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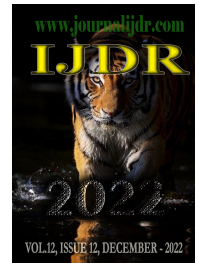
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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REVISITING GURUKUL PEDAGOGUE - A FORGOTTEN PATHWAY TO MAKE VIRTUAL LEARNING VIABLE AND WHOLESOME

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ABSTRACT

Education from time immemorial, continue to be the most integral aspect of any civilization. Over the years, it has adapted itself to the changing needs of time and to keep abreast with evolutionary changes and steering towards becoming a meaningful process and promoting lifelong learning. An education system that originated in the eastern world and continues to be a source of inspiration is the ancient Gurukul education system of India. During the modern times, one aspect which halted every walk of human life in every corner of the world, but at the same time, opened up new perspective and orientation of life, which otherwise would never have been explored is Novel Covid – 19 pandemic. Pedagogue and teaching-learning process too received intellectual churning during pandemic which resulted in surfacing of a cream of innovative and technology-based teaching - learning practices. Online or virtual mode of teaching which emerged as a boon during the lockdown, took over the baton to continue the rally of education to the next level. The process of transitioning from a traditional teaching method to the innovative online method requires the academic institution in general and the faculty in particular to meticulously plan activities, tasks, and evaluation methods. This also requires the formulation of a supportive policy by the government with scope for alterations with the changing tides. Despite the challenges faced, online platforms facilitated the continuity of learning process during lockdown and salvaged the education system from the loss of an academic year. Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) found a new boat to sail in the form of digital learning mode. The cloud platform made the atlas shrink and helped the students to avail the lectures of experts from any part of the world, which was even unthinkable with traditional learning. Time, space and economy are the other benefits of online education. The present study endeavors to explore the pros and cons of online mode of learning and also to identify the challenges of hybrid mode or assimilating the virtual mode into the physical mode of learning. This paper also endeavors to trace the relevance of reassertion of Gurukul Pedagogue through virtual channels. Ancient Indian indigenous education, through gurukuls facilitated activity-based learning, focused on applied knowledge, enriched with values and ethics, and aimed at holistic development of the student. The present paper attempts to ponder the feasibility of reviving gurukul pedagogue and to identify the possibilities of blending it with modern education through the virtual platforms.

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INTRODUCTION

'Change is the only constant,' said Heraclitus. Change could be either evolutionary or revolutionary. Right from the days of Sophists in Greece and oral culture in India to the modern times, pedagogue underwent a gradual and a progressive change playing its role in molding the human civilization. But, for the first time in history, humankind has witnessed a paradigm change in pedagogue during the initial decades of 21st century because of the novel Covid - 19 pandemic. This unforeseen situation has thrown the education system into a furnace to emerge out in new shape demanded by the situation.

As quoted by Neel Burton "the highest purpose of education is to unlearn what we once took for granted, to replace certainty with subtlety, prejudice with compassion, and destiny with possibility", the Covid – 19 pandemic situations has triggered a fission process in the intellectual corridors to reorient the education system so as to traverse through the odds unleashed by the pandemic and identify the possibilities of navigating new trends in teaching and learning process. For the first time in the human history, all the nations are compelled to gear up for the same cause. India being no exception and with 130 crore population, rose to the occasion and maneuvered to take teaching and learning process from between the four walls of the class room to the door steps of the students during the lockdown.

24th March 2020, the day lockdown was imposed in India, remains as an epoch in Indian history, for the reason that, though the dark clouds of Covid hovered over the country, it heralded the new beginning of exploring the untraveled avenues of all walks of life including the education system thereby developing alternatives to the frontal teaching mode.

Changing contours of Virtual Learning in Higher Education: Distance learning is not a new concept in India. Different models of learning beyond the class room like MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses), Open Universities, Distance Learning schools etc. have coexisted with conventional learning for many years. But, the Covid – 19 pandemic has completely halted the conventional way of learning, opening the new gates for digital or online education. Lockdown and social distancing measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have led to closures of schools, training institutes and higher education facilities in whole of the country. There is a paradigm shift in learning process from class room learning to cloud learning. The online learning, distance and continuing education have become a panacea for this unprecedented global pandemic. E-learning tools such as Google Class Room, ZOOM, Microsoft Teams, YouTube links have played a crucial role during this pandemic, helping schools and universities facilitate student learning during the closure of universities and schools. But, as every change comes with its own advantages and disadvantages, so is the case with online learning process.

Origin of Research Problem: The practical experience of all the educators suggests that, initially great enthusiasm was noted among the learners. But in later stages students developed apathy and lackadaisical attitude towards online learning. It is noted that the percentage of students attending online classes has declined drastically. To address this issue is inescapable imperative. Thorough research need to be done on the psychological and emotional traits of students and accordingly pedagogue has to be modified to make it more effective and less burdensome. The researcher also identified that the present system of education failed in promoting holistic development of the students. Gaining of knowledge occupied the center stage in education process, pushing virtue and values to the periphery. The National Education Policy 2020 states that “pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, discussion based, flexible and, of course, enjoyable”.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In completion of this paper the researcher adopted empirical and analytical methods. The research is based on primary data collected through Google Forms from students of Under Graduate Colleges of Telangana. The secondary data is procured from Journals, Magazines and Internet.

Significance of Online Learning: The process of transitioning from a traditional teaching method to the innovative online method requires the academic institution in general and the faculty in particular to meticulously plan activities, tasks, and evaluation methods. This also requires the formulation of a supportive policy by the government with scope for alterations with the changing tides. Despite the challenges faced, the significance of online learning can be as follows:

1. Online platforms facilitated the continuity of learning process during lockdown. It also salvaged the education system from the loss of an academic year. Absence of this facility would have resulted in a sudden halt in learning process leading to irreparable catastrophe.
2. Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) found a new boat to sail in the form of digital learning mode. CBCS facilitates the students to score credits in different subjects and in different institutions spread out in the country. But the students were required to travel long distances and had to face difficulty in finding the hostel

facility. Thanks to online mode of learning that it eased the implementation of CBCS.

3. The introduction of myriad digital and online tools facilitated ‘Blended Learning’ in education process. It is a teaching and learning approach, instructional methodology that combines both physical class room teaching and digital tools to transfer knowledge. This facility has opened new channels for transfer of instructions and made learning process more interesting and less burdensome. The disadvantages of face – to – face learning are to a maximum extent mitigated by computer mediated learning and *vice-versa*³.
4. Online learning allows differently abled students with more freedom to participate in learning in the virtual environment, requiring limited movement.
5. Pandemic has caused lot of psychological trauma and emotional stress to the vast majority of population in general and to the students in particular. Uncertainty, fear of death, and bleak future created havoc on the psyche of the students. This problem to the maximum was mitigated by the online education, which engaged the students and kept their hopes alive by keeping them in touch with their teachers and peer circle.
6. Online platforms widened the scope of acquiring knowledge. It helped to make available to the students, the lectures of experts from any part of the country, rather any part of the world, which was even unthinkable with traditional learning.
7. Online learning offers teachers an efficient way to deliver lessons to students. Online learning has number of tools such as videos, PPTs, PDFs, podcasts etc which a teacher can use as part of their lesson plans.
8. Time, space and economy are the other advantages of online education. This system provides for the travel less learning process, allowing the students to attend classes from their homes, which saves their travel time. It is economical too because it saves the travel expenses and online material will bring down the paper cost.

Challenges of Online Learning: Though online technology ushered new paradigm of learning, it cannot be adjudged as the paragon of learning initiatives. It has its own drawbacks which can be summarized with the following reasons.

1. Online learning technology is a paradigm change that engulfed the education system, world over, as a desert storm, for which the phalanx of educators and students in all countries were unprepared and unequipped. Standing on the frontline, facing new challenge, the educators could only replace chalk & black board with smart phones, but continued with same time table and teaching methods. Though, initially enthusiasm was noted among the learners, many studies reported that gradually the students developed apathy and lackadaisical attitude towards online learning. To address this issue is inescapable imperative. Thorough research need to be done on the psychological and emotional traits of students and accordingly pedagogue has to be modified to make it more effective and less burdensome.
2. There is no one-size-fits-all pedagogy for online learning. There are a variety of subjects with varying needs. Different subjects and age groups require different approaches to online learning. The online teaching infrastructure presently used could not be mastered to adopt it to different situations. The limited exposure of teachers to online teaching, the information gap, non-conducive environment for learning at home could be seen as the drawbacks of online teaching.
3. One of the biggest drawbacks of online learning is that the students find it hard to focus on the screen for a longer duration. Social media on the other side adds fuel to the fire. The academic literature is replete with research findings that lectures adhere to the 10 to 15 min attention span. Davis Barbara Gross in his book “Tools of Teaching” stated that “...student attention during lectures tends to wane after approximately 10 – 15 minutes¹. The over ambitious

mechanism of adopting the same timings of physical classes to virtual mode was taxing on the students.

4. Sense of isolation is also one of the key challenges of virtual class room. Joseph Powell rightly stated that “it is absolutely human certainty that no one can know his own beauty or perceive a sense of his own worth until it has been reflected back to him in the mirror of another loving, caring human being”. Very truly, in an online class, there are minimal physical interactions between students and teachers. Peer affinity that used to give confidence and comfort is missing in the virtual class room.
5. Internet connectivity is one of the major challenges of online learning. While internet penetration has reached the major cities and towns in India, in rural areas internet connection with required speed is still a long-time dream. According to a report by Deloitte, the Broadband penetration in India’s rural areas continues to be poor at 29.1% against national average of 51% with 687 million subscribers as of March 2020². This gap has to be bridged for the successful implementation of online learning.
6. Mahatma Gandhi stated, “By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man; body, mind and spirit”. All-round development, which is the primary goal of education, is possible only through face-to-face learning process. Online mode facilitates the communication of subject knowledge to the students, but falls short in ushering the holistic development of the student.

Gurukul Pedagogue: ‘Gurukul’ or ‘gurukula’ system of education is the epitome of Indian style of learning. It is a system in ancient India with students called as *shishya* living and pursuing his education with the teacher who is called as *guru*, in the same house. The word *gurukula* is a combination of the Sanskrit words *guru* (‘teacher’ or ‘master’) and *kula* (‘family’ or ‘home’). It was a residential schooling system whose origin dates back to around 5000 BC in the Indian subcontinent. It was more prevalent during the Vedic age where students were taught various subjects and about how to live a cultured and disciplined life. The epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata; Buddhist and Jain literature have many references of students having their education at Gurukul. The students learn from the guru and help the guru in his everyday life, including carrying out of mundane daily household chores, which is essential to inculcate qualities like self-discipline, self-help, social consciousness among students. The Gurukul pedagogue was a comprehensive, inclusive and wholesome education system. It focused not only on imparting knowledge, but also on character building of students. The significant features of Gurukul education are:

1. **Applied Knowledge:** Ancient indigenous education system of India was not confined to four walls and restricted curriculum, rather it treated society as enlarged class room. It focused on applied knowledge and offered an education system that prepares students for all fields of life. The students were motivated to have hands on experience of all disciplines of knowledge by enabling them to have practical experience. National Education Policy 2020 reiterate that the fundamental principles that will guide education system are: recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student. These ideals can be met by breaking free from the shackles of rigid and learning-for-exams education system. Education system need to be reoriented by making the teachers and faculty as the heart and soul of learning process emphasizing the need for creativity and critical thinking among the students.
2. **Activity Based Learning:** “Education is the knowledge of how to use the whole of one self. Many men use but one or two faculties out of the score with which they are endowed. A man is educated who knows how to make a tool of every faculty, how to open it, how to keep it sharp, and how to apply it to all practical purposes” said Henry Ward Beecher, an American Social Reformer. The ancient Gurukul education system of India was multi - dimensional and multi -

disciplinary providing wider opportunities for the students to develop their faculties. Activity based learning impart creative thinking among students; and learning by doing will enhance the rate of retention of knowledge among students.

3. **Value-based Learning:** ‘Virtue is Knowledge’ is the philosophy that separate Socrates from Sophists, the first teachers in ancient Greece. During the same period in India, Gurukul institutions too offered value-based education to the students and nourished them with qualities like self-discipline, character building, social consciousness, respect towards elders and teachers, tolerance and other moral and ethical qualities. Education bereft of values is purposeless and will be a catastrophe in the long run. The Principles of National Education Policy 2020 state that “the purpose of the education system is to develop good human beings capable of rational thinking and action, possession and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values”.
4. **Holistic Development of Student:** Plato, Greek political philosopher discussed vividly on the system of education to be adopted to realize an ‘Ideal State’. The Primary and Higher Education proposed by Plato in his Socratic dialogue “The Republic”, is a holistic entity including the subjects like basics of religion, physical culture, music, geometry and literature to be taught at initial stages to the subjects like art of governance, war fare, astronomy, dialectics to be taught in the later stages. So also, the ancient Indian indigenous education was wider and universal in its vision and facilitated wholesome development of the student.
5. **Student-teacher relationship:** Gurukul facilitated a teacher and student relationship that creates a secure learning environment. In this system, the teacher is accountable and responsible for student’s performance and his future. A sense of belongingness and parental atmosphere between the teacher and student will act as catalyst in exchange of knowledge and makes learning process more comfortable and flexible.

Gurukul Pedagogue through Virtual Learning: For years few sections of people in India believed that Gurukul mode of education is the panacea for all the ills in the present education system. Though, this argument holds ground, the structural design of modern education system had no place to accommodate Gurukul pedagogue. The Residential Education system had the scope to imbibe the features of gurukul model, but unfortunately it too got engulfed in the tide of corporate model of education, whose primary goal is to run for the ranks, and produce human machines conducive for the industry. As the disproportionate cultivation of commercial crops, in the long run, made the soil lifeless and barren, so also, the mad craze for buyer’s ready subjects at Plus-Two and Under Graduate level, made education system market friendly, devoid of values and social consciousness. This resulted in the gradual erosion of values in the society, which the education system was expected to nurture and protect. This deteriorating value system can be addressed and mitigated by the adoption of Gurukul Pedagogue, which is made easy and feasible by Virtual Platform.

The Cloud Channel of instructions or Online Learning can be made more interesting and relevant by adopting the below summarized Gurukul pedagogue

1. Virtual Platforms have brought the students to the home of the teacher, which is the primary feature of Gurukul model of education.
2. The center of accountability, which is seldom found in modern education system, amply exists in Gurukul mode of education. Teachers in present system of education are accountable only for the marks scored and rank secured by the student. The avowed objectives of education like wholesome development of student, inculcation of ethical values, and promotion of rationalistic outlook among them are disposed

- as achieves and obsolete. This vacuum can be filled by assimilating conventional education with Gurukul pedagogy.
3. Education is not time bound; rather it is a continuous process. The conventional model restricted education to a fixed curriculum and time. On the other side, through online learning the availability of the student to the teacher is more, like in gurukul system of education. This dividend can be utilized by the teacher to concentrate on the holistic development of student. The day of the student can start with meditation and Yoga and end with personality development class. This needs the complete overhaul of current pedagogy and redesign of curriculum to make online learning complete, meaningful and relevant.
 4. One reason for the students developing apathy towards online learning is the indiscriminate dumping of conventional teaching practices like Lecture Method of teaching, 50 minutes class, time table from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm etc. onto the online platforms. This made online learning tedious, burdensome and insipid. Every channel of learning requires tailor made curriculum design so as to make it run. This lacuna can be addressed by the adoption of Gurukul pedagogy which is activity based, flexible hours of instruction and it facilitates applied knowledge by practical experiences. Activity based strategies like collaborative learning; cooperative learning and problem-solving learning positively affect student retention⁴.
 5. Mentor – mentee system, where a teacher is supposed to play the role of a counselor and guide to the students, remained only on the paper and failed to bear fruits. The growing number of suicides among students in recent times because of the stress of competition is alarming, which highlights the dire need for the teacher to play a proactive role in guiding, counseling and supporting the students. This is possible by the adoption of gurukul pedagogy through online platforms. The teacher is the center of this system. The hotline between the teacher and the student always has to be available, to give emotional support to the student when needed. This makes online learning student - centered and learner friendly.
 6. Hybrid learning, a new inclusion in the education system, is a blend of conventional and virtual models of learning. Both platforms require different methods of learning to suit their requirements. Gurukul pedagogy is handy in adopting blended learning, Activity based learning which is one of the features of Gurukul model of learning can be best adapted by online learning. Conventional lecturing method is better suitable for offline platform.

But, history since 5 million years has shown the adaptability capability of human beings. Accordingly, the pedagogy too, with the initial hiccups, has adapted to the changing scenario by coming out with alternative sources of learning. Online initiatives were successful in keeping the gates of education open during lockdown. The experience with online infrastructure has enriched the teaching – learning process by bringing in innovative practices like Webinars, Online examination and evaluation, MOOCs etc. Online learning process has been so deeply assimilated into the education system, that the post-Covid situation demands for a well-articulated curriculum plan to embrace both physical and virtual learning. Different teaching platforms need different types of techniques to communicate the subject. The experience of online teaching during the lockdown brought to light certain challenges like student attention capacity, health hazards of viewing the screen for longer duration, internet connectivity etc. that need to be addressed. A thorough research is imperative on the impact of online teaching on emotional, physical and psychological health of the students. eLearning doesn't just happen; it requires careful planning and implementation. Online learning can be made more viable and purposeful by adopting ancient Indian Gurukul model of education. As it is said, 'Old wine cannot be poured in new bottles' so also, conventional methods of teaching cannot be adapted in new and technology-based cloud learning platforms. At the same time, it is dire necessity to blend values with technology so as to make education system a strong substructure to build a just, equitable, healthy and knowledgeable society. Under the circumstances, revisiting of Gurukul pedagogy is an unavoidable imperative. Ancient Indian indigenous education, through gurukuls facilitated activity-based learning, focused on applied knowledge, enriched with values and ethics, and aimed at holistic development of the student, which is the need of the century.

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CONCLUSION

The one factor that influenced every aspect of human life in every country is the Novel Covid – 19 pandemic. Education Sector too was unprepared for the unforeseen situations caused by the pandemic.
