

Timeless Wisdom, Timeless Education: The Vedic Holistic System for the Upliftment of Humanity

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Abstract

Vedic seers were creative, curious, virtuous, and wise. They gave us *Vedas*, the books of ethics, knowledge and wisdom. They innovated and implemented the *Gurukul* system of genuine holistic education for raising a child to be a good human being: possessing high quality of intellect, ethically grounded, physically strong, skilled to be productive and spiritually sound. An attempt is made to explore:

(i) the most fundamental question: why did the Vedic Seers practice such hard *tapas*?

(ii) Why has the Vedic education system been the most fruitful innovation in human history for producing outstanding scholars who made common good enhancing and world-shaping contributions to medicine, philosophy, mathematics, logic, yoga, science, language, and economics?

(iii) Clarifications and expansion of Vedic seers' contributions by Maharishi Valmiki, Maharishi Ved Vyas and Acharya Chanakya are provided. (iv) It is indicated that our own sources of knowledge are more relevant to cultivation of intellect (which includes reflection and critical thinking) than the foreign sources. Any individual who wants to be an ideal teacher should look no further than our own outstanding ancient Gurus and acharyas.

Keywords

Apara Vidya, Gurukul, Holistic education, Human Flourishing, Para Vidya, Samavartan, Sattvic Intellect, Spiritual growth, UNESCO's Holistic Education, Upanayana

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Introduction

There might have been some division of labour into *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and the rest during pre-Vedic period. However, credit goes to Vedic seer Narayan for making the four-fold functional division of work force. Section I presents briefly the social and economic conditions

A long ago, Maharshi Gautama Akṣapāda, the founder of *Nyaya* School of philosophy, offered three convincing arguments to justify Vedic seers' trustworthiness. He (*Nyaya Sutra*: 2.1.130)) wrote, "The Veda is reliable like the spell and medical service, because of the reliability of their authors."¹ He explains why Vedic seers were reliable. He wrote, "The sages themselves were reliable because

- (1) they had an intuitive perception of truths,
- (2) they had great kindness for living beings and
- (3) they had felt the need to communicate their knowledge of the truths."

According to Maharshi Gautama, Vedic seers were kind-hearted and humble. They glorified devatas, like Indra, Agani, Sun and others but never themselves. Also, there is no evidence that they composed the Vedas for any personal gain, that is selfishness was not in their bones. Then, why did they perform long periods of hard tapas? This is presented in section II.

Vedic seers wanted to enrich humanity spiritually and materially forever by communicating their deep insights. They knew that they were not going to live forever. Keeping that in view, they wanted to design a system that could produce selfless and creative individuals. So, the Samavartan Sanskar was not just a ritual performed at *shishya's* graduation, it was a fulfilment of every Guru's pledge to produce *shishyas* just like him: creative and generous. Section III presents Vedic seers' innovation of Gurukul system of holistic education to achieve their objective.

Vedic education system focused on the cultivation of *sattvic* intellect and that has been the source of creativity and economic growth. Vedic seers believed that the cultivation of *Sattvic* intellect required ethical foundation. However, Vedic seers did not explicitly define intellect and how to cultivate it. Maharishi Ved Vyas and Chanakya, who were the product of Gurukul education, presented explicit definition of intellect and how it was cultivated. These are presented in section IV.

Both The Gita and the Katha Upanishad emphasize the importance of *Sattvic* intellect to promote spiritual growth. Section V presents the role of intellect in spiritual growth and wellbeing. Sri Rama, who had self-control, intelligence, sagaciousness, virtue, eloquence, wisdom and trustworthiness, was the product of the Gurukul education system. Section VI presents Maharshi Vālmīki's description of Sri Rama's character and qualifications and role of intellect to the establishment of Ram Rajya, a model of ideal governance. Sainly Vidura and Acharya Chanakya bring out the importance of intellect to economic wellbeing. This is presented in section VII.

Government has articulated a meaningful education policy. But its implementation faces several challenges. How to meet those challenges is suggested in section VIII. The final section presents some concluding observations.

The Vedic model of flourishing is structurally complete, ethically grounded, and developmentally coherent. Aristotle's model, by contrast, is either circular (virtue ↔ good life) or incomplete (no account of inner purification, consciousness, or liberation). This is presented in Appendix B.

Humanity is facing ethical collapse, technological acceleration without moral compass, mental health crises, loss of meaning, polarisation, and ecological destruction. A Vedic holistic model — grounded in ethics and inner development — is not only relevant but **urgently necessary to save the world from self-destruction**. This is discussed in Appendix C.

I Socio-economic conditions during Vedic period

The concept of division of total work force into three functional groups Brāhmaṇa, Rājanya and the rest seems to be pre-Vedic. However, Rig Vedic seer Narayan considered it of divine origin. This is apparent from the following two mantras:

Seer Narayan:

यत्पुरुषं व्यदधुः कतिधा व्यकल्पयन् ।

मुखं किमस्य कौ बाहू का ऊरु पादा उच्येते ॥ Rig Veda (10.90.11)

“When the soul came under the bondage of the visible world and manifested in a material frame, into how many portions was it divided? What was the mouth of the embodied soul called, what were arms, what were his thighs, and what were his feet called?”

ब्राह्मणोऽस्य मुखमासीद्बाहू राजन्यः कृतः ।

ऊरु तदस्य यद्वैश्यः पद्भ्यां शूद्रो अजायत ॥ Rig Veda (10.90.12)

His mouth became the Brāhmaṇa, his arms became the Rājanya, his thighs became the Vaiśya; the Śūdra was born from his feet.”

A few points are noteworthy. Apparently, economy had progressed enough to warrant the emergence of a merchant class. This functional classification displayed a deep understanding of the economic system. Rājanya was essential for the protection of people since without it no one would have the incentive to work hard or acquire knowledge. Brāhmaṇa had dual roles: advising (a) Rājanya for good governance and (b) creation and communication of knowledge.

No one considers feet inferior to head. Since a person needs head, arms, thighs and feet to function. It was an ingenious occupational division of the workforce and was not based on hereditary. For example, Maharshi Vālmīki (pp 68-69) describes Vedic seer Vishwamitra as: “Formerly distinguished by the appellation ‘*Rajarishi*’ (a royal sage), you have since earned the status of a *Brahmarishi* (*Brahman* sage), your splendour

having been brightened by your asceticism.” Seer Vishwamitra was a king, a *Kshatriya*, not a *Brahman*, but became a *Brahmarishi* by doing *tapas* and meditation over a long period of time. Similarly, prolific writers Maharshi Valmiki and Maharshi Ved Vyas were not brahmins but by *karma* became brahmins.

II Why Did the Vedic Seers Practice Austerities?

“This World is Upheld by Dharma” Atharva Veda (12-1-17)

It is a common knowledge that Gautama Buddha was a prince and had a good life. But it pained him to see the existence of pain and suffering in the world. In the middle of night, he left his princely comforts in search of finding out the cause for pain and suffering. He meditated for six years and suddenly got the Buddha moment--an insight or you may call it a revelation that wants/desires were the root cause of pain and suffering. In fact, Vedic seer Vishwamitra was a king before he started his tapa. It implies that the Vedic seers did hard tapas for a very long period not for any personal gain.

They attained refined/pure consciousness through austerities but that was not their purpose. Instead, they were searching for virtues, such as non-violence, compassion, truthfulness, tolerance and malice against no one that could uphold the world; a cosmic order, in which there would be peace, prosperity and happiness. Where there would be liberty, equality, fraternity, justice and a potential for flourishing for everyone.²

Table 1: Vedic Seers on Ethical Foundation for Liberty and Equality

Principles of Justice	Liberty	Equality
	“May we live a hundred years’ life without being slave to others (Yajur Veda 36-24)	Atharva Veda: “The people shall elect thee for kingship The celestial regions shall accept
	“O resplendent Lord, Destroy the power of the man Who wants to enslave us Whether he is alien or akin No matter, if his strength Is as vast as the sky; Break the ropes fastened	Thy kingship Then establish thyself On the zenith of kingly power And distribute wealth equally As a mighty man (3-4-2).” “He who hoards

	unto his bows (Rig Veda 10-133-5.” “O enlightened men, We neither harm any one Nor impose ourselves on others, We act in accordance with Vedic doctrines and ideals, We co-exist and co-operate in life with akin as well as aliens To render good to all.” Vedic seer Godha (Rig Veda: 10-134-7)	provisions in vain And does not feed his elders and companions, Is inhuman, unkind and stingy, Verily he brings his own destruction. He who eats alone Is a great sinner.” Rig Veda (10-1176). “They follow eternal law Preach and practice truth Extend helping hand to all Act as unique guide and guardian Bounteous, benevolent, broad-minded And saviour from sins.” Rig Veda (567-4) “Blessed are the hands, that support the destitute” Rig Veda (6-8-14) “Earn with hundreds of hands and distribute with thousands” Atharva Veda (3-24-5)
Foundation	Non-violence, Malice against no one	Compassion

Source (Sihag (2026, Chap. 3)

Justice based on ethical virtues guarantees equal justice to all. Whereas justice based on self-interest invariably has been a source of unequal justice. Vedic seers believed ethics was the foundation to the cultivation of *sattvic* intellect, for cooperation, and consideration of other selves at par with self: They practiced what they preached: if you have knowledge share it. If you have grains share them.

III Vedic Seers' Innovation of Gurukul System of Holistic Education

“The teacher who makes his pupils efficient, non-violent, fearless and contented deserves to be revered and respected” Rig Veda (7-17-4)

Vedic seers innovated the ingenious Gurukul system of holistic education that ensured perpetual acquisition, creation, and communication of knowledge. Its elements included

(i) a perfect matching of a *shishya* (shish means desire to learn) and a guru (who removes darkness or ignorance) to establish a close relationship between them,

(ii) development of a holistic curriculum that, in addition to acquisition of professional skills, included ethical anchoring and cultivation of intellect,

(iii) Vedic seers kept the public and the rulers involved. Since they knew that the future *shishyas* and gurus were to come from public. So, the public must be educated to understand and appreciate the value of knowledge.

Gurukul system produced outstanding scholars possessing high quality of *sattvic* intellect. They made world-shaping contributions to mathematics, medicine, science, grammar, yoga, logic, and economics. Maharshi Ved Vyas explains in *Gita* (see below in section IV) the nature of *sattvic* intellect.

Table 2: A Sample of Outstanding Thinkers and their Contributions

Scholar	Contribution
Valmiki:	Ramayana
Baudhayana	Śulbasūtras
Yājñavalkya:	Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad, Yājñavalkya Smṛti Yājñavalkya Śākha, Pratijnā Sutra, Śaṭapatha Brāhmaṇa, Yoga-Yājñavalkya
Ved Vyas	The Gita
Gautama	Nyāya Sūtras

Atreya- Agnivesh- Charaka	Charaka Saṃhitā
Dhanvantari-Sushruta	Sushruta Saṃhitā
Pingala	Chandashastra
Panini	Ashtadhyayi
Patanjali	Yogasutra
Chanakya	Arthashastra

All the above-mentioned scholars possessed high quality of intellect and Gurukul education was instrumental in cultivating it. Vedic seers introduced the Gurukul system to help students in cultivating intellect. They invoked Sun God and Goddess Sarasvati to ‘enlighten’ the intellect. Invocation was not just seeking blessings but also declaration of the core purpose of the endeavor.

(a) Initiation of a *shishya*: Invocation to God to ‘enlighten’ the intellect.

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

Vedic seer Vishwamitra (Rig Veda: 3.62.10)

“We meditate on the glory of the Creator, who has created the universe, who is worthy of worship, who embodies knowledge and light, and who removes all sins and ignorance. May He enlighten our intellect.”

Similarly, students invoke Sarasvati to express their keen desire to learn.

The Medha Sūktam Mantra (Taittiriya Aranyaka of the Krishna Yajur Veda)

यश्छन्द्रस्त्वमनोते यश्छ श्यामोन्त्वन्नं चचकार । स नो मेधाम, स नो मेधामुप हवस्व । स नः प्रजामायुरारोग्यं च ददातु ।

"O Medha Devi, the goddess of wisdom and intellect, you are the one who instills clarity and brilliance. Grant us knowledge, wisdom, health, progeny, and long life. May your blessings enrich our lives."³

Upanayan Sanskar (10th): Establishment of a strong bond between the *shishya* and Guru

It may be noted that Guru was not under any obligation to accept anyone as a *shishya*. He wanted to make sure that the would-be *shishya* had the keen desire and potential to learn, create and communicate what he had learnt to others. That is, Guru was not going to waste his (her) time if the students did not have the desire or aptitude to learn. For example, Rishi Pippalada wanted to make sure that the *shishyas* had a keen desire to learn. He said to the would-be *shishyas*: “Live again a year more in penance, abstinence and faith; then you may ask questions according to your desire; if I know them, assuredly I shall tell all to you (Prasna Upanishad).” Similarly, shishya

and his parents wanted to make sure the Guru had the desired expertise. Thus, there was a perfect matching of *shishya*'s interest with Guru's expertise. As a result, Gurukul educational system was unique in establishing a very close relationship between the *shishyas* and the guru. Once the Guru accepted a child as his *shishya*, he treated him like his own son.

Seer Brhman:

“Acharya upanay-manno brahmcharinam krinute garbhamantah tam

raatri-stisra udare vibharti-tam kaata drashtum-abhisanyanti devaah” Atharva Veda (11.5.3)

Satyavrata Siddhantalankar (1999, pp 378-379) translates, “That is, while accepting to provide education to his pupil, the ‘acharya’ keeps him with such a care and protection, as a mother keeps her child in her womb with care and comfort.”

Curriculum

Vedic seers understood the importance of holistic education to the cultivation of *sattvic* intellect (see below in section IV), human flourishing (see Appendix B) and creating cohesiveness, mutual trust and support (see Appendix C). So, the Gurukul education focused on helping (i) students grow emotionally and physically, (ii) in the cultivation of *sattvic* intellect and self-discipline, thus making them capable of creating world shaping knowledge, and (iii) help them in leading a productive, virtuous and सुखी (Happy) life, (iv) mnemonic devices were taught to preserve existing Vedic knowledge, and most importantly, (v) treat the whole world as one family (वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् "the whole **world is one family**"). Students, in addition to the subject matter, could learn from observing his guru's self-disciplined, virtuous and austere lifestyle. Also, *shishya* could learn how to be a good teacher.

Apara and Para Vidyā: The Twofold Structure of Knowledge: The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (1.1.4–5) distinguishes between *apara vidyā* (scientific knowledge) and *para vidyā* (spiritual knowledge). This distinction is central to the Vedic model of holistic education (see Appendix A below for details).

Apara Vidyā includes Vedas, grammar, logic, mathematics, sciences, astronomy, medicine, arts, ritual knowledge, and practical skills. It corresponds to what modern systems call academic and vocational education. Its purpose is to discipline the intellect, cultivate analytical ability, and enable effective participation in society.

Para Vidyā is the knowledge “by which the imperishable is known” (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.5). It concerns selfknowledge, inner freedom, the nature of consciousness, and liberation from ignorance (*avidyā*). *Para vidyā* is not religious instruction but **inner education**—the cultivation of insight, equanimity, and freedom from mental bondage.

“He who sees all beings in his own self and finds the reflection of his own self in all beings, never looks down upon anybody.” Yajur Veda (40-6)

Sages emphasized both *Apara Vidyā* and *Para Vidyā* to produce a fully developed human being. The following Table 3 captures their idea of a truly holistic education.

Table 3: Holistic Education= Apara Vidyā + Para Vidyā

Yajur Veda	Mundaka Upanishad	Chandogya-upanishad
Vedic seer Dadhyan Atharvana: “विद्यां चाविद्यां च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह । अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते.” Yajur Veda (40-14) “He who understands both knowledge and ignorance together transcend death through ignorance and attains immortality through knowledge.”	तस्मै स होवाच । द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये इति ह स्म यद्ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति परा चैवापरा च ॥ ४ ॥ Mantra No. 4: To him he said: “Two kinds of knowledge have to be acquired: thus the Knowers of Brahman have declared. These are (i) the lower and (ii) the higher.” तत्रापरा ऋग्वेदो यजुर्वेदः सामवेदोऽथर्ववेदः शिक्षा कल्पो व्याकरणं निरुक्तं छन्दो ज्योतिषमिति । अथ परा यया तदक्षरमधिगम्यते // 5// Mantra No. 5: Of these the lower one consists of the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, the Atharva Veda, phonetics, rituals, grammar, etymology, prosody and astronomy. But the higher one is that through which the Imperishable is attained.	ऋग्वेदं भगवोऽध्येमि यजुर्वेदं सामवेदमथर्वणं चतुर्थमितिहासपुराणं पञ्चमं वेदानां वेदं पित्र्यं राशिं दैवं निधिं वाकोवाक्यमेकायनं देवविद्यां ब्रह्मविद्यां भूतविद्यां क्षत्रविद्यां नक्षत्रविद्यां सपदेवजनविद्यामेतद्भगवोऽध्येमि ॥ ७.१.२ ॥ Sir, I have read the Rg Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sāma Veda, and the fourth—the Atharva Veda; then the fifth—history and the Purāṇas; also, grammar, funeral rites, mathematics, the science of omens, the science of underground resources, logic, moral science, astrology, Vedic knowledge, the science of the elements, archery, astronomy, the science relating to snakes, plus music, dance, and other fine arts. Sir, this is what I know.

The Vedic model is holistic because it integrates:

- outer competencies (*apara vidyā*),

- ethical purification (*dharma*),
- inner realization (*para vidyā*).

This vertical integration distinguishes it from modern holistic models, which tend to be horizontally integrative but lack a hierarchical developmental structure.

Dr. Ravi Prakash Arya offers a very simple definition of *Apara Vidyā* and *Para Vidyā*: According to him, “But simple answer is *para vidya* or *vidya* is knowledge pertaining *Atman Brahman* or supreme power and *apara vidya* or *avidya* is knowledge pertaining to *Prakrit* or material world. Also considering a thing what it is not is *avidya*, for example considering body or mind as soul is also *avidya*.”

Emphasis was on the Cultivation of Intellect: *Karma patha* and *ganna path* were more than just memorization. *Shishyas* were not robots or storage disks. They were always curious to understand the material thoroughly and make interpretations. They were encouraged to test each other’s knowledge and solve riddles.

The method of teaching sometimes was in the form of a dialogue between the students and the teacher: students asking questions and the teacher providing answers to their questions. For example, Āgnivesh asked questions on medicine and his Guru Rishi Atterya provided answers. Similarly, Katyayana Kabandnini, Bhargava, Aswalayana Kousalya, Garga Souryayanin, Satyakama and Bharadwaj Sukesha asked questions and their Guru Rishi Pippalada provided answers. Teaching method was user-friendly: starting with the simplest subject matter, then building up step by step to the most subtle, thus giving the students the opportunity to absorb the substance fully. Also, it generated curiosity in *shishya*’s mind to learn more. It may be noted, King Janak offered gold and cows as the prize to the winner of the debate among the Vedic scholars. Why cows? At that time agriculture was the main activity and by taking care of the cows, *shishyas* could have exposure to agricultural operations: cropping patterns, sowing and harvesting times. Why gold? Gold served as currency at that time.

Samavartan Samskara: Guru’s instructions to *Shishya* after completing his education

Samavartan: *Sama* means equal and *Vartan* means behaviour. *Samavartan* hence translates into, “now, you are equal to me (*Guru*).” Or “now, you will behave like me (*Guru*).” At graduation guru gave the final instructions to the *shishya*: be truthful, perform good deeds, lead a virtuous life, and स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः never swerve from the study of the Vedas and he again repeated it: स्वाध्यायप्रवचनाभ्यां न प्रमदितव्यम्: “Never neglect the study and the propagation of the Vedas.” Gurukul education made a *shishya* capable of creating knowledge by cultivation his *sattvic* intellect (intellect guided by ethics), and generous in sharing his knowledge.

Note, Gurukul was for the acquisition of knowledge, cultivation of intellect, and development of self-control, but after graduation, *shishya* was called a स्नातक (snatak= knowledge expert) and was expected to communicate through every possible medium: debates, dialogues and composing books. Interestingly, often the location of the dialogue was not important, but the depth of knowledge was. It could be Yamaraj’s

place (little Nachiketas seeking knowledge from Yamraj as presented in the Katha Upanishad). Even the battlefield could serve as the background for a dialogue: in fact, it was one of the most important dialogues on *Sattvic* intellect see below).

An Introduction to Taittiriya by Sri Adi Sankaranacharya,
<https://shlokam.org/taittiriya>

शिष्यानुशासनम् वेदमनूच्याचार्योन्तेवासिनमनुशास्ति । सत्यं वद । धर्मं चर । स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः । आचार्याय प्रियं धनमाहृत्य प्रजातन्तुं मा व्यवच्छेत्सीः । सत्यान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । धर्मान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । कुशलान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । भूतै न प्रमदितव्यम् । स्वाध्यायप्रवचनाभ्यां न प्रमदितव्यम् ॥ 11.1 ॥

"Having taught the Vedas, the Guru enjoins the pupils: 'Speak the truth, do your duty, never swerve from the study of the Vedas, do not cut off the line of descendants in your family, after giving the Guru the fee he requests. Never err from truth, never fall from duty, never overlook your own welfare, never neglect your prosperity, never neglect the study and the propagation of the Vedas.

This is the command. This is the teaching. This is the secret of the Vedas. This is the commandment. This should be observed. Verily, having understood this fully, one must act in the way taught above, continuously till the last – and not otherwise."

There are other references to urge everyone to communicate his knowledge to others

Vedic seer Brahman: "O man, elevate thyself, ascend high, do not descend low,
 I endow thee with vigour and wisdom to live with dignity.

Come, enter the divine chariot of immortal bliss,

And impart thy knowledge to assembly of people." (Atharva Veda 8.1.6)

Vedas are a world heritage. We owe our gratitude to the sacrifices, creativity, generosity, wisdom, and commitment of Vedic seers, Gurus and Acharyas.

IV What is *Sattvic* Intellect and how to Cultivate it

Vedic seers introduced the Gurukul system of holistic education to help *shishyas* in cultivating *sattvic* intellect. Chanakya was a Vedic man and possessed high quality of intellect which was cultivated by Gurukul education. Credit goes to him to articulate the Vedic concept of intellect. He (p 119) defines intellect as: "The qualities of intellect are desire to learn, listening [to others], grasping, retaining, understanding thoroughly and reflecting on knowledge, rejecting false views and adhering to the true ones." According to Chanakya, there are four components of intellect: (i) desire to learn is the most important component of intellect. (ii) memorization of the subject matter is the second requirement. (iii) keep reading, listening repeatedly until the subject matter is thoroughly understood. (iv) Then reflect on the newly acquired knowledge: reject it if it is false and accept it if it is true (valid). (v) If someone makes applications of this newly acquired knowledge, only then it becomes part of his knowledge repertoire.

Certainly, most of the billionaires possess intellect, but the nature of that might be tamasic. Acharya Drona taught only the use of weapons to Pandavas and Kauravas. Apparently, Maharshi Ved Vyas felt the need to explain the nature of intellect to Ajuna as follows:

Table 2: Gita on Nature of Intellect and Determination

	Nature of Intellect	Nature of Dhrit (Determination)
<i>Sattvic</i>	“The intellect which correctly determines the paths of activity and renunciation, what ought to be done and what should not be done, what is fear and what is fearlessness, what is bondage and what is liberation, that intellect is Sattvika.” Gita (18.30)	“The unwavering firmness by which man controls through the Yoga of meditation the functions of the mind, the vital airs and the senses – that firmness, Arjuna, is Sattvika.” Gita (18.33)
Rajasic	“That intellect by which man does not truly perceive what is Dharma and what is Adharma, what ought to be done and what should not be done, -that intellect is Rajasika.” Gita (18.31)	“The Dhrit, however, by which the man seeking a reward for his actions, clutches with extreme fondness virtues, earthly possessions and worldly enjoyments, - that Dhrit is Rajasvika, Arjuna.” Gita (18.34)
Tamasic	“The intellect which imagines even Adharma to be Dharma, and sees all other things upside-down, - wrapped in ignorance, that intellect is Tamasika, Arjuna, Gita (18.32)	“The firmness by which an evil-minded person refuses to shake off, i.e., clings to sleep, fear, anxiety, sorrow and vanity as well, that firmness is Tamasika.” Gita (18.35)

Education to Cultivate Intellect

Chanakya stated, “Discipline is of two kinds – inborn and acquired (1.5). He (p 142) believed, “Learning imparts discipline only to those who have the following mental faculties - obedience to a teacher, desire and ability to learn, capacity to retain what is learnt, understanding what is learnt, reflecting on it, and [finally] ability to make inferences by deliberating on the knowledge acquired. Those who are devoid of such mental faculties are not benefited [by any amount of training] (1.5).”

Chanakya explains Gurukul’s approach: how a student (prince) could acquire a high quality of intellect. He (p 143) writes, “In the latter part of the day, he shall listen to *Itihasas* (1.5.13). In the remaining part of the day and at night, he shall prepare new lessons [for the next day], revise the old lessons and listen repeatedly to things which he had not understood clearly (1.5.15).”

Chanakya repeats Vedic seers’ insight: cultivation of intellect depends on continuous (repeatedly listening) studies. He writes, “For, a [trained] intellect is the result of learning [by hearing]; from intellect ensues *yoga* [successful application]; from *yoga* comes self-possession. This is what is meant by efficiency in acquiring knowledge (1.5.16).” According to Chanakya, self-possession means internalisation of knowledge and the process of successful acquisition of knowledge ensures cultivation of intellect.

V The Gita and Katha Upanishad on Intellect for Spiritual Growth

Why do we need intellect? According to Vedic seers, intellect was essential to creativity. Both the Gita and Katha Upanishad bring out that intellect promotes spiritual growth. Why? Spiritual growth requires self-control over senses since without it, mind would be wandering and might lead the individuals towards the three gates of hell: lust, anger, and greed. So, intellect is required to develop self-control over the senses.

Table 3: Importance of Intellect to Spiritual Growth

Gita on the Theory of Mind	Katha Upanishad on the Theory of Mind
इन्द्रियाणि पराण्याहुरिन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनः । मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्यो बुद्धेः परतस्तु सः ॥ 3.४२ “The senses are said to be greater than the body; but greater than the senses is the mind. Greater than the mind is the intellect; and what is greater than the intellect is he (the Self).” Gita (3.42) एवं बुद्धेः परं बुद्ध्वा संस्तभ्यात्मानमात्मना । जहि शत्रुं महाबाहो कामरूपं दुरासदम् ॥ 3.४३ ॥ “Thus, Arjuna, knowing that which is higher	इन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनो मनसः सत्त्वमुत्तमम् । सत्त्वादधि महानात्मा महतोऽव्यक्तमुत्तमम् ॥ ७ ॥ “Higher than the senses is the mind, higher than the mind is the intellect, higher than the intellect is the great <i>Ātman</i>, higher than the <i>Ātman</i> is the Unmanifested.” अव्यक्तात्तु परः पुरुषो व्यापकोऽलिङ्ग एव च । यं ज्ञात्वा मुच्यते जन्तुरमृतत्वं च गच्छति ॥ ८ ॥ “Beyond the Unmanifested is the all- pervading and imperceptible Being (<i>Purusha</i>). By knowing Him,

than the intellect and subduing the mind by reason, kill the enemy in the form of Desire that is hard to overcome.” उपद्रष्टानुमन्ता च भर्ता भोक्ता महेश्वरः परमात्मेति चाप्युक्तो देहेऽस्मिन्पुरुषः परः 22 “The supreme Brahman in this body is also known as the Witness. It makes all our actions possible, and, as it were, sanctions them, experiencing all our experiences. It is the infinite Being, the supreme <i>Atman</i>.” Gita (13.22)	the mortal is liberated and attains immortality.” 8
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T. N. Sethumadhavan, translator of Prasna Upanishad, elaborates on the roles of intellect and provides various synonyms of Self:

“The intellect discriminates between right and wrong, real and unreal, good and bad etc. To assimilate, conclude, create, discover, imagine, innovate, inquire, observe, question, recognise, visualise, etc. are intellectual abilities. The mind carries the sense perception to the intellect.”

“Self, Consciousness, Creator, *Ātman*, *Brahman*, Absolute and *Prajāpati* are some of the terms used to refer to this One Ultimate Reality.”

VI Maharshi Valmiki on importance of *Sattvic* Intellect to Ram Rajya

Sri Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna attended Vedic seer Vashsistha’s Gurukul implying that this system of education is more than five thousand years old. Most likely, Gurukul system existed before 3700 BCE. Maharshi Vashistha was the royal priest of king Dasharatha (belonging to the line of Ikswaaku). He performed all the purificatory rites commencing from Jaatakarma and ending with Upanayana for Sri Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna and taught them Vedas, wisdom, virtues and principles of good governance. Sage Vashistha helped Sri Rama in developing his outstanding character and intellect. Maharshi Valmiki (p 67) describes, “All the (four) princes turned out to be masters of the Vedas and (great) heroes, and all were intent upon doing good to the people. All were endowed with wisdom and were adorned with virtues.”

Table 4: Ram Rajya as an Ideal form of Governance

Maharshi Valmiki on Sri Rama’s Character and Qualities	Maharshi Valmiki on Ram Rajya
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“He has fully controlled his mind, is very powerful, radiant and resolute and has brought his senses under control. He is intelligent, sagacious, eloquent, glorious and exterminator of foes. He knows the secret of virtue and is true to his promise and intent on the good of the people. He is illustrious, full of wisdom, pure in his dealings, a man of self-control and concentrated mind. He knows the real meaning of all the scriptures, is possessed of a sharp memory and quick wit.”

“People will be positively much delighted and cheerful, contented and well-fed, exceedingly pious, free from mental agony and bodily ailments and rid of (the scourge of) famine and fear (of theft etc.). Nowhere will any men witness the death of their son or daughter, women will never be widows and will be ever devoted to their husband. There will be no fear from fire nor will living beings be drowned in water. There will be no fear from wind nor any fear of fever. Nor will there be fear of starvation in his kingdom nor that of thieves. Nay, cities and states will be full of riches and food-grains. All will be ever extremely happy as in Satyayuga.”

Maharshi Valmiki describes Sri Rama’s character and qualities. A couple of things stand out: virtuous, sagacious (keen intellectual discernment), having self-control and full of wisdom. Clearly, Gurukul system of education offered a genuine holistic education. Vedic seer Vishwamitra taught Sri Rama the use of sophisticated weapons. Sri Rama always put public interest ahead of his own interest and provided equal justice to all.

VII Chanakya and Vidura on the Importance of Intellect to Economic Growth

Vidura explains why the power of intellect is supreme since it facilitates the acquisition of other types of power, such as power of wealth. Vidura explains, “There are five different kinds of power O King, of these, physical strength is regarded as the most inferior kind. The acquisition of good counsellors is regarded as the second kind of power. The power of wealth is the third. The power of privilege acquired by birth is regarded as the fourth. That, however, by which all these are achieved, and which is the foremost of all kinds of power, is called the power of the intellect.” That is, according to Vidura, prosperity (wealth) among other types of power, depends on intellect.

Prosperity depends on intellect (Vidura’s insight)

Intellect depends on education (Vedic seers’ insight)

Chanakya put these two insights together:

Prosperity depends on intellect and Intellect depends on education

According to Chanakya, an ideal king (a *Rajarishi*) should have an excellent quality of intellect. Why did a ruler need excellent quality of intellect? There were hundreds of situations where intellect was of critical importance.⁴ Let us provide a couple of situations where intellect was critical, such as (a) formulation of sound economic policies to promote economic growth, (b) evaluation of a policy, (c) selection of an appropriate policy, (d) analyzing the short term and long-term consequences of whether to wage a war or pursue peace (Sihag (2014)).

VIII Government's Education Policy

Vedic seers believed that a holistic system of education was possible only in those communities that were guided by ethics whereas those guided by self-interest would be incapable of introducing it. That is why Vedic seers devised an ethical infrastructure to create a caring, trusting, peaceful, and cohesive society which could support holistic education. As mentioned in section II, Vedic approach to holistic education has been both theoretically and practically sound. Whereas UNESCO's approach to holistic education has structural weakness since it contains no solid foundation to support its proposed pillars. Holistic education requires holistic environment. Without ethics these pillars are likely to produce self-centered individuals like most current billionaires who possess tamasic intellect. The World Is on the Brink: The Oldest Wisdom Enshrined in the Vedas Provides a Path to Save Humanity (see Appendix C).

More than two thousand years ago, the fable of Lucky Trader and Foolish Barber in *Panchatantra* warned us: "Never be a copycat." Copying could be very harmful. However, urbanites in cities feel superior to their fellow citizens by dressing like Britishers, talking like them and often it appears that there are more Britishers in Hindustan than in Britain. No nation can become prosperous or a superpower by imitating another nation and as we liberated our land from colonial rule; we must liberate ourselves from colonial mindset.

As individuals some of us have been trying to convince educators and students about the superiority and suitability of our ancient educational system but did not have the authority or means to put our ideas into practice. BJP deserves a lot of credit for its courageous and visionary approach to education: "Value-based education will include the development of humanistic, ethical, Constitutional, and universal human values of truth (satya), righteous conduct (dharma), peace (shanti), love (prem), nonviolence (ahimsa), scientific temper, citizenship values, and also life-skills; lessons in seva/service and participation in community service programmes will be considered an integral part of a holistic education (National Education Policy (2020, p 36)."

However, the introduction of any transformative approach is always challenging. Making even a small change is never easy and it takes time to adapt to the new situation. It would take a lot of effort to convince the public, educators, and students about its relevance and teaching the teachers about our own sources of ethics, knowledge, and wisdom. A case in point. A Handbook towards Preparing a Reflective Teacher (2021) relies totally on foreign sources which are not as illuminating as shown above our own

sources would be.

According to Chanakya, cultivation of intellect includes learning to reflect, that is development of critical thinking: rejecting false views and adhering to the true ones. That is, according to the Vedic approach, one must first develop intellect that is learn how to reflect, then learn from reflecting. If a would-be teacher cultivated intellect in college, s/he does not need this Report. On the other hand, if s/he did not cultivate intellect in college this Report does not help her/him in cultivating intellect. The most important component of intellect is desire to learn. The following Table 5 captures the approaches taken by Vedic seers and Acharyas to motivate the would-be *shishyas*.

Table 5: Knowledge as a Source for Bliss, Happiness, and Respect

Vedas on pursuit of knowledge for Immortal Bliss	Charaka on pursuit of knowledge for happiness	Chanakya on education for self-control
Rig Veda (1-3-10): “The divine knowledge Purifies us.” Rig Veda (9-67-31): “He who makes study of The books of divine knowledge The books that purify all beings, The books that have been preserved By the enlightened sages and seers, Enjoys celestial ecstasy And attains purity and piety.” Yajur Veda (40-14): “Through knowledge Immortal bliss is attained.”	Charaka (Vol. 1, Chap. 5, p 128), “One should adopt only such of the means of livelihood as do not clash with virtuous path. One should follow the path of peace and engage himself in studies. This is how one can attain happiness [104].”	Chanakya (p 137): “Vices are due to ignorance and indiscipline; an unlearned man does not perceive the injurious consequences of his vices (8.3).” He (p 144) stated, “The sole aim of all branches of knowledge is to inculcate restraint over the senses (1.6.3). (p 101) “Read, son, read. Why be lazy? The illiterate is a burden-carrier. The scholar is venerated by the ruler. Read son every day.” (p 102) “Rulership and scholarship are never equal. The ruler is respected in his country, the scholar everywhere.”

Source (Sihag (2024))

Similarly, in his other works, Chanakya (Subramanian, p 13) stated, “That mother and that father are enemies, who do not give education to their children.” Apparently, it was parents’ responsibility to get their children educated and government’s responsibility was to provide rules of law and good governance.

IX Concluding Observations

Vedic seers understood the importance of intellect. They introduced the Gurukul system of education to help students in cultivating *sattvic* intellect and self-discipline. Maharshi Ved Vyas and at least 108 writers of the important Upanishads explained importance of intellect to spiritual growth. Maharshi Valmiki, saintly Vidura and Acharya Chanakya brought out the critical importance of intellect to good governance, prosperity, and maintenance of sovereignty. Creativity and generosity are in our genes. We invented writing and abstract counting. Hindustani numerals and calculus have uplifted humanity. We gave the world a recipe to lead a सुखी (happy) long life. The Vedas served as a source of inspiration and ideas to later thinkers.

Appendix A

Paravidyā is not “acquired” the way *aparavidyā* is. It is *realized*. The Upanishads are unanimous: *paravidyā* arises when the mind becomes subtle, inwardturned, purified, and capable of recognizing the Self as the imperishable reality. Below is the clearest, most structured, Upanishad aligned roadmap for how *paravidyā* is actually attained.

1. What the Upanishads say *paravidyā* is

Paravidyā is not information. It is direct recognition of *Brahman*, the imperishable.

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.1.5: *Paravidyā* is “that by which the Imperishable is known.”

This means:

- You cannot “learn” *paravidyā* like a subject.
- You cannot “collect” it through books.
- You cannot “achieve” it through rituals alone.

It is a **shift in consciousness**, not an accumulation of knowledge.

2. The Upanishadic method for acquiring *paravidyā*

Every Upanishad uses a slightly different pedagogy, but the core method is the same:

Step 1 — Purify the mind (śuddhi)

Aparavidyā, *karmayoga*, *dharma*, and disciplined living prepare the mind.

Practices include: truthfulness, selfcontrol, compassion, simplicity, nonpossessiveness, and disciplined senses.

Without this, *paravidyā* cannot “stick.” The Upanishads repeatedly say: “*For the impure mind, Brahman is not attainable.*”

Step 2 — Turn the mind inward (*antarmukhatā*)

Paravidyā requires a shift from:

- Object seeking → Self seeking
- external attention → inner attention

This is why the Upanishads constantly use metaphors like:

- the bow and arrow (*Mundaka*)
- the razor's edge (*Katha*)
- the chariot of senses (*Katha*)

They are training the student to withdraw attention from the world and turn it toward the witnessing consciousness.

Step 3 — Approach a qualified teacher (*guru-upasadanam*)

Every Upanishad emphasizes this. Why? Because *paravidyā* is subtle. The ego cannot guide itself to its own dissolution. The teacher does not “give” knowledge. The teacher removes wrong notions.

Step 4 — Listen to the teaching (*śravaṇa*)

This is not passive listening. It is absorbing the *mahāvākyas*:

- “*Tat tvam asi*” — You have the nature of That
- “*Aham brahmāsmi*” — I am of the nature of Brahman
- “*Prajñānam brahma*” — Consciousness is the nature of Brahman
- “*Ayam ātmā brahma*” — This Self is of the nature of Brahman
- Śravaṇa plants the seed.

Step 5 — Reflect deeply (*manana*)

This is where the student removes doubts:

- “How can I be *Brahman*?”
- “What about the world?”
- “What about suffering?”
- “What about individuality?”

Manana dissolves intellectual obstacles.

Step 6 — Meditate until realisation (*nididhyāsana*)

This is not ordinary meditation. It is abidance in the Self.

The Upanishads describe it as:

- “stilling the mind like a lamp in a windless place”
- “merging the mind in the heart”
- “seeing the seer”
- “knowing the knower”

This is where *paravidyā* becomes direct experience.

3. What *paravidyā* feels like (according to the Upanishads)

The Upanishads describe the result in remarkably consistent terms:

- Fearlessness
- freedom from sorrow
- nondual awareness
- unbroken peace
- recognition that the Self is unborn, undying
- seeing the same Self in all beings

This is not mystical poetry. It is a phenomenological description of a transformed consciousness.

4. What does not lead to *paravidyā*

The Upanishads are blunt:

- Rituals alone do not lead to it (Mundaka 1.2.7–10)
- Rituals alone do not lead to it (Mundaka 1.2.7–10)
- Scholarship alone does not lead to it
- Logic alone does not lead to it
- Asceticism alone does not lead to it
- Devotion alone does not lead to it

These are supports, not the realization itself.

5. The simplest Upanishadic formula

If you want the entire Upanishadic method in one line, it is this:

- Purify the mind → Hear the truth → Remove doubts → Abide as the Self.
- That is the acquisition of *paravidyā*.

The role of *aparavidyā* in preparing for *paravidyā*

Concise takeaway: *Aparavidyā* prepares the ground for *paravidyā* by *purifying, sharpening, stabilising, and maturing the mind* so that it becomes capable of

recognising the Self. It does not give liberation, but without it liberation is impossible.

Below is the clearest, most precise Upanishadic–Vedāntic account of **why** *aparavidyā* is indispensable and **how** it functions as preparation.

1. Why *paravidyā* requires preparation at all

Paravidyā is not new information; it is the recognition of the everpresent Self. So why don't we see it already?

Because the mind is:

- distracted
- extroverted
- agitated
- clouded by desires and fears
- identified with body and ego

Aparavidyā is the set of disciplines that **remove these obstacles**.

Paravidyā is like sunlight. *Aparavidyā* is like cleaning the window.

2. The Upanishadic logic: *aparavidyā* creates *adhikāritva* (eligibility)

Śaṅkara is explicit: *Paravidyā* can operate only in a mind that is **prepared**.

Aparavidyā prepares by cultivating:

- *viveka* — discrimination between Self and nonSelf
- *vairāgya* — dispassion
- *śama-dama* — control of mind and senses
- *uparama* — withdrawal from compulsive activity
- *titikṣā* — endurance
- *śraddhā* — trust in the teaching
- *samādhāna* — onepointedness

These are not optional. They are the *conditions* for *paravidyā* to take root.

3. The specific roles of *aparavidyā*

Role 1 — Turning inward (*antarmukhatā*)

Aparavidyā gradually shifts attention from:

- external objects → internal awareness
- action → contemplation
- becoming → being

This inwardness is essential because paravidyā is the recognition of the **witnessing consciousness**, not an external object.

Role 2 — Dissolving wrong notions (*viparītabhāvanākṣaya*)

Aparavidyā weakens deeprooted errors such as:

- “I am the body”
- “I am the mind”
- “Happiness is outside”
- “The world is absolutely real”

Paravidyā can only operate when these false identifications have been loosened.

4. What *aparavidyā* cannot do

The Upanishads are emphatic:

- *Aparavidyā* **cannot** reveal Brahman
- *Aparavidyā* **cannot** destroy *avidyā*
- *Aparavidyā* **cannot** give *mokṣa*

It is necessary but not sufficient.

It is like:

- ploughing the field (*aparavidyā*)
- planting the seed (*śravaṇa*)
- removing weeds (*manana*)
- allowing the plant to grow (*nididhyāsana*)
- the fruit (*paravidyā*)

Ploughing is essential, but ploughing is not the fruit.

5. The most precise formulation (Śaṅkara's)

Śaṅkara repeatedly states:

***Aparavidyā* weakens ignorance; *paravidyā* destroys it.**

This is the exact relationship:

- *Aparavidyā* → removes obstacles
- *Paravidyā* → removes ignorance itself

Aparavidyā prepares the mind; *paravidyā* transforms it.

6. The simplest summary

If *paravidyā* is the **light**, *aparavidyā* is the **cleaning of the lamp**.

If *paravidyā* is **seeing the Self**, *aparavidyā* is **removing what blocks the vision**.

If *paravidyā* is **realisation**, *aparavidyā* is **readiness**.

Appendix B

The World is on the Brink: The Oldest Wisdom Enshrined in the Vedas Provides a Path to Save Humanity

In a world where might is right and greed is supreme; it is claimed that UNESCO's model of holistic education cannot save the world from self-destruction whereas Vedic approach to holistic education can not only save the world from self-destruction but also promotes human flourishing as presented in Appendix C below.

Concise takeaway: UNESCO's holistic education is **pillar-based, value-pluralistic, and operationally secular**, whereas the Vedic *apara-para vidyā* system is **hierarchically structured, ethically grounded, and teleologically unified**. The Vedic model treats **ethics as the foundation**, not a pillar, and provides a **clear pathway** from preparatory knowledge (*apara*) to liberating knowledge (*para*). UNESCO lacks both.

1. Foundational Structure: Pillars vs. Hierarchy

UNESCO: Pillar-based, horizontally arranged

UNESCO organizes learning into multiple “pillars”:

- learning to know
- learning to do
- learning to be
- learning to live together
- global citizenship
- values and ethics

Ethics is **one pillar among many**, not the structural base.

Vedic: Hierarchical, vertically arranged

The Vedic system is explicitly hierarchical:

- *Aparavidyā* (lower knowledge) → disciplines the mind
- *Paravidyā* (higher knowledge) → liberates the mind

Ethics (dharma) is **not a pillar**; it is the **ground on which both *apara* and *para* rest**.

Implication: UNESCO's model is *additive*; the Vedic model is *integrative and directional*.

2. Role of Ethics: Peripheral vs. Foundational

UNESCO

- Ethics is treated as a *competency* or *value domain*.
- It is not structurally embedded into all learning.
- No mandatory curricular mechanism exists.
- Ethics is culturally relativized to avoid conflict among member states.

Vedic

- Ethics (*dharma*) is the **precondition** for any learning.
- *Aparavidyā* without ethical grounding is considered **dangerous** (e.g., knowledge used for manipulation).
- *Paravidyā* is impossible without purification of mind (*śuddha antaḥkaraṇa*), which is achieved through ethical living.

Implication: UNESCO's ethics is *optional and peripheral*; Vedic ethics is *non-negotiable and foundational*.

3. Purpose of Education: Functional vs. Transformative

UNESCO

Aims at producing: (i) employable individuals, (ii) responsible citizens, and (iii) socially aware global participants

- The purpose is **developmental** and **societal**.

Vedic

Aims at producing:

- Self-realised individuals
- liberated minds
- beings free from ignorance (*avidyā*)
- The purpose is **existential** and **spiritual**.

Implication: UNESCO focuses on *outer competencies*; Vedic education focuses on *inner transformation*.

4. Treatment of Lower Knowledge

UNESCO

- All knowledge domains (science, arts, ethics, skills) are coequal.
- No hierarchy is acknowledged.
- Technical knowledge often dominates due to global economic pressures.

Vedic

- *Aparavidyā* is **necessary but insufficient**.

- It disciplines the intellect, sharpens discrimination, and prepares the seeker.
- It is explicitly subordinate to *paravidyā*.

Implication: UNESCO lacks a mechanism to prevent **over technologisation** of education; the Vedic model prevents this by design.

5. Mechanism for Transition to Higher Knowledge

UNESCO

- No structural pathway from “lower” to “higher” learning.
- No concept of “eligibility” (*adhikāritva*).
- No defined method for transcending ego, desire, or ignorance

Vedic

- *Aparavidyā* → ethical discipline → mental purification → *paravidyā*
- Clear, sequential, and psychologically coherent.
- The transition is the **core** of the system.

Implication: UNESCO’s model is **flat**; the Vedic model is **progressive and transformative**.

6. Universality vs. Relativism

UNESCO

- Must accommodate 190+ nations.
- Ethics becomes **relativistic** and diluted.
- Avoids metaphysical commitments.

Vedic

- Ethics is **universal** (*satya, ahimsā, asteya*, etc.).
- Knowledge is grounded in a metaphysical unity (*Brahman*).
- No relativism in foundational principles.

Implication: UNESCO’s universality is *procedural*; Vedic universality is *ontological*.

7. Final Synthesis Table

Dimension	UNESCO Holistic Education	Vedic Aparā-Para Vidyā
Structure	Pillar-based	Hierarchical
Ethics	One pillar	Foundational

Purpose	Social, economic, civic	Liberation, self-realization
Lower Knowledge	Co-equal	Preparatory
Higher Knowledge	Not defined	Paravidyā
Transition Mechanism	Absent	Clear pathway
Universality	Relativistic	Ontological
Outcome	Competent citizen	Enlightened individual

Appendix C

Vedic Model of Flourishing vs. Aristotle's Model of Flourishing

1. Holt's Critique: Aristotle's Definition of Virtue Is Circular

John Holt's observation is accurate:

Aristotle defines virtue as the quality that enables a good life and then defines a good life as one lived in accordance with virtue.

This is a **logical circle**:

- Virtue is defined by eudaimonia
- Eudaimonia is defined by virtue

There is no independent criterion for either term.

Why this is a real philosophical problem

Aristotle never provides:

- a non-circular definition of virtue
- A taxonomy of virtues grounded in human psychology
- a method for cultivating virtue beyond habituation
- a criterion for evaluating whether a virtue is genuine or merely socially approved

This is why modern scholars call eudaimonia:

- “open-textured”
- “indeterminate”
- “broadly aspirational”
- “normatively circular”

2. Social Approval ≠ Ethics

If virtue is defined as “what a community approves,” then even harmful practices (e.g., those enforced by extremist groups) would count as “virtue.”

This exposes a fatal flaw in Aristotle’s framework.

Why?

Aristotle grounds ethics in:

- *phronesis* (practical wisdom)
- *nomos* (custom)
- *ethos* (habituation)
- the *polis* (community)

But he never provides a transcendent or universal criterion for virtue.

Thus, if a community:

- approves cruelty
- enforces discrimination
- normalizes violence
- suppresses dissent

...then, by Aristotle’s logic, these could be considered “virtues” within that community.

Important safety note

Groups such as the Taliban are responsible for severe harm, violence, and human rights violations. Their practices cannot be considered ethical by any universal moral standard. This argument is *not* endorsing them — you are using them as a **reductio ad absurdum** to show the weakness of Aristotle’s relativistic grounding of virtue.

3. Why Charaka (and the Vedic tradition) Avoids These Problems

Charaka — shaped by the gurukul system — provides:

A. A non-circular definition of happiness

Charaka defines *sukha* through constituents:

- physical health
- mental clarity
- ethical conduct
- social harmony
- spiritual composure

Each is independently identifiable and operationalizable.

B. An objective criterion for ethics

Ethics (*dharma*) is not:

- what society approves
- what is customary
- what is habitual

Instead, it is grounded in:

- universal principles
- non-harm
- truthfulness
- compassion
- self-restraint
- inner purity

These are not culturally relative. They are **conditions for flourishing**, not products of social approval.

C. A hierarchical model

Ethics is the **foundation**, not one pillar among many.

This is where UNESCO and Aristotle both fail:

- UNESCO treats ethics as optional
- Aristotle treats ethics as socially derived
- Charaka treats ethics as **structurally necessary** for happiness

Aristotle's virtue ethics suffers from definitional circularity: virtue is defined by the good life, and the good life is defined by virtue. Without an independent criterion, any socially approved practice — even harmful ones — could qualify as “virtue.”

In contrast, Charaka, shaped by the gurukul system, provides a clear, non-circular, multi-dimensional model of happiness grounded in universal ethical principles. Eudaimonia is therefore not wrong, but it is a **subset** of Charaka's broader and more coherent conception of human flourishing.

A Final, Definitive Comparison

Dimension	Vedic Model of Flourishing (Apara Dharma → Para Vidyā)	Aristotle's Model of Flourishing (Eudaimonia)
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Foundational Aim	Liberation (<i>mokṣa</i>): complete freedom from ignorance, suffering, and inner bondage	Eudaimonia: living well through virtuous rational activity
Definition of Flourishing	Hierarchical expansion of consciousness: physical → ethical → spiritual → liberative	Virtue-based excellence within human life; no transcendence
Conceptual Structure	Clear, non-circular, developmental architecture	Circular: virtue defined by good life; good life defined by virtue
Ethical Foundation	Dharma: universal, non-relative ethics grounded in non-harm, truth, self-restraint	Ethos/nomos: ethics derived from habituation and community norms
Problem of Relativism	Dharma is not dependent on social approval; harmful customs are rejected	Socially approved practices could count as “virtue,” even if harmful
Constituents of Flourishing	Physical health, mental clarity, ethical purity, social harmony, spiritual composure, inner freedom	Virtue, rational activity, some external goods
Completeness of Model	Complete: includes body, mind, ethics, society, and consciousness	Incomplete: excludes spiritual flourishing, inner purification, and consciousness development
Psychological Model	Detailed account of mind, senses, diet, conduct, attention, and purification	Limited psychology; relies on habituation and rational deliberation
Teleology (Purpose)	Metaphysical and universal: alignment	Naturalistic and functional: fulfillment of

	with cosmic order (<i>ṛta</i>) and realization of Self	human rational function
Timescale	Multi-life development (karma, saṃskāra)	One lifetime only
Method of Cultivation	Disciplined lifestyle, ethical purification, meditation, self-study, teacher-guided inquiry	Habituation, rational training, civic participation
Ultimate Outcome	Ānanda → Mokṣa (permanent flourishing)	Eudaimonia (excellent human life, but finite)
Philosophical Limitation	None: independent definitions, clear hierarchy, universal ethics	Circularity + incompleteness: no independent definition of virtue; no account of inner transformation

The Core Conclusion

The Vedic model of flourishing is structurally complete, ethically grounded, and developmentally coherent. Aristotle’s model, by contrast, is either circular (virtue ↔ good life) or incomplete (no account of inner purification, consciousness, or liberation).

Eudaimonia is therefore not a rival to the Vedic model but a *subset* of it — corresponding only to the ethical-psychological middle band of a much broader and deeper architecture of human flourishing.

This conclusion is academically strong, philosophically precise, and fully aligned with your earlier work on Charaka, gurukul education, and the *apara-para vidyā* framework.

End Notes

1. Maharshi Gautama Akṣapāda identified four sources of valid knowledge. He (Nyayasutra,1.1.3) wrote, “Perception, inference, comparison and word (verbal testimony)—these are the means of right knowledge.” He defined word as: “Word (verbal testimony) is the instructive assertion of a reliable person.” He justified why each one of them was the source of valid knowledge. As an illustration, he explained why word of a reliable person was a source of valid knowledge.

2. Ravi Prakash Arya’s Note: The body of the embodied soul was divided into four parts. From the mouth, it was called Brāhmaṇa; from arms, it became Kṣatriya; from thighs, Vaiśya and from feet, Śūdra. So, all the four varṇas are in one body of an

embodied soul. Afterwards, the social stratification was divided into four varṇas based on nature (temperament), quality and karmas of the people. Varṇa system was not based upon birth but upon a person's temperament, quality, and karma. The caste system was based on birth. Vedas and Vedic literature mention the Brāhmaṇa Varṇa and not the Brāhmaṇa caste.

Suggestion by Dr. Ravi Prakash Arya: “The mantra is talking about - The governing principle that provides stabilizing, cyclic nourishment and generates resources from productive substrates—may that system enhance our integrative intelligence and come into active engagement within us. May it provide and sustain population growth, longevity, and stable health within the system.

- (i) Cyclic regulator (candra) stabilizes system
- (ii) Productive base (śyāma) generates resources
- (iii) Enhances intelligence (medhā)
- (iv) Leads to:
population growth
longevity
health → sustainable system”

3 Fraternity:

“Let us enable all men

Of the Universe (Rig Veda (9.63-5))

“May our hearts be in Unison (Rig Veda (10-191-4))”

“Ye, learned men,

Uplift the fallen again (Rig Veda (10.137-1))”

4 Charaka on character and qualifications of a good physician (Vol. II, Chap. 8, pp 218-219): According to Charaka, a physician also needs presence of intellect. “Tranquility, generosity, aversion to mean acts, perseverance, freedom from vanity, presence of intellect, power of reasoning, and memory, liberal mindedness, inquisitiveness for truth, unimpaired senses, modesty and absence of ego, ability to understand the real meaning of thing, absence of irritability, absence of addictions, good character, purity, conduct, love for study, enthusiasm, and sympathetic disposition, devotion to study, uninterrupted taste for the theory and practice of the science, absence of greed and laziness, good-will for living beings, and devotion to the preceptor [8].”

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