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THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

R.S.Nuriddinov

Lecturer of the Psychology Department

Fergana State University, Uzbekistan

e-mail: nuriddinovrasuljon1993@gmail.com

Abstract. This article examines the historical origins and development of education and the teaching profession in ancient civilizations. The study analyzes the evolution of pedagogical activity from primitive communal society to organized educational systems in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China. Particular attention is given to the emergence of early educational institutions, methods of instruction, teacher-student relationships, and the social role of educators in different cultural contexts. The article highlights how education gradually transformed from practical survival training into a specialized social institution aimed not only at transmitting knowledge and professional skills but also at shaping moral and spiritual values. The educational traditions of ancient civilizations are explored through the activities of Mesopotamian edubbas, Egyptian temple schools, Indian gurukulas and Vedic institutions, and Chinese educational centers influenced by Confucian philosophy. The study demonstrates that despite cultural differences, all ancient civilizations recognized the high social status of teachers and emphasized the importance of moral upbringing alongside intellectual development. The article concludes that the pedagogical heritage of ancient civilizations laid the foundation for the modern educational process and continues to influence contemporary pedagogical thought and practice.

Keywords: education, pedagogy, ancient civilizations, teacher, upbringing, educational history, pedagogical traditions, moral education, teaching profession, educational institutions, cultural heritage, teacher-student relationship, history of education.

The significance of the teaching profession in the life of humanity is immeasurable. The reason for this is that teachers play a key role in ensuring the development of future generations and the progress of society. Looking back into the distant past, we can see that when people transitioned to a collective way of life, they began teaching children primitive knowledge about gathering and hunting by demonstrating these activities in practice. This included showing how to hold hunting tools, how to tan and process animal skins, and how to find and collect edible plants, tubers, and roots. The primary method of emotional and psychological influence of adults on children was mechanical repetition. The spontaneously emerging goals of primitive education were to prepare individuals for a simple life and to understand the world as a simple animistic phenomenon. The beginnings of pedagogical thinking appeared only at the level of everyday consciousness, combined with practical upbringing, traditions, and folklore. Ancient people had to be strong and resilient, able to distinguish edible plants from poisonous ones, thoroughly know their habitat, understand the features of the

terrain, and recognize animal behavior. Gradually, education came to be understood as a special type of activity in the daily struggle for survival [1, p.212].

As a result of the development of the second signaling system, the formation of speech became a powerful means of transmitting the experience of gathering and hunting through communication. The well-known historian Yuval Noah Harari described the importance of speech in human life in his work *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* as follows: “Through communication, Homo sapiens were able to create sentences with different meanings by combining a limited number of sounds and gestures in various ways. This means that we are capable of obtaining, storing, and transmitting an unimaginably large amount of information about the world around us” [2, p.21].

Later, with the improvement of hunting and labor tools and the development of social relations, the need arose for the special transmission of acquired skills and knowledge. As a result, the most respected and experienced elders of the clan began to perform the functions of the first “educators”. They shared with the younger generation the rich experience accumulated by previous generations. The main responsibilities of these elder-educators were to care for the spiritual growth of the younger generation, their morality, and their preparation for life. Thus, education gradually transformed into a special type of human activity. In Ancient Mesopotamia, one of the first cradles of civilization, Sumerians, Semites, and Akkadians lived from the fourth millennium BCE. A number of sciences flourished there, including astronomy, mathematics, agricultural engineering, and socio-philosophical disciplines. A special writing system—cuneiform—was created, and the wheel and coins were invented. The first educational institutions in Mesopotamia emerged in the third millennium due to the economic and cultural need for literate people—scribes [3, p.35]. Scribes professionally copied chronicles and prepared documents by hand. They were considered individuals of high social status.

Institutions that trained scribes were called “edubba” in the Sumerian language, meaning “house of tablets,” because cuneiform writing was inscribed on clay tablets. Early edubbas were small educational institutions with a single teacher. Teachers managed the institution and prepared sample tablets. Students memorized these samples and copied them onto practice tablets. Future scribes had to learn how to skillfully produce clay tablets and master the cuneiform system. Later, specialized teachers appeared in edubbas to teach writing, arithmetic, drawing, and other subjects. Such institutions could also have a supervisor responsible for maintaining order and discipline. Education required payment, the amount of which depended on the teacher’s reputation. To gain the favor of respected teachers, parents often presented them with gifts. The educational process in the “House of Tablets” was complex and labor-intensive, beginning with learning reading, writing, arithmetic, and memorizing cuneiform symbols. Gradually, students moved on to studying instructive stories, fairy tales, and legends while accumulating practical knowledge and skills necessary for

constructing buildings and drafting commercial, legal, and official documents. Graduates were expected to know arithmetic operations, master the art of writing, possess singing and musical abilities, think logically and reasonably, and thoroughly understand the rules of religious sacrifices. In addition, they needed to know how to measure land plots, distribute property, distinguish fabrics, metals, and plants, and understand the language of priests, shepherds, and craftsmen. In conclusion, graduates of edubbas became possessors of a unique and multifaceted profession. Although edubbas initially served only to train scribes, they later evolved into centers of culture and enlightenment where libraries were formed. Tens of thousands of clay tablets were preserved in the libraries of Nippur and Nineveh [4, p.10].

The goal of education was preparation for the profession traditionally practiced by family members. Egyptians considered the family the first link in education. Priests, musicians, craftsmen, and others taught their children their trades. Craftsmen used toys representing miniature copies of agricultural tools, mills, blacksmith workshops, and other objects specially designed for educational purposes [5]. Education began at the age of five. Initially, students had to learn to write and read correctly and beautifully, and later master the preparation of official documents. To become literate, one needed to memorize at least 700 hieroglyphs and distinguish between simplified and classical writing. As a result, students mastered both the official style for everyday needs and the strict style for composing religious texts. Egyptian teachers conducted lessons from early morning until late evening. Students who showed laziness in education and upbringing were punished. To achieve success, students were required to renounce worldly pleasures. One surviving papyrus contains the following advice from a teacher to a lazy student: “Get up! Your books are already before your classmates. Read diligently. Love writing and hate amusement. Write during the day and study at night. Do not waste the day, or it will bring suffering to your body. Seek advice from those who know more than you. I have heard that you abandoned your studies and became absorbed in games, wandering the streets. If you continue roaming the streets, I will tie your feet and whip you with a hippopotamus lash” [4, p.12].

In Ancient India, education had a family-caste character. The first evidence of the emergence of education in the Indus Valley belongs to the culture of the city of Harappa, dating back to the third millennium BCE. Very little information about this culture has survived. Around the second millennium BCE, Aryan priests compiled the Rigveda in classical Sanskrit, including more than a thousand sacred teachings—the Vedas—which are the oldest documents of culture, upbringing, and education in the Dravidian-Aryan civilization of India. [4, 14]. During the Dravidian-Aryan period, stable ideas about upbringing and education were formed. According to these ideas, every person was expected to develop moral, intellectual, and physical qualities in order to become an important member of their caste. Among Brahmins, intellectual ability was considered the leading quality; among Kshatriyas—strength and courage; among Vaishyas—diligence and patience; and

among Shudras—obedience. During this period, the concept of perfect upbringing was also formed. The hero Rama from the epic Mahabharata was portrayed as an example of ideal upbringing. Despite surpassing everyone in strength, courage, knowledge, morality, and wisdom, he never showed arrogance or sought faults in others.

In the sixth book of the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita, the content and methods of upbringing and education are presented in the form of a conversation between the wise divine teacher Krishna and his student Prince Arjuna. Facing difficult life situations, Arjuna asks Krishna for guidance and rises to a higher level of knowledge and behavior. Arjuna's method of learning was as follows: first, the teacher presented new knowledge in a complete form. Then the information was analyzed in parts. Krishna explained abstract concepts through concrete examples. The essence of education lay in presenting Arjuna with various goals that expanded and deepened in ways that encouraged him to independently search for truth and learn proper methods of cognition. The educational process was compared to a battle in which, through victory, Arjuna strove for perfection. [4, 14]

By the middle of the first millennium BCE, certain educational laws and traditions of family-social upbringing had formed in India. The Vedas served as the main subject of study. By the sixth century BCE, a network of Vedic schools led by Brahmins already existed. Teachers in these schools were called “gurus.” The houses of teachers—“gurukulas”—served as educational centers. Later, family-based gurukulas also appeared. Men transmitted knowledge to young people and educated them. The educational system was based on family relationships: the student was considered a member of the family and, in addition to receiving education, also learned the rules of human relations. There were no special classrooms; lessons were conducted outdoors. Students listened to, memorized, and analyzed Vedic hymns.

The new Brahmanism changed attitudes toward upbringing. Educational programs gradually adapted to practical life needs. Access to educational institutions for representatives of different castes expanded. The pedagogical traditions of Buddhism and Brahmanism gradually merged. Buddhists, like Hindus, believed that the most important condition of upbringing was the student's service to the teacher, while the teacher, in turn, had to share everything he possessed with his students. During the coexistence of Buddhism and the new Brahmanism, education was provided in Brahmanical schools and Buddhist temples. Education in Vedic schools remained caste-based and was intended for representatives of the three leading castes. Alongside religious instruction, emphasis was also placed on secular education. By this time, in addition to Sanskrit, instruction in reading and writing local languages had also been established. Gradually, two types of Vedic schools formed: the elementary school known as “tol” and the higher educational institution called “agrahar.” Initially, agrahar curricula focused on religious customs and rituals, but later practical life needs were taken into account. With the admission of Kshatriyas and Vaishyas

from lower castes, the curriculum expanded to include geography, mathematics, languages, medicine, and fine arts. Agrahars gradually evolved into communities of gurus and students.

The rich and unique pedagogical traditions of Ancient China were based on family-social upbringing. The social structure of family life relied on customs formed over centuries. Every family member was required to follow certain rules and restrictions. Over time, a pedagogical ideal emerged aimed at educating a cultured and polite person with inner balance, capable of deep self-knowledge and able to create peace and harmony within oneself. It is believed that the first educational institutions in Ancient China appeared in the third millennium BCE. They were called “xiang” and “xu”. Xiangs emerged in places where educated elders taught and mentored youth. Xu initially provided military training. Later, the term “xue,” meaning “to teach” or “to study,” came to denote educational institutions. The earliest references to xue are found in manuscripts dating from the sixteenth to eleventh centuries BCE. Only children of free and wealthy families could study there. The curriculum included six arts: ethics, writing, arithmetic, music, archery, and chariot driving.

The educational approach in schools was summarized in a concise but meaningful formula: ease, harmony between teacher and student, and student independence. Mentors paid particular attention to teaching students to independently identify and solve various issues. As a result, literacy spread relatively widely in Ancient China. The authority of educated people increased, and a distinct scholarly culture emerged. Education and examination systems became an integral part of state policy.

In conclusion, the rich pedagogical experience of ancient civilizations and their established educational systems played a decisive role in the socio-political and cultural development of these societies. In all ancient civilizations, specialized educational systems existed mainly for clergy, government representatives, and children from wealthy families. The social status of teachers was very high, and educators and mentors were greatly respected in society. In China, for example, the teachings of Confucius recognized teachers as “second parents.” The educational process was based on practical life needs and aimed at teaching writing, arithmetic, crafts, and governance skills. At the same time, in all civilizations, education served not only to transmit knowledge but also to shape moral values. Each civilization had its own distinctive features: in Mesopotamia, special attention was paid to writing and jurisprudence; in Egypt, spiritual education and medical knowledge predominated; in India, education based on the varna system and spiritual self-improvement occupied an important place; and in China, the preparation of state officials and moral-philosophical education prevailed.

The pedagogical heritage of ancient civilizations has not lost its value even today. Traditional forms of teacher-student relationships, effective methods of knowledge transmission, and the comprehensive nature of education continue to serve as important lessons for modern pedagogy. These four great civilizations of

the ancient world created a solid foundation for the organization of pedagogical activity and the formation of the teacher's personality, and their experience constitutes a rich legacy in the history of human education.

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