



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### THE PILLARS OF DHARMA: EXPLORING MORAL VALUES IN THE VEDIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

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#### ABSTRACT

This study explores the moral values integral to the Vedic education system of ancient India and their influence on both individual moral development and broader societal values. Grounded in sacred texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita, the Vedic system emphasized key ethical principles, including Dharma (righteousness), Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), and Karma (action and its consequences). These values were not only taught through the study of sacred texts but were also integrated into daily life through the Guru-Shishya (teacher-student) relationship, wherein the Guru served as both an academic and moral guide. The Guru's role was pivotal in shaping the student's character, teaching by example and providing personal mentorship. This paper explores how these moral teachings influenced personal behaviour and contributed to societal norms, fostering social harmony, ethical leadership, and cultural stability. By reviewing secondary literature, the study underscores the lasting impact of Vedic moral education, suggesting its relevance to contemporary discussions on character development, ethics, and social responsibility. Ultimately, the Vedic system provided a model of education that merged intellectual and moral growth, promoting a just and ethical society.

## INTRODUCTION

Moral values serve as the guiding principles that shape individuals' understanding of right and wrong, motivating them to act in ways that promote personal well-being and the common good. These values are essential in fostering personal integrity, ethical behaviour, and social harmony. Throughout history, educational systems have sought to instill moral values in students, ensuring that they not only achieve intellectual success but also contribute responsibly to society. The role of moral education is to cultivate virtues that nurture character development and promote ethical living. The Vedic education system, which flourished in ancient India, is one of the earliest models to emphasize the integration of moral values with intellectual and spiritual growth. Rooted in the study of sacred texts such as the Vedas and Upanishads, this system viewed education as a holistic process that sought to develop both the mind and the moral character of the student. Central to this educational tradition are the core moral values of Dharma (righteousness), Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), and Karma (action and consequence), all of which were seen as crucial not only for personal development but also for creating a just and harmonious society (Radhakrishnan, 1989). In the Vedic system, the Guru-disciple relationship played a pivotal role in the moral and intellectual development of the student. Education was imparted through the Gurukula system, where students lived with their teacher, learning not just from sacred texts but also through direct personal example. The Guru, as both a spiritual and moral guide, was

responsible for instilling the principles of Dharma in the disciple, teaching through both instruction and lived experience (Easwaran, 1999). The Vedic tradition emphasized that moral conduct was not limited to religious practices but extended to all areas of life, including social, familial, and professional interactions. The values of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Satya (truth) were taught as foundational principles, encouraging students to practice compassion, honesty, and integrity in every aspect of their lives. Similarly, Karma (action) was central to the Vedic moral framework, teaching that every action has consequences, and individuals must act responsibly, with awareness of how their actions impact both themselves and others (Sivananda, 2014). These teachings provided a comprehensive ethical framework, encouraging students to align their conduct with universal moral laws, thus fostering individuals who were not only knowledgeable but also virtuous, contributing positively to society. The lasting influence of Vedic moral education is evident in its ongoing impact on contemporary discussions of character education, where the principles of Dharma continue to inform the ethical foundation of modern educational systems (Bhattacharyya, 2007).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What moral values were emphasized in the Vedic education system?
- How did the relationship between the Guru and student influence moral development in the Vedic education system?

- What impact did the Vedic education system have on society's moral behaviour and values?

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researchers formulated three key research questions: 1. What moral values were emphasized in the Vedic education system? 2. How did the relationship between the Guru and student influence moral development in the Vedic education system? and 3. What impact did the Vedic education system have on society's moral behaviour and values? To address these questions, the researchers conducted a comprehensive review of relevant national and international academic literature. The study exclusively relies on secondary sources, drawing insights from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and authoritative academic publications. Through a rigorous examination of existing research, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the moral dimensions of the Vedic education system and its broader societal implications.

## DISCUSSION

**Research Question 1:** *What moral values were emphasized in the Vedic education system?*

The Vedic education system, one of the earliest and most influential educational traditions of ancient India, placed a strong emphasis not only on intellectual knowledge but also on moral and ethical development. This system, which was rooted in the study of sacred texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita, aimed to foster well-rounded individuals who were not only knowledgeable but also morally upright and spiritually enlightened. Central to this educational tradition were core moral values such as Dharma (righteousness), Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), and Karma (action and consequence), which were considered essential for personal growth and the well-being of society. These principles provided a moral framework for guiding the conduct of individuals in their personal and social lives, and they continue to be significant in discussions of moral education today (Radhakrishnan, 1989).

**Dharma (Righteousness and Duty):** At the heart of Vedic moral teachings lies Dharma, which refers to the ethical duties and responsibilities that guide both individual behaviour and the universal order. Unlike a narrow religious or ritualistic concept, Dharma in the Vedic context encompasses righteousness, justice, and moral integrity. The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes that one should perform their Dharma selflessly, without attachment to the outcomes of actions, highlighting it as the path to spiritual liberation and societal harmony (Sivananda, 2014). In the Vedic education system, students were taught to align their lives with Dharma, understanding that fulfillment of their ethical duties would lead to the creation of a balanced and just society. Dharma was, therefore, not only a personal virtue but also a social one, as it provided the foundation for maintaining order, justice, and harmony within the larger community (Radhakrishnan, 1989).

**Ahimsa (Non-Violence):** Ahimsa, or non-violence, is another foundational moral value emphasized in the Vedic education system. Rooted in the philosophical teachings of the Upanishads, Ahimsa extends beyond physical non-violence to include restraint in speech and thought. This principle was considered essential for both spiritual growth and the cultivation of compassion towards all living beings. The Vedic texts suggested that true wisdom and spiritual enlightenment could only be achieved through compassionate living, where individuals avoid causing harm to

others in any form. By emphasizing Ahimsa, Vedic education instilled in students a deep sense of empathy, kindness, and respect for all life, reinforcing the idea that violence, whether physical or verbal, leads to negative karmic consequences in both this life and the next (Easwaran, 1999). Ahimsa thus encouraged individuals to live harmoniously with others and the natural world, forming the basis for ethical behaviour in social interactions and conflict resolution.

**Satya (Truth):** The value of Satya, or truth, was integral to the Vedic system's approach to moral education. Satya in the Vedic tradition was not confined to mere factual accuracy but encompassed honesty, transparency, and a profound alignment between one's thoughts, words, and deeds. It was viewed as a central virtue that underpins ethical and spiritual integrity, and was essential for the purification of the mind. The Taittiriya Upanishad underscores the importance of truth, teaching that speaking the truth is a means of purifying one's consciousness and gaining societal trust (Bhattacharyya, 2007). By teaching the value of Satya, Vedic education encouraged students to cultivate inner truthfulness and integrity, knowing that truth leads to moral clarity, self-awareness, and spiritual progress. The emphasis on truthfulness was not only intended to shape personal behaviour but also to promote a society based on trust and moral transparency.

**Karma (Action and Consequences):** The principle of Karma - the law of cause and effect - is another central moral tenet in the Vedic education system. According to this doctrine, every action produces a corresponding reaction, and individuals are responsible for the outcomes of their deeds. The Vedic texts emphasized that one's present life circumstances and future experiences are shaped by the actions taken in the past and present. Karma thus instilled a strong sense of personal responsibility, encouraging students to act mindfully and ethically in all areas of life. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that individuals should act in accordance with their Dharma, without attachment to the fruits of their actions, recognizing that their deeds create a chain of consequences that affect both their own lives and the lives of others (Sivananda, 2014). By internalizing the teachings of Karma, students learned to approach life with a deep awareness of their actions and their potential impact on the world around them.

**Integration of Moral Values in Vedic Education:** In the Vedic education system, moral values were not presented as isolated ideas but were integrated into every aspect of learning. The Guru-Shishya (teacher-student) relationship was central to this educational process. The Guru played the role of a spiritual and moral guide, not only imparting knowledge from sacred texts but also modeling ethical behavior and providing personal guidance. The Shishya, in turn, was expected to embody the values of Dharma, Ahimsa, Satya, and Karma in everyday life, making these principles an integral part of their personal and social conduct. This holistic approach to education aimed to develop individuals who were intellectually enlightened, morally grounded, and spiritually aware, capable of contributing positively to society (Easwaran, 1999).

**Research Question 2:** *How did the relationship between the Guru and student influence moral development in the Vedic education system?*

The Guru-Shishya (teacher-student) relationship in the Vedic education system played a pivotal role in shaping the moral and ethical values of students. In this ancient system, the Guru was not only an intellectual guide but also a spiritual and moral mentor, guiding the student (Shishya) in both their academic and personal development. The relationship between the Guru and student was based on mutual respect, trust, and devotion, creating an

environment where moral and ethical values could be nurtured alongside intellectual learning. This mentorship model was instrumental in shaping the character and ethical conduct of students, as it emphasized the internalization of moral values through example, instruction, and personal guidance.

**The Role of the Guru in Moral Development:** In the Vedic system, the Guru was seen as a source of wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual guidance. The Guru's influence went beyond academic teaching; the Guru was considered a model of virtue, and students were expected to follow not only the content of their teachings but also the example set by their conduct. The Guru served as a moral compass for the Shishya, helping them understand the values of Dharma (righteousness), Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), and Karma (action and consequence) through both verbal instruction and personal example (Easwaran, 1999). The emphasis on the Guru's role in guiding students morally and spiritually reflects the deep connection between ethical development and the educational process in the Vedic tradition. The Guru was viewed as a living embodiment of the values they imparted to their students. According to the Upanishads, the Guru was considered the ultimate source of knowledge, and their guidance was seen as divine. The students were encouraged to follow their Guru not only in academic matters but also in their daily lives, cultivating virtues by observing the Guru's personal conduct. For instance, the Vedic texts stress that students should learn by example; the Guru, through their actions and lifestyle, modeled what it meant to live a life in accordance with Dharma, Ahimsa, and Satya (Bhattacharyya, 2007). This close personal relationship ensured that students internalized moral values, understanding them not just as concepts but as ways of living.

**The Guru's Influence on Ethical Conduct:** One of the central features of the Guru-Shishya relationship was the transmission of ethical teachings through close mentorship. The Guru provided moral and spiritual guidance, helping students cultivate virtues like Ahimsa (non-violence) and Satya (truth). Students were taught to embody Ahimsa in their actions and interactions, understanding that true wisdom comes from compassion and respect for all living beings (Easwaran, 1999). This value of non-violence extended beyond physical actions to include speech and thoughts, as the Guru's teachings reinforced the idea that ethical conduct involves mindfulness in every aspect of life. Similarly, the Guru played an essential role in teaching the importance of Satya (truth). The Guru's guidance was not just theoretical; it was lived out in everyday life. The Shishya observed their teacher's integrity, honesty, and alignment between their thoughts, words, and actions, which served as a model for the students to follow. The Taittiriya Upanishad mentions the importance of adhering to truth as a foundational moral value, one that was instilled in students by their Guru through both instruction and demonstration (Bhattacharyya, 2007). This mentorship was designed to shape not only the intellect but the character of students, ensuring that they learned to be truthful in all circumstances.

**Fostering Personal Responsibility and Karma:** The Guru also had a significant role in teaching the students about Karma (action and its consequences). In Vedic education, it was believed that understanding the consequences of one's actions was integral to moral development. The Guru provided moral guidance, helping students to recognize that every action, whether small or large, had an impact on their future. The principle of Karma emphasized that individuals must be responsible for their actions, and students were taught to live consciously, understanding the ethical implications of their decisions. Through the Guru's guidance, students learned the importance of acting in accordance with their Dharma while being mindful of the consequences of their actions (Sivananda, 2014). The Guru's role was to instill in the Shishya a

sense of moral accountability, ensuring that they understood the broader implications of their behavior on themselves, others, and society.

**Transformative Influence through Close Personal Interaction:** The close, personal nature of the Guru-Shishya relationship was essential in the moral development of students. Education in the Vedic system was not simply about transmitting knowledge; it was about transformation. The Shishya lived with the Guru, engaging in daily interactions that went beyond formal lessons. This environment of close mentorship allowed for continuous moral and spiritual development, as the Guru guided students through real-life situations and challenges, helping them apply ethical principles in practical contexts. The relationship fostered trust and respect, and the Shishya learned to internalize the moral values they were taught by seeing them exemplified in the Guru's conduct (Easwaran, 1999).

**The Impact of the Guru on Character Development:** Ultimately, the Guru's influence in shaping the moral and ethical values of the Shishya was transformative. The teachings of the Guru, integrated with daily life, ensured that students learned to live by the ethical principles taught in the Vedic tradition. Through continuous guidance, students learned to embody Dharma, practice Ahimsa, speak the Satya, and act responsibly in accordance with Karma. The Guru-student relationship, characterized by deep respect and personal mentorship, played a crucial role in the moral development of students, ensuring that they not only gained intellectual knowledge but also became ethically responsible members of society (Sivananda, 2014).

**Research Question 3:** *What impact did the Vedic education system have on society's moral behaviour and values?*

The Vedic education system had a profound impact on the moral behavior and values of society in ancient India. Rooted in the sacred texts of the Vedas, Upanishads, and other philosophical scriptures, this educational framework was not just a means of imparting knowledge but also a way to cultivate ethical conduct, personal integrity, and social responsibility. The Vedic tradition emphasized the cultivation of virtues like Dharma (righteousness), Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), and Karma (action and its consequences), which formed the bedrock of moral behavior both at the individual and societal level. The moral teachings imparted through the Guru-Shishya relationship and the Vedic curriculum played a critical role in shaping not only individual character but also the societal norms, governance, and cultural values in ancient India.

**Social Harmony through Dharma:** One of the primary ways in which the Vedic education system influenced society's moral behavior was through the emphasis on Dharma—the ethical duties and righteous living that governed both individual conduct and social order. Dharma was the guiding principle for the moral framework of the Vedic society. By instilling a sense of duty toward oneself, family, community, and the cosmos, the Vedic education system encouraged individuals to live in accordance with universal ethical laws.

As the Bhagavad Gita outlines, following Dharma led to a harmonious life, not just for individuals but for society at large, ensuring justice, equity, and moral order (Sivananda, 2014). In this context, education was not just about acquiring knowledge but was a means of shaping individuals who would uphold societal values, contributing to social stability and moral integrity. The role of Dharma in governance was also significant. The teachings of the Vedic system influenced the ethical principles that guided rulers and leaders. Kings were expected to govern with justice and in alignment with Dharma, ensuring that the laws of the land

reflected moral righteousness. This alignment between personal and governmental conduct helped establish a well-ordered and just society (Radhakrishnan, 1989). Thus, the moral values taught in Vedic education not only shaped personal conduct but also provided a foundation for ethical governance and social organization.

**Promotion of Ahimsa and Non-Violence:** Another critical impact of the Vedic education system on societal values was the emphasis on Ahimsa (non-violence). Rooted in the teachings of the Upanishads, Ahimsa was a core principle of Vedic education that extended beyond physical violence to include harm through words and thoughts. The teaching of Ahimsa contributed to the formation of a society that valued peace, empathy, and non-harmfulness in interpersonal relationships. This principle was deeply ingrained in the moral fabric of Vedic society, shaping individuals to engage in compassionate and respectful interactions with others, irrespective of their social status, caste, or background (Easwaran, 1999). By promoting Ahimsa, the Vedic education system had a far-reaching effect on the behavior of individuals, encouraging a culture of non-violence that was reflected not only in personal conduct but also in the governance of the state. This influence is seen in the ethical teachings of many later Indian rulers, such as Emperor Ashoka, who embraced Ahimsa and non-violence as central to his reign after adopting Buddhism (Bhattacharyya, 2007). The emphasis on Ahimsa was pivotal in fostering a sense of collective responsibility for the welfare of all living beings, influencing the social and ethical climate of ancient India.

**Truthfulness and Integrity in Social Interactions:** The value of Satya (truth) had a significant impact on the moral and social behavior of individuals in Vedic society. Truthfulness was considered not just a personal virtue but a societal one, necessary for maintaining trust and harmony within the community. Satya was integral to the moral education of students, as it was believed that speaking and living truthfully purified the mind and fostered a sense of righteousness. The Taittiriya Upanishad teaches that truth leads to liberation and inner peace, reinforcing its importance as both a personal and societal virtue (Bhattacharyya, 2007). In a broader societal context, the practice of Satya contributed to the establishment of honesty, transparency, and integrity in social interactions, making it a foundational value in maintaining social order and trust. Individuals were expected to embody Satya in their speech, actions, and relationships, creating a society where truthfulness was central to both personal integrity and collective well-being (Sivananda, 2014). This societal norm of truthfulness helped cultivate a culture of openness, reducing deceit and fostering cooperation among individuals and communities.

**Karma and Personal Accountability in Social Life:** The concept of Karma (the law of action and consequence) taught in the Vedic education system had a profound impact on how individuals behaved and interacted with others in society. The principle of Karma emphasized that every action had consequences, and individuals were morally responsible for their actions. This concept encouraged a society where individuals were expected to act with integrity, be accountable for their actions, and understand the long-term impact of their deeds on themselves and others. The focus on Karma reinforced the idea of personal responsibility, encouraging individuals to make ethical choices and contribute to the well-being of the community. The idea that good actions would lead to positive outcomes, while harmful actions would lead to suffering, created a sense of moral accountability that extended beyond the individual to the larger social structure. This was particularly important in a society where the interdependence of individuals was paramount, as ethical actions directly influenced societal harmony and order

(Radhakrishnan, 1989). The idea of Karma also had significant social consequences, as it encouraged individuals to take responsibility for their actions, whether in their personal lives, social relations, or in their role within the broader community. By integrating Karma into education, the Vedic system helped build a society where moral accountability was a key component of ethical living and social cohesion.

**Impact on Cultural and Social Structures:** The Vedic education system also had a lasting impact on cultural and social structures, particularly through its teachings of moral values. By integrating these ethical principles into the educational framework, the Vedic system helped shape societal norms regarding family life, social roles, and governance. The hierarchical social structure of ancient India, while complex, was influenced by these teachings, with each individual expected to fulfill their social duties in accordance with Dharma and Karma. This ensured a sense of order and mutual respect within the community, contributing to social stability (Sivananda, 2014). The teachings of Ahimsa, Satya, and Dharma not only shaped personal behavior but also influenced the ethical foundations of broader societal structures such as the caste system, social interactions, and the concept of justice in governance. The moral principles embedded in Vedic education formed a framework for a society that valued ethical conduct, social responsibility, and collective well-being, laying the foundation for India's rich cultural and spiritual heritage (Easwaran, 1999).

## CONCLUSION

The Vedic education system was a foundational framework that integrated intellectual, spiritual, and moral development, emphasizing the cultivation of virtues essential for both individual well-being and societal harmony. The system's core values—Dharma (righteousness), Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), and Karma (action and consequence)—served as ethical pillars that guided individuals in their personal and social conduct. The Guru-Shishya (teacher-student) relationship was central to this educational model, with the Guru playing a dual role as both an academic instructor and a moral guide, shaping the ethical character of the student through both teachings and lived example. The influence of Vedic moral teachings extended beyond the individual level, shaping societal norms, governance, and cultural values, with Dharma providing a moral compass for both personal conduct and social order. By emphasizing principles such as non-violence, truthfulness, and accountability, the Vedic education system contributed to a culture of ethical responsibility and social cohesion that permeated all aspects of ancient Indian life. This legacy continues to inform contemporary discussions on character education, highlighting the enduring relevance of Vedic moral values in shaping ethical behaviour and fostering social harmony in modern contexts. Ultimately, the Vedic education system's holistic approach to moral and intellectual development played a pivotal role in shaping a just, compassionate, and balanced society.

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