</b> region and now in <b>Antichak</b> village, <b>Bhagalpur, Bihar</b>.</p>	<p>It was a center of <b>Vajrayana Buddhism</b> and employed <b>Tantric Guru</b> (preachers), And other formal subjects such as <b>Logic, Vedas, Astronomy, Urban Development, Law, Grammar, Philosophy</b> and <b>Fine Arts</b> were also taught in this University. <b>Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji's</b> forces destroyed it in <b>1203</b>.</p> 
5.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Jagaddala University</b></p>	<p>It was founded by <b>Ramapala</b> (King of the Pala dynasty).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>1084 AD to 1207 AD</b> and center of learning was destroyed by <b>Muslim marauders</b> in 1207 AD.</p>	<p>It was located in the <b>Varendra</b> region in <b>North Bengal</b> (now in Bangladesh).</p>	<p>This was a <b>Vajrayana Buddhist</b> centre and there taught a variety of subjects, including Sanskrit, and also taught at the other interconnected universities; And <b>Vajrayana Buddhism</b> was one of the special subjects taught. Some famous Buddhist scholars in Tibet such as <b>Vibhuti Chandra, Danasila, Mokshakara Gupta</b>, and <b>Subhakara Gupta</b> belonged to this monastery.</p> 
6.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Valabhi University</b></p>	<p>This was built by King the <b>Maitraka</b>. He was ruler of <b>Bhattarka</b>.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Around <b>6<sup>th</sup> century</b> and it flourished for 600 years till <b>12<sup>th</sup> century</b>.</p>	<p><b>Saurashtra</b> nowadays, known as <b>Vallabhi</b>, &amp; located in the <b>Bhavnagar</b> region of Gujarat.</p>	<p>It was a Hinayana Buddhist learning center. Aside from religious sciences, the following courses are available: <b>Niti</b> (Political Science, Statesmanship) <b>Varta</b> (Business, Agriculture) <b>Administration Philosophy</b> and <b>Religious Thought</b> (especially Buddhist philosophy), <b>Accounting, Economics</b>, and <b>Law</b>, etc.</p> 

7.	<b>Pushpagiri University</b>	It is claimed that <b>Emperor Ashoka</b> established this ancient University of India.	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to 10<sup>th</sup> century</b> ), was a Buddhist seat of higher learning in ancient India that flourished until the 11th century.	It was located in ancient <b>Kalinga</b> , covering two districts; such as, <b>Cuttack</b> and <b>Jajpur</b> of present <b>Odisha State</b> .	This was one of the ancient most prominent centers of <b>higher education</b> in past along with the universities of <b>Takshashila, Nalanda</b> and <b>Vikramashila</b> . It was established in ancient Kalinga kingdom (modern day Odisha) and was spread across Cuttack and Jaipur districts. This ancient centre of learning taught many different subjects like its contemporary Universities. This University attracted students from all across the entire world.	
8.	<b>Vallabhi University</b>	It was founded by the kings of the <b>Mastraka</b> dynasty about <b>2000</b> years ago.	It was flourished until the <b>12<sup>th</sup> century CE</b> . The Arabs destroyed it in the <b>8<sup>th</sup> century CE</b> .	It was located at <b>Vallabhi</b> in the <b>Saurashtra region</b> of <b>Gujarat</b> .	It is one of the old universities of ancient India. Many different subjects were taught at this University, including <b>Law, Economics, Literature, Medical-Science, Book-keeping, Grammar, and Hinayana Buddhism</b> .	
9.	<b>Mithila University</b>	It was founded by the <b>King Janak</b> , the father of <b>Sita</b> .	From the <b>12<sup>th</sup> / 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century CE</b> .	The university is in Darbhanga town, <b>Mithila</b> region, <b>Bihar State</b> .	Although, it is not mentioned in India's mainstream history records, it was an important center of learning in past. It was gradually started from the philosophical conferences held by <b>Janaka</b> , the king of Mithila at his court. These philosophical conferences led to the formation of a seat of learning and this seat of learning converted into the university of <b>Mithila</b> . This was a center of the ' <b>Brahmanical system</b> ' of education. It has been recorded there taught various subjects, including <b>literature</b> , and <b>fine arts, Vedas, science subjects, Nyaya Shastra</b> , and more. <b>Nyaya</b> and <b>Tarka Shastra</b> gained the main prominence at this University.	
10.	<b>Somapura University</b>	It was established by the Pala king <b>Dharmapala</b> .	Late- <b>7<sup>th</sup> century</b> and It flourished until the <b>12<sup>th</sup> century</b> .	This was located in <b>Bengal</b> , and now, <b>Somapura Mahavihara</b> in <b>Naogaon District</b> of <b>Bangladesh</b> .	Its structure host traditional Buddhist stupa in the centre and was the largest of the Mahaviharas. This University was almost as big as Nalanda University. Here students learned subjects pertaining to <b>Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism</b> . Even today one can find ornamental terracotta on its outer walls depicting the influence of these three traditions.	

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## Destruction of Ancient Indian Universities

Examining the references given in the above table, it is concluded that many ancient Indian Universities were destroyed around **12<sup>th</sup> century**. The universities of **Nalanda, Vikramshila** etc. were destroyed around this period during the Muslim invasion of India by the fanatic **Bakhtiyar Khilji** from Turkey in **1193 CE**. The great library of Nalanda University was destroyed, ransacked and burnt by the soldiers of Khilji's army and it is said that it was so vast that the manuscripts kept burning for three months. Innumerable ancient Indian manuscripts that had been preserved for thousands of years were destroyed in this fire. Thousands of monks in the university were burnt alive and beheaded by Khilji's army.

## Invention of Writing and Illumination

**of Idea & Being in Human Life** The 'idea' got dynamic with the invention of writing/printing. This has helped to spread a system of spreading 'education' which was more knowledge-based. Starting in about 3500 BC, various writing systems developed in ancient civilisations around the world. In Egypt, fully developed "Hieroglyphs" were in use at Adidas as early as 3400 BC; and similarly, Sumerian 'Pictographs', Chinese 'Syllabograms', Old Persian 'Cuneiform', Roman 'Alphabet' and Indian 'Devanagari' were also in practice. Though it is not at all close to the current understanding of the term 'higher education', it was the roots of today's all-encompassing concept of (formal) education. In the modern world, universities have two purposes: equip students with advanced skills useful in the workplace and to further human knowledge and understanding of the world.



Figure- 1, six major historical writing systems

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## Role of the Guru in the Ancient Era

Guru or teachers had complete autonomy in all aspects from selection of students to designing their syllabi. When the Guru was satisfied with the performance of the students, the course concluded. He would admit as many students as he liked and taught what his students were keen to learn. Debate and discussions were the primary methods of teaching. Gurus were assisted by their advanced level students.

## Contribution of Society

At that time, knowledge was considered sacred and no fee was charged. Contributions towards education were considered the highest form of donation. All members of the society contributed in some form or the other. Financial support came from rich merchants, wealthy parents and society. Besides gifts of buildings, the universities received gifts of land. This form of free education was also prevalent in other ancient universities like Valabhi, Vikramshila and Jagaddala. At the same time in the south of India, agraharas served as centers of learning and teaching. South Indian kingdoms also had other cultural institutions known as Ghatika and Brahmapuri. A Ghatika was a centre of learning including religion and was small in size. An agrahara was a bigger institution, a whole settlement of learned Brahmins, with its own powers of government and was maintained by generous donations from the society. Temples, Mathas, Jain Basadis and Buddhist Viharas also existed as other sources of learning during this period.

## Continuation of Indian Education System

The Indian education system continued in the form of ashrams, in temples and as indigenous schools. During the medieval period, **Maktabas** and **Madrassas** became part of the education system. During the pre-colonial period, indigenous education flourished in India. This was an extension of the formal system that had taken roots earlier. This system was mostly religious and spiritual form of education. "Tols" in Bengal, "Pathshalas" in western India, "Chatuspadis" in Bihar, and similar schools existed in other parts of India. Local resources via donations supported education. References in texts and memoirs inform that villagers also supported education in southern India.

As we understand, the ancient education system of India focused on the holistic development of the students, both inner and outer self, thus preparing them for life. Education was free and not centralised. Its foundations were laid in the rich cultural traditions of India thereby helping in the development of the physical, intellectual, spiritual and artistic aspects of life holistically.

Our present day education system has a lot to learn from the ancient education system of India. Therefore, the stress is being laid on connecting learning to the world outside the school. Today educationists recognise the role and importance of multilingual and multicultural

education, thereby connecting the ancient and the traditional knowledge with contemporary learning.

## Art Education System in Colonial Era

The British approach to Indian art played an important role in the development of the process of formal training of Indian artists and in this sequence they started establishing art schools in Indian cities like Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, Lucknow, etc. One of the main reasons for opening art schools in India was that the British found that Indian artists lacked scientific knowledge of art and were less capable of creating naturalistic landscapes. Another factor was the demand for Indian luxury crafts by the British public in the last decades of the 19th century, which became a major point of consideration for early policy makers.

The art education found a platform with the foundation of these art schools besides this art school later established in Lahore (1875) which was basically under the provincial government and were working according to the needs of and aims of the founders. By the 1890s these schools were able to create separate divisions for Fine Arts and the Crafts. After a public meeting on 26 February 1839, the first proper art school was established in Calcutta by the name of Calcutta Mechanics' Institution and School of Arts which was founded by Frederick Corbin. In Calcutta, School of Indian Arts began in 1854 under the direct influence of Lecture by Colonel Godwyn on "**Union Science, Industry and Arts**". He also advised to teach all the youths in Industrial arts based on scientific methods. Dr. Fredrick Corbin supervised the institute and C. Grant was taking drawing classes there. The main purpose of this school was to develop the inventiveness and originality, to trained more artists and makes them skilled draughtsmen, designers and engravers to provide employment. This school was originally started as a private enterprise by a group of Indian and English enthusiast members of the society known as Industrial Art Society. In 1864, this institution was known as Government School of Art and Crafts after government took over the control of the school.

## Conclusion

The roots of Indian education system seem to be related to the remote Vedic period and when we follow its hierarchy, we come to the conclusion that along with the study of various subjects for the entire development of human being, '**fine arts**' and its various branches of '**skill-development**' has always been important, that's why whether it is Vedic period **ashrams** or **Gurukulas** or **Buddhist monasteries**, all have played an important role in the development and promotion of **fine arts** and **handicrafts**. After that, the efforts made by various government and non-government institutions in the development of education of fine arts, from the British rulers to the present Governments are taking the continuity of the ancient education system forward by making due changes.

There was a significant contribution of social and religious institutions in the ancient Indian education system. They continued to teach until they disappeared from history, Hinduism, Buddhism, Brahmanism and Jainism being prominent among them and each of them introduced unique art education systems through ideological expansion and existence of their own. The Mughal Empire then encouraged miniature painting and the Company School came into existence on its extension which favored the materialization of art activities to appeal to Western sensibilities. Ravi Varma was thoroughly criticized for his expressions with oil painting: a western tool but the Bengal School proved its name to be more Indian through its propaganda. The school established by Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan was the answer to many questions: from here with the emergence of new beginnings and individual activities by diverse talents, a style accepted at an all-India level began to be staged in India and led to new developments in art education. Development took place.

Based on the above facts, it is proved that, when the intellectual and exhaustive development of a human being is envisaged in any country or society, then in a civilized society, the education of fine arts and handicrafts is equally important in its education system as much importance was given to other subjects. This is the reason why teaching and training in fine arts is as relevant today as it was in ancient times.

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