Education in Ancient Iran

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Abstract:
The organization of education is one of the social foundations in every Society. It is indeed a phenomenon which has been formed and developed through social growth process, as a result of human beings requirements in relationship to each other. There is no society which is independent of education during its development. Society continuously is changing. So its requirements are changing as well. Modern society refers to new educational systems in order to fulfill its requirements. Present article is an attempt to analyze educational situation in ancient Iran. An attempt has been made to examine different dimensions of educational system in ancient Iran such as organization, aims and sorts of educational systems, characteristic of teacher and pupil. Age of student, duration of education, post graduate studies and its goals of education for women.

Keywords: Education, Ancient Iran, Organization, Systems.

1. Introduction

Education is a trend from cradle to grave; with different aspects, it is found in every community. Learning from daily experiences, educational institutes in industrial or non – industrial societies, in rural or urban areas, and different instructional age – groups are some of various aspects of education (Alagheband, 2000).
Educational establishments are not only essential for every society, but also found in every era of human life, though they may have different form. For, human has a social and impressible nature; education is natural and inevitable affair. And for human perfection is unlimited, education is variable and indefinite in accordance with variable social circumstances (Golshan Foomani, 1994).

In Iran, educational era is divided into two different periods:
1 – Pre-Islamic era  2 – Islamic era

According to specific conditions of each era, educational systems are different as well. Knowing that is important because we are Iranian and Muslim. Both civilizations have formed our present character which is different from that of their nations. In every era, there have been schools in our country but with different goal and content which should be examined separately (Almasi, 1999). Until Islam emergence, Iran had experienced class – concessions in every monarchial dynasty, but there were differences between Achamenian and Ashkanian dynasties in the field of education.

In Achamenian, for instance, Iranian community was divided into three classes: clergymen, militants and farmers. Craftsmen were added as forth class. Aria, the original Iranian race, considered craftsmanship as inferior vocation which non – Iranian deserved to apply. New monarchial dynasty of Sasanian enjoyed four classes too with a little difference. In its categories, both farmers and craftsmen belonged to forth class and clerks to third class (Sadr, 1978).

During thousands of years, educational organization was not as the same. Children were fostered in the family, fire-temple or royal court. During the Sasanian dynasty, university was added as well (Hekmat, 1971). Although the Iranian kings paid attention to education, they did not made any official organization for ordinary people who had no free possibility of knowledge obtaining and also were deprived of the gift of education and educational centers. Official education was the monopoly of aristocrats and nobles and their affiliates. This kind of school was founded in the royal court in which the children of aristocrats were brought up.

Instruction and fostering in different eras of ancient Iran

About four thousand years ago, before Aria – ee’s entrance into Iran, there lived another people about whom there is little information. Obviously, there was educational system in each period of history. In the Achamenian dynasty, for example, families, fire-temples, courts were instructional centers. Primary schools and universities were added in the Sasanian dynasty, because they wanted to foster obedient to govern the realm whereby the kings could improve and expand their kingdom (Abasi, 1996). Now, we discuss in different eras, briefly:

Ancient Iran:
1 – Mede era in the ancient east of Iran: The kings of Mede dynasty had chronicles and diaries in which incidents and reports were recorded, but remains no trace from them but a mere name. Dr. Bijan says, therefore we can assume the manner of education in dynasty of Mede by Achamenian educational style. The history of fostering in Madinn communities was divided into two political and social phase; first phase began from the period of immigration,
and second began from the time of sovereignty which continued until it’s break up by Kooresh. The source of education was religion, they believed in good and evil beings.

The second phase of education, continued until Diux Sovereignty, didn't exceed the limitation of family, tribe. As the government was established, some new affairs emerged which caused the development of social foundations. Undoubtedly, the most important of them were such as forming national alliance, equipping national army, and Diux (Dia – eko) was a captive and reliable farmer who became a judge and later a king. Expanding domination from the viewpoint of recent researchers, mede language was approximately, like Persian language. So they could understand the language of each other.

2. Education in Achamenian era: The great Kooresh built a wide country which from west reached Egypt, from east got to Send River and from south was limited by Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. To region such a country, Kooresh needed a powerful centre and some talent powerful and wise men. For this reason, he began to foster and instruct the children of nobles and aristocrats. So, educated men from such centers were sending all over the country who maintained the arrangement and security of whole empire and this program was continued over the next periods. This is how we can definitively say that ancient Persian governments were the main factors of education.

Education in Achamenian era has three dimensions: social, personal and vocational. (Almasi, 1991)

3 – Macedonian era, Greek’s sovereignty on Iran seleucidae gained control over Iran during 25 – 333 B.C. Alexander died in Babel in 323 B.C eight years after he had captured Iran. One of his commanders, appointed as sovereign, he ruled about eighty years, he chose seleucida as his capital which transferred to Antioch latter Greece ;angia begam tp s[read/ tjem weddomgs between Iranian and Macedonian , colonization, trade, and arrangement of army caused that Persian language of Achamenian was deserted. Greece took its place and grows wide spread, even, during Partian dynasty, it was taught. (Almasi, 1999).

Partian (Ashkanian) era

Ashkanian society was aristocratic in which the king was the highest person. After king, Nobles, aristocrats and commanders were in higher position than ordinary people. Seven families of Ashkanian were in more advantageous position than other aristocrats. Clergymen gained more power whose chiefs were the members of Sheikhes council. Business men and clerk were in middle position. Villagers and slaves were the lowest. Social form of Ashkanian was the same as western European social pyramid in Middle Ages. Apparently, cruciform was popular. Discovered friezes confirm that Ashkanian used papyrus and venerable men – elder – learned men, although, they gained education; nevertheless, the ordinary people were deprived of education.

Age and duration of education

Regarding Herodot and Strabo’s children quotation aged five, began to study. But Plato Dinkert and Ferdousi have mentioned it, being 7 years old. Ferdousi, continuously, wrote 7 years, while he was mentioning the readiness of parents for education. 15 was the age of maturity, in which every Zoroastrian was expected to do their religious duties thereafter (Sediq, 1975). In the Ashkanian era like that of Achamenian, the age of 7 was the beginning
of education which continued until 15, the age of 15 was the time of specific education, this dividing continued all over Achamanian period. When Alexander attacked Iran and Seleucidian gained sovereignty, science and knowledge grew weak, and educational system was affected.

School
Generally, home was the first place for education in which the parents were the teachers. As the social foundations progressed and families concentrated, educational place accordingly was transferred to instructors home, which was the first gathering place for teaching. With magus dissemination, fire temples were applied as teaching centers. They preserved that rule for long time (Hekmat, 1971, p: 363-364)In ancient time, educational centers in court were specified for princes and the sons of nobles and aristocrats, which government officials appeared from. These centers located on a ground around which there were castles and government buildings (Golshan Foomani, 1994, p: 74). However, in Achamanian era, there were military schools which located in wide ground and roofless places. Other vocational centers had instructional work field, suitable to the sort of instruction. Until Sasanian era, the situation did not change but a little. At Sasnian time, knowledge gained a revival, reaching its height and improved qualitatively and quantitatively. The cities of Raha and Nasiblin. Made room for two popular Persian schools, so they grow famous and honored. The number of students studying was about 800. Rather than these two, there were technical and vocational school as well as science and philosophy schools which paved the way for famous Great and unique university of GandiShapoor(Almasi, 1999, p: 38-39).

Fostering Factors
The fostering factors were such as nature, geographical condition, opinions and traditions which brought by Iranian and developed and improved by Zoroaster. The government became one of main factors when it was spreading its power and reign.

Nature: Except a line around Caspian Sea, most of regions have dry climate. The level of rain fall is very low. The deserts are wide spread. The hillsides and mountains are naked with no grass covering. The ancients made a great attempt to find water, to dig wells, to fertilize soil and to fight against drought and botanical disaster.

Geographical location: our country is located under Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkistan of china and Russia. On the western north there are Caucasian mountains. In above mentioned regions, lived desert inhabitants, and nomads with increasing propagation and decreasing food sources, were forced them to raid into Iranian borders most of the time. Iranian inevitably defended and resisted their attacks. That made them clever, wise, brave and skilled fighters.

At east, Iran was the neighbor of two countries, India and china and from west, with western Asia which was the way to Europe, Mediterranean Sea and Africa. Therefore the link way from east to west and vice versa, passed through Iran. Iran was the place for exchanging goods, Manufactures, art works and civilization.

Religion: It was another factor effecting education Iranian believed in two powers, good and devil that were fighting to each other. Rain rightfulness, fire, and sky were good which were worshiped. Drought, darkness, disease were the devils which must be overcome by daily round of prayer or repeated recital. This caused a great deal of mythology and magic.
Government: it was the fourth factor, having a great effect on education and instruction. As the royal governments established and power transferred to one place and to one person, called king, it grew the need for qualified and trusted men who knew their responsibilities and practiced them. So, the government in order to meet these requirements brought up some of the children from nobles and aristocrats (Sediq, 1975).

The aim of education

In ancient Iran, the aim of education was to foster the children and to make them become a useful member of the society with good morality. This aim has been mentioned in every religious book and even in Zoroastrian book of Avesta. In minor Avesta, there has been written that: O, Ahura Mazda (the God of goodness) grant me a child who will be polite and wise: A respectable son who will enter the society and will do his function, and also will fulfill people’s need, attempt for his country, town and families prosperity (Almasi, 1991, p: 121).

Educational system was divided into three parts during Achamenian era as following:
First: Ethnic and social education
Second: Individual and personal education
Third: Economic and vocational education.

The first aim was to convert self-interest into cooperation with others, to familiarize the children with their rights and also other people’s rights, so that the children could respect these rights, as well as their ethnic pride. According to some documents, Iranian in their second aim, in addition to children’s bringing up, they paid attention to individual characteristics, and they not only fostered the characteristics, but also taught the children something useful, in order that, more than formal education, children could pass their free times. The purpose of third aim was to prepare the members of aristocrats for high level and commanding jobs, nothing was done for education of low rank social groups.

The supervision of clergy men was their own responsibility with no support from government. The vocation of father transferred to child and the knowledge of a teacher transferred to his pupil.

Apparently, there were three major goals about education:
1 – Attendance on society and country.
2 – Attendance on family and parents.
3 – Improvement of state and progression on the whole. (Zamiri, 1988, p: 19)

The details of those aims were:
1 – Morally and religious aim: belief, purification of mind and conscience which could be implemented under Zoroaster’s instructions called (good speech, good conduct, and good thinking).
2 – The aim of health and strength: braveness, righteousness, honesty, cleaness, and soundness.
3 – War aims: Security of borders, peace maintenance and defense of country.
4 – Economic aim: preparing food, prosperity, development of industries, and agriculture, irrigation, reading, business, and trading.
5 – Political aims: public relations, relations with other countries, friendship with neighbors.
The aims of education varied through Sasanian dynasty. Knowledge and science had found many branches, and accordingly the function of education progressed. Although, the dissemination of different religions had being increased such as Manavian, Mazdkian, Christian, and Buddhist religions. Iranian insisted in Zoroastrian religion because of having strong and useable national link with it. (Almasi, 1991, p: 81-85)

The aim of religious instruction which a big share had been appropriate was to maintain the religion. Training vocational skills, teaching arts were some of the features of education during Sasanian era. Iranian felt to be obligated to learn at least one of the various arts or skills.

**Teacher and student**

In courts, generally, the princes or governors had the function of teaching, and because of their relation with the hegemony and government felt great dignity. The Mogs (the clergymen of fire temples of fire worshiping) were the first teachers who later called Hirbud or Athravan. They, being from priesthood and the patterns of good doing, had a respectable position. The social position of a teacher was as much as what Zoroaster was called a teacher. As, In Isna (part 29 – article 8) it has been written: (Zoroaster was the teacher of honesty. Who established righteousness in the world that is why he was granted desirable speech). The priest teacher was obliged to study and to learn from the wisemen in order to grow conversational. At the Day of resurrection, on the pathway of paradise, he would be honored and pleasured, so, the teacher should be respected by student, and be blessed by god. (Sediq, 1975, p: 46) The teachers played a major role in the organization of society through instructing the kids that is why he was perfectly interested and respected by all. From long ago, in Iran history, the basic role of teachers has been to transfer culture and civilization from past generation to present generation and so.

**Advanced Education and Professors**

Advanced learning commonly supposed to have begun in 20th century or during Sasanian era by establishing Jandi Shapoor. We will be surprised, if we know that 2500 year ago at the time of Achamenian, there were fire temples in which practical and theoreial sciences were taught, under Dariush’s direct command. Avesta is a sing which clearly shows that the level of science was very advanced at the time of its writing. Avesta was authored some 2500 years ago, if we observe it factually and justly. The existence of advanced education will be inevitable in that era(Almasi, 1999, p: 40). Before Jandi shahpoor establishment, there had been important advanced schools, especially in medical in cities of Borsipa, Milet, and Erkhoni, at the time of Achamenians. When, in such subordinate cities, advanced schools were instituted under Achamenian’s influence. As a result, the major cities such as Balkh, Azarbyegan and Ray must have had educational centers. And also, it should be mentioned that on the outskirts of Madayen, in the south of Iran, there were Nastoorian churches, in which logic, philosophy, and astronomy were taught.(Almasi, 1991, p: 61). University, in its new concept, began with Jandi shahpoor which was one of the largest universities of that time. Jandi shahpoor University was a centre for teaching medicine, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, and an introduction to all branches of science. The correct form is Jandi
shapoor, according to Mojmal-O-Tavarikh, originally, it was beh as andi shapoor, meant. The city of shahpoor the faculties of medicine and astronomy through expanding and establishing these courses achieved extraordinary discoveries and inventions (Almasi, 1999, p: 40)In medical courses in the university, in addition to Iranian physicians; some physicians from Greece and India were employed as professors after closing of philosophy school of Aten In 529 and neglecting philosophers, some of them took refuge. They were accepted and provided shelter in Sasanian capital Tisfoon. Then they were employed in Gandi shahpoor University. They were occupied in teaching and searching. (Golshan Foomani, 1994). The university made no pause when Islam flowed into Iran. But while, Bagdad was becoming the center of gravity for Islamic education, the University of Jandi Shahpoor was gradually neglected and then collapsed. Jandi Shahpoor has still remained in Iranian Muslims as a centre which helped and support Islamic civilization. (Motahari, 1998, p: 377)

The aims of advanced education

In ancient time, the first feature was to make individuals be obedient before emperor. Absolute obedience was implemented on the base of main goals in two forms; first, in the base of governmental requirements, proper to judge’s instruction and preparing political men, court authorities, specialists, and clerks; second, was the religious base, the major goal of the two, resulting from social and political situation, was a response to stimulation and a need; there was a need for specialists to prepare the young for political professions. Advanced education in accordance with political purposes, was an absolute materialism. In contrast, advanced education, being in accordance with religious purposes, would be in perfect adaptability for religious instruction.

With respect to these aims, three kinds of science were taught: first, religious instructions of Christianity, depending on Jewish texts, were originated from Sham (Syria) and Palestine. This resulted in religiously educated young people who then were sent to Nastorian area churches in order to guide people. Regarding this, studying sacred books, prayer, and rites was basic. Second, philosophical science; its origin was Greece and later Alexandria, Nasiben, Araha and Gandi Shapoor. In this field, in addition to philosophy, students considered research, world history geography and rhetoric in order to combine religion with knowledge. The third kind of science was those Came from east like Iran and India. Indian man, named Kanga was one of physicians and translated some medical and psychological books from Hindi which were some of those basic references, taught for a long time in Gandi Shapoor (Dorrani, 1997, p: 50-51).

Pedagogic organization

The organization of pedagogy was not similar during some thousands years. Most of the time families, fire temples and courts were the centers for education. University was added during Sasanian’s era. The educational centers in courts were specified to aristocrat’s children who were prepared for governing. It was located in a field surrounded by governmental buildings and palaces, Far from traveling centers in order to protect the students from noise and crowd. The centre was divided into four branches: kids, young, men and old men. Each branch was divided into twelve parts and was run by a chief old men taught men, men taught the youngs, and the youngs taught the kids. (Hekmat, 1971, p: 380) Education developed and reached
high level in Sasanian era, because of suitable social and economic situation, including development of Paper industries and libraries. It was planned to teach the small children. More classes of people could meet their education needs (Gorbani, 1998).

Pedagogy planning

The plan consisted of three parts:
1) Moral and religious education 2) Physical instruction, and 3) reading and writing for some special groups.

Moral and religious education:
It was the most important part of education which was mentioned by Zoroaster in Avesta taking a special chapter for kids bringing up and religious teachers’ instruction. Iranian celebrated a special day when their children grew as old as being ready to fast and join worshipers. The ritual was performed by Moobedan (a religious position in fire – worshiping). (Sediq, 1975, p: 49) In the festival, the child was washed the child was fasten a sacred belt with three circles as a sign for three principals, good thinking, good speaking and good acting. The child by singing vocals admitted his belief. Righteousness was the main point in his bringing up and was affirmed and highlighted in Avesta. Zoroaster termed his religion, as righteousness. (Almasi, 1999, p: 15)

Physical instruction:
In Avesta (Zoroastrians’ sacred book), Weakness was attributed to devil. So, every Iranian was fostered to act against Ahriman (devil). Health and purity were praised always. They thought that if mind grew weak, body would be weak as well and if body grew weak, mind would be weak. So, they must have kept the both healthy (Irani, 1981, p: 76). Horse riding was basic sport for Iranian; they consider their horses as a member of families, during the prayers. They asked blessing for horses. After learning horse riding they began to learn archery and hunting. Polo playing was desirable sport. For the first time it created in Iran: they invested in polo. Children played on feet while the older played on horses. The aim for physical instruction was to foster braveness. All the sports were played on open area, such as archery, bowing swimming and. Polo some of them were aimed to bear hot and cold air, lake of food (Almasi, 1999).

Reading and writing
Reading writing and accounting were not common. Only businessmen and clerks needed to learn them. Only the children of aristocrats were taught in order to prepare them to become army commander, governmental official, judge, accouters and tax collectors (Golshan Foomani, 1994, p: 74-75).

The sorts of education
Generally, two ways were common in education: firstly, parents were allowed to educate their children on their own planning such as choosing teachers, and the method of teaching. Secondly, government intervenes in all factors having some specific goals. It created the behavior of children. The second way was common in ancient Iran. It was tried to stereotype children mentality by use of regulations and rules. It is written in Dinkert: (education should be considered as important as life. Everyone should reach high level of morality by leaning,
reading and writing. And act in accordance with religious instructions, advice-book and regulations. By use of education, they wanted their children to be useful in society. According to Minoy: (every one accepts their child to increase country pride and honor by some proof we can divide practical and speculative education as following:

1 – Moral and religion
2 – Governmental
3 – Army and military
4 – Political
5 – Industrial and Vocational
6 – Health
7 – Art
8 – Technical
9 – Girls Education

Women pedagogy
In ancient Iran, Girls were instructed household functions. In dinkert mentioned a quote from Avesta: Girls should be learnt household jobs. However, they were learnt horse ridding, and polo. But only aristocrats’ daughters were allowed to learn horse ridding and polo. As Nezami in Khamse has quoted that “Khosro Parviz” with his beloved “Shirin” had played polo. The girls from high class and nobles families could learn literature, art, and theorical (speculative) science. Some of them became advanced educated. It’s been written in (Manikan Hezar Dastan): (One five women, studying judiciary, met a Judicial consultant, they asked them some questions about guarantee. They found him unable to answer. Then they said that the mentioned subject had been written in an explanation written by (Mogan andarz bud). (Almasi, 1999, p: 13). Social discrimination was existed during kings’ sovereignty before Islam began to spread. But the styles of classification were different among Achamenian, Ashkanian and Sasnian era. For instance, during Achamenian period, Iranian society was divided into three classes: the priests, militarists and farmers. Later craftsmen were added as fourth social class. Ethnically, Iranians were Arian who was priests, militarists or cultivators. They regard industrial and trading vocations so low that they could not deserve Iranians. Sasanian’s new system was formed of four classes: Priests, militarists, clerks and craftsmen, and cultivators. Foundation of Iranian society, after ownership, was lineage. Each class with respect to social advantages had stable degree. Under social regulation no one was allowed to wish higher rank, which did not deserve. The purity of blood and usage of nobles was a considerable point for governmental officials. Their real-estate was recorded in governmental files. Ordinary people were not allowed to buy these properties. Moral and religious education of girls was their mothers’ responsibility. After father’s death, the permission for wedding was given by her mother if mother was died; the permission was given by the closest relatives. As soon as maturity, girls should have married. Propagation should not be delayed (Sadr, 1976, p: 245 -246).
Conclusion

Some four thousand years ago, there was an educational system in Iran which resulted in extraordinary conclusions. Six centuries B.D, because of powerful morality, national dignity, and braveness. King worship and patriotism, for the first time in the world, the biggest empire appeared which wide ranging from India to Danob and from Ethiopia to Jexartes whose justice and tolerance, and patience to contrasting views were a pattern for the next empires. Iran honorably spread civilization, culture, and thought it protected East thoughtful heritage against assailant nations. However, it had two disadvantages, first, pedagogy, exclusively was encircled by the prances nobles and aristocrats. Ordinary people were deprived of education. Second, it was the opinion indoctrination which destroyed the personality of people and made them like a machine without any self determination and character. Therefore, if the king was suitable, country situation would be proper and people would live in prosperity, and if the king was unsuitable, country situation would face disorder, civil war and people would live in trouble and poorness, Dariush, being a wise and merit empire, built a wide spread kingdom whose people lived in prosperity. Even the captured nations experienced his justice.

Although, the kings of Iran paid attention to education and religion, they did not build any organization; ordinary people could not gain education. Only aristocrats and nobles had the opportunity. The court educational centers taught the nobles children to prepare them for official position. For ordinary people, education was carried out in families. For the children learnt their fathers’ vocation, the instruction for job was not important. Child fate was determined from the early age. Each child inherited father’s job and producing tools (Abassi, 1996, p: 60).
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