

A Case for Village Pedagogy

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Introduction

This paper is a response to the ISKCON Ministry of Education's request to help more clearly define ISKCON'S Philosophy of Education.

Based on the teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder-*Acarya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), and in keeping with the seminal Vedic texts such as *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, I will argue 1) that traditional Vedic education must be the norm for both ISKCON and the general society, and 2) that village pedagogy best highlights the natural and scientific correlation between traditional education and the rural sector in meeting the physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs of individuals and society.

By village pedagogy, I mean the traditional village learning skills and sciences needed to maintain what the Vedic culture defines as the prescribed lifestyle for the majority of people aiming at simple living and high thinking in keeping with the Vedic principles of self-sufficiency, sustainability and self-realization.

The paper will attempt to demonstrate how western modern education, characterized by a shift from humanities to technology, from the sacred to the profane and from a spiritual perspective to a more secular and material focus, has caused havoc in society and has been the main culprit in creating the present crisis we find in the rural sector causing global ramifications.

Such a crisis is characterized by life-threatening global challenges such as desertification, loss of bio-diversity, depletion of natural resources, climate change, global warming, loss of habitat, economic and political strife, dehumanizing of mankind, hedonism, all bringing humanity on the brinks of what some identify as the sixth global human mass extinction. ¹ The paper purposely goes beyond addressing the educational needs of ISKCON and aims at bringing awareness to all similar Faith Based Organization (FBOs) as well as to other private and public agencies, governmental departments, and in particular educational institutions.

To help understand the origin and defects of western modern education and the need to refocus on traditional education as found in our ancient Vedic literatures, I will first present,

- 1) a historical perspective on education, followed by
- 2) the foundational principles governing Vedic culture,
- 3) the five pillars of Vedic education,
- 4) the role of *varna* selection in education, 5) the four traditional Vedic sciences (*Char Vidya*), and
- 6) the agrarian and urban dichotomy.

I will then conclude with practical recommendations and suggestions to be considered by the leadership of ISKCON and other Faith Based Organizations.

1. Historical Perspective on Education

1.1. Early Traditions

¹ Chris Hedges, Mass Extinction, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9MnG7FTooE>

It is interesting to note how in the early centuries philosophers like Plato and Aristotle placed special importance on character formation, morality, good behavior, ethics, spirituality and less on academics and secular education. Their humanistic approach to education allowed for closer interaction and relationship between the teacher and the student. In his book *Curriculum: Design and Development*, section *Greece and Its Legacy*, quoting from Marou, David Pratt states:

*While formal schooling was well established in Athens by the end of the fifth century B.C., the method of teaching employed by Socrates belonged to an older tradition: a tradition in which a young nobleman was entrusted to an older man for training and the educational relationship was one of love and inspiration.*²

Thus, early forms of education were mainly influenced by religionists and philosophers with emphasis on character, virtue and the development of both human and spiritual qualities. Professor Mavelikara Achyuthan also supports this view in his book "*Educational Practices in Manu, Panini and Kautilya*":

*Ancient educators in India laid the greatest emphasis on spiritual development and the formation of character of the pupils. This seems to influence some of the western educators also. According to Froebel, 'to give firmness to the will, to quicken it and to make it pure and strong and endure is the chief concern of education'. The German educator Hebart was also a staunch supporter of the formation of character as the aim of education.*³

1.2. Initial Break from the Traditional

Not only was the method traditional, but also the objective of such education was clearly defined and also traditional. The primary concerns of Socrates and Plato were "*that education should lead the pupil to moral discipline, spiritual perfection, virtue and truth. All aspects of education were rigorously examined with reference to*

² Pratt, 1980: 17

³ Achyuthan, 1974: 90

*their contribution to these ultimate ends.”*⁴ In the fourth Century B.C., however, a major change in emphasis occurred with the introduction of a more technical and formal approach in education which was to influence the direction education would take up to our present modern times. This was the influence of the Sophists. As the emphasis shifted from internal values to external considerations, from the “why” of education to the “how” of education, the traditional values inculcated by both the earlier philosophers and religionists took on a secondary role.

*The Sophists are the first people who can confidentially be labeled professional educators... They would undertake the entire post-elementary education of a youth for a fee, concentrating largely on useful knowledge and all-around education for life and for political leadership. Speculative and metaphysical questions did not greatly concern them... they might also be termed the first educational technologists. While the contributions of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to the philosophy of education was profound, Sophists such as Protagoras and Isocrates, in the long run, probably had more influence on the development of Western education....The effects of the Sophists on education necessarily make one wonder whether it is wise to entrust education to the technicians rather than the philosophers.*⁵

1.3. Further Breaks from the Traditional

Other major changes and influences were to take place in the course of history regarding the direction education was to take particularly in relation to religion. The French Revolution in the eighteenth century enabled Europe to further widen the gap between the religious and the profane. Art and literature were no longer to be confined to the divine and the sacred. The doors opened wide to new directions, new discoveries and new ideologies. Some major changes in how one should acquire and disseminate knowledge took place at this time with the

⁴ Pratt, 1980: 17

⁵ Pratt, 1980: 18

introduction of the inductive approach of learning, thus ushering the beginning of our modern scientific approach which was to become a major influence on all spheres of life, including education:

The history of reasoning was to undergo a dramatic change in the 1600s when Francis Bacon began to lay increasing stress on the observational basis of science. Being critical of the model of deductive reasoning on the grounds that its major premises were often preconceived notions which inevitably bias the conclusions, he proposed in its place the method of inductive reasoning by means of which that study of a number of individual cases would lead to a hypothesis and eventually to a generalization. ⁶

1.4. The Modern Era: Technology, Materialism and Cultural Changes

With the advent and impact of modern scientific discoveries, technological advancement and rapid economic growth in the late 19th Century and 20th Century, education in our present modern world was to become much more of a commodity, an essential tool to help meet the growing demands of a rapidly increasing consumer oriented and “diploma-oriented” society (Okamoto, 1994). ⁷ With the need for more and more specialists in various fields, education was seen as a crucial factor in providing such manpower. As more and more stress was given to economic development and production, the importance of social values, human growth and culture tended to be neglected (Gagnon, 2002). ⁸ Educators today still see the educational field as primarily a means to give support and manpower to meet the demands of our highly advanced modern technology:

In the early 1990s, the reform movement has moved to a global arena. All countries are focused on the importance of education. All

⁶ Cohen, 1980: 1

⁷ Okamoto, 1994

⁸ Gagnon, R.L. Survival of the Rural Sector: 8

*nations see their future economic hopes linked to an educated citizenry skilled in the world technologies.*⁹

Education has thus been geared more towards meeting economic and technological demands than in meeting the human and spiritual needs of individuals and society (Van Tassel & Joyce-Baska, 1998).¹⁰ Such misdirected and incomplete knowledge caused largely by an ill-defined and misused technology has disrupted the very social frame of society resulting in various serious disruptions in both the rural and urban sectors. *"Technology has helped to create an overabundance of goods and it has also been the cause of various disruptions in society in particular in the area of the problem of migration and unemployment".*¹¹

From this brief and condensed historical overview of knowledge and education, one sees emerging two major and distinct, yet diametrically opposing approaches to education: one being more traditional, humanistic, personal and spiritual in nature while the other being more liberal, technical, impersonal and essentially secular. Advocates of the "traditional schools" are individuals like Manu, Panini, Kautilya in India, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle in Greece, Pestalozzi in Switzerland, Froebel in Germany, and most leaders of major religions while those of the "modern school" are various philosophers, scientists and educators, beginning with the early Sophists to many, if not most, of our modern day western thinkers.

2. Foundational Principles Governing Vedic Culture

Vedantic sociology, or daiva varnasrama dharma, is the most ideal, most scientific, and most fulfilling educational institution. It will make one vastly learned, organized, productive, skilled, culture, wise, and,

⁹ Van Tassel and Joyce-Baska, 1998: 3

¹⁰ Van Tassel & Joyce-Baska, 1998

¹¹ Gagnon, 2002: 11

*ultimately, self-realized.*¹²

Vedic culture, which naturally encompasses Vedic education, is based on eternal, scientific and thus unchanging concepts and principles that define both material and spiritual truths or *tattva*.

Vedic education can only be properly understood if we become acquainted with and practically apply these basic concepts such as 1) self-realization, 2) *sva-dharma*, 3) agrarian lifestyle, 4) formal vs non-formal education, 5) first is *varna*, then *asrama*, 6) *varna* identification, and 7) *stri-dharma*.

2.1. Self-realization

The first Vedic principle is that the primary goal for all human beings is attainment of self-realization. "*The supreme occupation [dharma] for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self.*"¹³ We learn from Vedic texts that the human form of life is acquired after a long evolutionary process called the transmigration of the soul for the primary purpose of self-realization, *atma-jnana*. Indeed, the first aphorism of the Vedanta Sutra is *athato brahma jijnasa*, one should inquire into the Supreme. Vedic culture is thus first and foremost theistic in nature, advocating not one particular religion but the essence of all religions as defined in the concept of *sanatana dharma*, the eternal duty or occupation of all human beings. Self-realization is thus the cornerstone to understand all the other components of a holistic, sustainable and self-satisfying life.

¹² Bhakti Raghava Swami, 2011, Traditional Education, Preface

¹³ *SB 1.2.6*

2.2 The concept of *sva-dharma*

Sva-dharma refers to our original nature and the natural duties and occupations both at the material and spiritual levels.

The material norm of *sva-dharma* or material *sva-dharma* is thus defined as those activities within the scientific system of *Varnasrama Dharma* that help us meet in a more simple and natural way our material necessities of life that in turn help facilitate self-realization.

On the bodily plane sva-dharma is called varnasrama-dharma, or man's steppingstone for spiritual understanding. Human civilization begins from the stage of varnasrama-dharma. ¹⁴

The spiritual norm of *sva-dharma* or spiritual *sva-dharma* is defined as those activities on the spiritual level within the scientific system of *Bhagavata Dharma* that help us achieve our spiritual needs.

So, and real sva-dharma is spiritual sva-dharma... And what is the occupation of that sva-dharma?... Jivera svarupa haya nitya-krsna-das...that is spiritual sva-dharma. ¹⁵

It should be noted that these two levels are based on unchanging concepts and principles as defined in the Vedic texts. Furthermore, both need to be implemented. Srila Prabhupada further clarified by stating that "*Spiritual existence of devotional activities and classless society are two identical terms. The one without the other has no meaning.*" ¹⁶

¹⁴ Bg 2.31, Purport

¹⁵ Bg 2.31, Lecture, September 1, 1973, London

¹⁶ Back to Godhead, May 20, 1956

2.3 Agrarian Lifestyle

In order to more easily facilitate the achievement of self-realization, the Vedic culture advocates an agrarian lifestyle based on localized living closely connected with cows and land. This helps to fulfill the axiom of simple living and high thinking. We find the expression, *sarva kama dughha mahi*,¹⁷ all necessities of life can be had from the land. Thus, for the vast majority of people, agriculture, land, cows and all activities related to these are the norm and means of livelihood.

2.4 Education as Formal and Non-formal

Within the Vedic context, formal education provides extensive training and knowledge to those who demonstrate aptitudes and abilities to become natural leaders of society, primarily the *brahmanas*, *ksatriyas* and *vaisyas*. The studies will be more intellectual and will cover both levels of spiritual sciences as found in the *sruti* section of the *Vedas* as well as material sciences as found in the *smriti* section of the *Vedas*.

Non-formal education, on the other hand, provides short-term training and apprenticeship connected with manual work. It helps individuals develop skills so that they may take up a particular trade or occupation and become responsible citizens.

When such an agrarian lifestyle is followed, and when both material and spiritual *sva-dharma* become the norm in society, the result is that the vast majority of young people don't receive formal education and thus don't need to attend formal school.

¹⁷ SB 1.10.4

2.6 First is *Varna*, then *Asrama*

In the Vedic culture, the early identification of ones *varna* is considered as most crucial. The responsibility to identify ones *varna* lies with the learned *brahmanas* of the village, the elders and the parents. Identification of *varna* is a science in itself and most significant. By identifying *varna*, one can afterwards direct the student to take up either formal or non-formal education. Formal and non-formal education further define the occupation of such a person. Finally, identification of *varnas* is also directly connected with one's future *asrama*, either as a *brahmacary*, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha* or *sannyasi*. This is one of the main reasons why Srila Prabhupada instructed to open Varnasrama Colleges where all members of ISKCON could gradually learn about the Varnasrama Mission.

2.7 *Varna* Identification for Boys

Although controversial in our modern urban metropolis, but more easily accepted, observed and experienced in a more natural village atmosphere, *varna* identification is for boys, not for girls, since traditionally a young girl follows the *varna* of her husband.

Srila Prabhupada further adds that women don't require formal education but simply require to be faithful and chaste wives.

So, women should be trained up to be very faithful and chaste. Then the life will be very happy. That is the only education for woman... Therefore, I am instructing our GBCs that "Let our little girls be educated to become faithful and chaste. That is their qualification. No education required."¹⁸

¹⁸ Conversations, July 13, 1975, Philadelphia

In his discussions with leading disciples on the topic of Varnasrama College, Srila Prabhupada clearly states that the Varnasrama College where one learns about *varnas* is not meant for women.

Satsvarupa: Srila Prabhupada, is this school for women also, or just for men?

Prabhupada: For men. Women should automatically learn how to cook, how to cleanse home.

Satsvarupa: So, they don't attend varnasrama college.

Prabhupada: No, no. Varnasrama college especially meant for the brahmanas, ksatriyas and vaisya. ¹⁹

There is another kind of education especially for women that entails learning the traditional 64 fine arts and crafts. ²⁰

When Srila Narada Muni, the greatest exponent of both material and spiritual *sva-dharma*, explains the duties within each *varna* in the seventh chapter of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, he first delineates the occupation of men in society and immediately follows by explaining the duties and responsibilities of women. This is commonly known in the Vedic culture as *stri-dharma*.

2.8 *Stri Dharma*

The Vedic literatures speak explicitly of *stri dharma*, the special duties and responsibilities of a woman. In the *Mahabharata* Grandfather Bhismadeva, also one of the greatest authorities on *dharma*, elaborately explains the subject matter of *dharma* which includes *stri-dharma*:

He then explained, by divisions, acts of charity, the pragmatic activities of a king and activities for salvation. Then he described the duties of women and devotees, both briefly and extensively. ²¹

In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Sri Narada Muni defines the four main duties of women:

¹⁹ Morning Walk, Varnasrama College, March 14, 1974, Vrindavan

²⁰ Brahma Samhita, 5.37, Purport

²¹ SB 1.9.27

To render service to the husband, to be always favorably disposed toward the husband, to be equally well disposed toward the husband's relatives and friends, and to follow the vows of the husband—these are the four principles to be followed by women described as chaste. ²²

3. Pillars of Vedic Education

Vedic education is characterized by five unchanging pillars that give a clear understanding and direction of such education: 1) Definition, 2) Disposition, 3) Delivery, 4) Design, and 5) Direction. ²³ I will give but a cursory review of these five cornerstones that clearly define traditional Vedic education.

3.1 Definition

We find the simple yet complete definition of Vedic knowledge and education in the following brief statement of the Bhagavad-gita:

I shall now declare unto you in full this knowledge, both phenomenal and numinous. This being known, nothing further shall remain for you to know. ²⁴

True and complete education must therefore cover both material and spiritual knowledge, a fundamental principle and concept absent in modern day education.

3.2 Disposition

Both the teacher and the student must demonstrate specific qualities in order to be accepted as qualified teachers and students. A teacher must imbibe the following nine qualities.

Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness—these are the natural qualities by which the brahmana work. ²⁵

²² SB 7.11.25

²³ Gagnon, 2018. Modernity is Killing Civilization. Pillars of Vedic Education: 106

²⁴ Bg 7.2

²⁵ Bg 18, 42

The student must also be qualified to receive both material and spiritual knowledge. The following three qualities of 1) submissiveness, 2) inquiry and 3) service form the basis for a qualified student.

Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth. ²⁶

3.3 Delivery

Vedic knowledge is meant to be delivered in a congenial atmosphere of goodness. Hence, traditionally, students would study in the forest or adjacent to a village away from distraction and noise. The knowledge would be given within a residential or boarding school system where both the student and the teacher live together and develop a long-lasting friendship and love. We hear of Vedic forest university since saintly persons from whom one would learn would live in the forest.

In addition, both formal education (*Gurukula*) and non-formal education (apprenticeship) were residential where both the teachers and the students lived together and shared the similar educational learning experience. Education was also free for the students and teachers were not salaried as we find in modern education, making the whole process of education as a commercial business.

3.4 Design

Of paramount importance and in reference to the main argument presented in this short essay, the design of curriculum was such that one would determine from a young age what education one would receive based on one's *varna*. The two main types of education were formal (*Gurukula*) and non-formal (apprenticeship or vocational training). Both forms of education were given within the same

²⁶ Bg 4.34

environment, one being more intellectual (for the *brahmanas* and *ksatriyas*) and the other being more manual in nature (for the *vaisyas* and *sudras*).

The subject matters were entirely from *sastra*. The Vedic literatures are divided into two main divisions, one being 1) *para-vidya* and the other being 2) *apara-vidya*. All knowledge that does not tally with these two categories falls into the category of *avidya* or ignorance.

For formal education in Gurukula, the subject matters covered the four standard sciences and sub-sciences (*Char Vidya*) that will be covered later in this paper.

3.5 Direction

As we find in all Vedic literatures, the primary aim of all education is self-realization. King Rishabadeva instructs that one should not become a king, guru or teacher unless one can deliver one's dependents from the condition of ignorance.²⁷

In the *Sri Isopanishad*, we find the following warning:

*Those who engage in the culture of nescient activities shall enter into the darkest region of ignorance. Worse still are those engaged in the culture of so-called knowledge.*²⁸

And Srila Prabhupada concludes in the Purport to this text:

*Thus, the aim of real education should be self-realization, realization of the spiritual values of the soul. Any education which does not lead to such realization must be considered avidya, or nescience.*²⁹

²⁷ SB 5.5.18

²⁸ Sri Isopanisha, Mantra 9

²⁹ Sri Isopanishad Mantra 9, Purport

4. **Varna Selection in Education**

As nicely explained by one of the foremost authorities in the Vaisnava *parampara*, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, it was one of the most important responsibilities in a village for elderly *brahmanas* to determine the *varna* of young boys within the age of 15. Such identification of *varna* would in turn determine the education, the occupation and one's future *asrama*.

The following is a brief description of the practice as explained by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura:

Question: By following which rules, can the varnasrama system of India be revived?

Response: "In order to revive the principles of varnasrama the following few rules have to be reintroduced:

- 1. No one's caste should be ascertained simply by birth.*
- 2. A person's caste should be determined according to the nature he develops in the association of the children and by the accumulation of knowledge.*
- 3. At the time of ascertaining a person's caste one should, along with that person's nature and taste, consider the caste of his parents.*
- 4. After a person become matured, in other words, when he becomes fifteen years old, the family priest, the landlord, the parents, and a few selfless educated people of the village should sit together and determine his caste.*
- 5. Which caste should a matured person belongs? Such a question should never arise. Rather the question should be raised whether that matured person is qualified to retain his father's caste or not.*
- 6. If it is found that a person is qualified to retain his caste then appropriate samskara or purificatory rituals should be performed. If it is seen that he is qualified*

for a higher caste then his samskara should be performed accordingly. If it is found that, he is qualified for a caste lower than that of his father, then he should be given two more years.

7. After this additional two years, he should be examined again and his caste should be ascertained.

8. Every village should have a committee consisting of landlords and the scholars to protect the rules and regulations of the society.

9. The support of the king has to be taken in order to keep these activities going. The king is actually the protector of the principle of Varnasrama.

10. According to one's caste, one's marriage and other activities should be carried out.³⁰

5. The Four Vedic Sciences - *Char Vidya*

From the *Kautilya Arthashastra*,³¹ we learn from the renowned moralist, philosopher and educator, Chanakya Pandita, how the ancient Vedic culture has always been governed by four essential sciences (*Char Vidya*) that in themselves form the pillars of Vedic philosophy and Vedic education. It is imperative that all ISKCON educators thoroughly understand these essential constituents if we are to have a harmonious, progressive, prosperous and sustainable society.

The four sciences are referred to as 1) *Anviksiki*, the Science of Philosophy, 2) *Trayi*, the Science of Education, 3) *Danda Niti*, the Science of Politics and 4) *Varta*, the Science of Economics.

These four sciences contain both spiritual and material knowledge that are sufficient to guide individuals and society towards the fulfilment of a successful life,

³⁰ Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Sajjana Toshani, 2.7

³¹ Kautiliya's Arthashastra, Introduction

which in the Vedic culture is defined as "*atma-jnana*", knowledge of the soul or self-realization.

These four sciences reflect the unchanging characteristics of a culture that is described as *sanatana* or eternal, hence the essence of the Vedic culture is *sanatana dharma* or eternal occupation.

If we properly understand these four concepts, we will know that the knowledge of philosophy presented in these literatures is based on unchanging concepts that are embedded in such classics as the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, described as the ripened fruit of Vedic knowledge.

The concept of village pedagogy thus finds its root in the fundamental understanding of the above outlined principles. Unfortunately, these seminal teachings of the Vedic culture have been rejected or not understood by most modern intellectuals and educators.

6. The Agrarian and Urban Dichotomy

The urban shift ushered with the eighteenth century Industrial Revolution in Europe is destroying traditional education by introducing non-traditional occupations and creating confused and disarrayed individuals; thus, placing society in what the Vedic literatures describe as a state of *ugra karma* (ferocious activities), a society where individuals live a complicated life neither understanding who they are nor what is the purpose of life. Srila Prabhupada consistently warned against the dangers of such modern city life, reminding us of the more ideal way of village life:

"Live village life, simple life, and be satisfied with the bare necessities. There is no need of luxury. And save time and chant Hare Krishna. This is ideal life. So, I am very pleased that you are doing that, and do it more nicely so that others may be attracted."
"This town life, industrial life, factory life, is asuric life. It is killing

human ambition. It is killing civilization.”³²

Srila Prabhupada often quoted Gandhi’s concept of simple and practical “village organization” where education for the majority of people lies in small-scale craft and industry. As stated by Gandhi himself:

“There are two schools of thought current in the world. One wants to divide the world into cities and the other into villages. The village civilization and the city civilization are totally different things. One depends on machinery and industrialization, and the other on handicrafts. We have given preference to the latter”³³

In his book *Small is Beautiful*, German-born Economist E.M Schumacher echoes Gandhi’s ethos of “village organization” by describing *“alternative technology as appropriate technology, its application being in a small scale, decentralized, labour intensive, environmentally safe and locally autonomous.”³⁴*

In the Foreword to Seymour’s *The Complete Book on Self-Sufficiency*, Schumacher explains the negative impact of this recent shift from the agrarian to the urban sector as follows:

“In the modern world, during the last hundred years or so, there has been an enormous and historically unique shift away from self-reliance and towards organization. As a result, people are becoming less self-reliant and more dependent than ever before in history. They may claim to be more highly educated than any generation before them; but the fact remains that they cannot really do anything for themselves. They depend utterly on vastly complex organizations, on fantastic machinery, or larger and larger money incomes.”³⁵

Village pedagogy, similar to forest pedagogy, introduces one to the natural, simple and scientific education one receives within a rural setting to fulfill the

³² Folio, Evening Lecture at Gita Nagari Farm, July 15, 1976

³³ M. Gandhi, Cities and Villages, https://www.mkgandhi.org/village_swaraj/04citiesandvillages.htm

³⁴ E. M. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, Website

³⁵ Seymour, John, *The Complete Book on Self-Sufficiency*, Foreword by E. M. Schumacher

primary aim of life (spiritual emancipation) while simultaneously amply meeting all the necessities of material life.

Well-known Russian American Sociologist Pitirim Sorokin who became an authority on social rural development was appalled to witness the modern-day degradation of an ever increasing materialistic and industrialized country like America where he had taken refuge. In many ways, he was a forerunner to the proponents of the forest pedagogy movement who advocate a more natural and simple learning experience through nature:

*"... the farmer peasant's mental luggage is more stable and less fluctuating than many attitudes and convictions of the city population, often based on inadequate and overdeveloped indirect experience, which inadequacy makes many changes necessary in order to correct or to replace one attitude, opinion, or belief with another."*³⁶

Village pedagogy upholds the scientific and standard system of aptitude based education, both formal and non-formal, that leads one to aptitude based occupation in one of the four *varnas* beginning with *brahmana*, *ksatriyas*, *vaisyas* or *sudra*.

Village pedagogy also upholds the scientific and standard system of phased lifelong spiritual emancipation through the four stages of spiritual life, namely the four *asramas* of *brahmacarya*, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha* and *sannyasa*.

Faith based organizations (FBO) such as ISKCON must work at re-establishing village pedagogy to help redress society. By tampering with the standard Vedic sciences of education, politics and economy, misdirected and untrained leaders have created havoc in the lives of individuals and society. Villages all over the world are on the brinks of collapse. At the State University of Arizona in 2004, in his

³⁶ Sorokin, <http://cliffstreet.org/index.php/rural-sociology>

introduction to the topic of Holistic Management, world renowned Biologist Allan Savory of the Savory pulled out a plate containing cow dung telling his audience:

"What that represents is more important to your future, the future of the United States, the future of all your families, the whole world, the survival of civilization. What that represents is more important than all the technology in the world and all the money in the world. They're not going to save us. What that represents might save us."³⁷

Therefore, as explained by Founder Acarya of ISKCON, the system of *daiva varnasrama dharma* advocates a classless society centered on one unifying principle of loving devotional service to God, Lord Krishna. Such a classless society becomes a truly class-less society.

Conclusion

As exhorted in the ancient Vedic teachings, *"Education is Life" and "Life is Education"*. Village organization served as the educational "field" where the vast majority of young men and women received both formal and non-formal education in a natural, personal and homely atmosphere.

There is an interesting link to be made with the concept of forest pedagogy³⁸ where it is being substantiated more and more that the mind and intelligence interact more holistically in a "natural environment" of an agrarian community as opposed to city congested urban centers such as our modern metropolis. Urbanization blurs perceptions, cognizance and values, and thus is distracting for those interested in self-realization.

³⁷ Allan Savory Holistic Management, Website

³⁸ Forest pedagogy, Wwebsite

Education must be understood within a particular social context. That social context for Vaisnavas is the God-given social system of *daiva varnasrama*. As explained by Srila Prabhupada, when we speak of society, we mean *varnasrama*:

Sociology is already given by Krishna. [Bg 4.13] This is perfect sociology. If you try to create some system, that system will be imperfect because you are imperfect. ³⁹

The fulfilment of Srila Prabhupada's mission in establishing both the material *sva-dharma* and the spiritual *sva-dharma* as taught in the Vedic culture lies in understanding and implementing the four movements that he described in his *Essay on Gita Nagari*. ⁴⁰ "These four movements, or waves, all based on the teachings of the *Bhagavad-gita*, are meant for the social and spiritual upliftment of mankind." ⁴¹ They complement one another and form a holistic vision of how Srila Prabhupada wanted to implement his mission.

*Leaving aside all his (Gandhi's) other activities in the political field, the four following principles which he adopted sincerely in his mature old age, are in essence derived from the teachings of the *Bhagavad-gita* for practical application in the matter of social and spiritual upliftment of the present order of things.* ⁴²

These are: 1) the Sankirtan Movement (the holy name and books), 2) the Temple Worship Movement (establishing deities and temple), 3) the Spiritual Initiation Movement (present day congregational preaching) and 4) the Classless Society Movement (*daiva varnasrama*).

³⁹ Dialectic Spiritualism, IX, Utilitarianism & Augusta Comte (1798-1857)

⁴⁰ Folio, Compilations, Gita Nagari

⁴¹ Bhakti Raghava Swami, (2007), Make Vrindavana Villages, 10

⁴² Gita Nagari Essay, Part 1

One of the main features of the Vedic culture is that it is based on the principles of simple living and high thinking. In order for such simple living and high thinking to take place, the recommended lifestyle, for the vast majority of individuals, is agrarian based. The concept of village pedagogy thus finds its root in this fundamental understanding. Unfortunately, this seminal teaching of the Vedic culture has been rejected by most modern intellectuals and educators since the French Revolution in Europe, and in many ways, remains unknown to most educators of Faith Based Organization such as ISKCON where traditional education is yet to be introduced as the norm.

The inherent values and direction of Vedic philosophy and Vedic education are diametrically opposed to modern philosophy and modern education characterized by ever changing philosophies of life as opposed to a standard, scientific and ever unfolding philosophy of Vedic education. Within ISKCON, the Ministry of Education should take the lead in establishing traditional *Gurukulas* and Varnasrama Colleges, as desired by Srila Prabhupada.

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