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Objectives of Vedic Education

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Abstract: The present paper proposes to expound and examine the basic objectives of education as available in the Vedic sources, mainly the four Vedic Saṁhitās. Veda is held to be śruti, i.e., directly heard by the disciple from the mouth of his preceptor, so it also incorporates the idea of guru-śiṣya relationship in Vedic philosophy of education and signifies an integral approach towards the around development of an individual seeker under the able and immediate guidance of an enlightened seer.

Key Words: Vedas, Education, Guru, Śiṣya, Ācārya, Vidyā.

I. INTRODUCTION

Veda is not only the fountain-head of Indian philosophy and culture, language and literature, but also of Indian education. The Vedas proclaim that even though the human being is not born perfect, yet he can and should strive for the higher goals in life through self-motivated aspirations as well as noble inspirations from the learned and the realized ones. This is the core of Vedic education which aims at arousing an internal quest for awakening the human consciousness.

The word Veda is derived from the root √vid (=to know) and is aptly looked upon as the stock of knowledge (*Sarvajñānamayo hi saḥ. Manusmṛti, 2/7*). Vedic knowledge is basically progressive and ascent-oriented in the sense that life according to Vedic view is nothing but moving ahead and marching forward in all its aspects. The Veda impels man to become human and procreate the divine (*Ārohaṇam ākramaṇam jīvato jīvato 'yanam. AV, 5/30/7*) by rising above petty cravings and following the pure, divine path of progress.

II. FOREMOST OBJECTIVES OF VEDIC EDUCATION

The foremost objectives of Vedic education are to inspire an individual and enkindle in him the urge to transcend the limitations of sense-bound experience and reason-bound intellect and to awaken a higher level of consciousness by which he can comprehend the underlying essence of everything around him. Once this genuine awareness is generated within the seeker, he travels from the known to the unknown in order to gain access to the deeper, wider and higher realms of experience. It is in this basic exploration of truth that the seeker

knocks into the domain of an illumined seer who has already realized the truth and is empowered to direct his disciple towards the infinite source of knowledge.

According to Vedic philosophy the basic nature of a human being is integral, therefore true education should aim at revealing his overall potential. In other words, the principal objective of Vedic education has been to inspire man and inculcate in him both the curiosity and the capacity to comprehend each and everything around him in its true sense. From this point of view, education is not merely a collection of information, but realization of the divinity already inherent in man. The Vedic philosophy of education cultivates a holistic view beyond the multiplicities of human experience; it strives not only for intellectual quest but also for spiritual accomplishment which is the main feature of Indian philosophy. The Veda declares that vidyā or true knowledge is the knowledge of the self and it is the means for attaining immortality. The main subject of teaching, according to Vedic view is this philosophy of self or *brahmavidyā* which is the science of sciences, he who does not know it, cannot achieve anything even after knowing everything else; but he who has known it, has known all that is worth knowing.

However, it needs to be emphasized that the Vedic philosophy of education is not only a view of life, but also a way of life; although it lays greater stress on the knowledge of the self, yet it does not negate the world. The Veda draws a clear distinction between vidyā and *avidyā* (YV, 40/14) the knowledge of the essence and the knowledge of phenomenon;

between the knowledge of the self and the knowledge of the things: *parā vidyā* and *aparā vidyā* (*Muṇḍakopaniṣad*, 1/4) to use the *Upaniṣadic* terminology. In fact, the Vedic philosophy of education admits both, but there is never any doubt as to which one is higher and more desirable. It is not merely a 'question of survival' that the Vedic education focuses upon, but also the 'question of significance', which is its prime concern. Knowledge of things and processes as also of many more mundane subjects is very much there (as is evident from the exhaustive list of various professions enumerated in the 30th chapter of *Śukla Yajurveda*), but it is only secondary; the nature of reality or truth is the most important subject worthy of teaching and learning in Vedic view.

III. VEDIC SYSTEM OF EDUCATION VEDIC SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

Vedic system of education was free and flexible in the sense that the teacher is not bound with the rigidities prevalent in the examination-oriented modern system of education. Therefore, he is free to use separate methods of teaching for different students. Since all the students are not of the same level of their ability, hence the teacher employs different degrees of discipline for each one of them and does not demand from the student more than the highest effort of which he is capable. "There are pupils who are well endowed with sight and hearing but are unequal in the quickness of their mind. Some look like pools that reach to the mouth or armpit and some are like lakes in which a man can bathe" (RV, 10/71/7) is the poetic description of different levels of receptivity of the student.

This is a clear suggestion to prove that the teaching in Vedic system of education was not monotonous and the methods of education varied with the capacities of the pupils so as to suit each one's need of growth and development. In fact, the *gurukula* system of education where a constant and immediate association between teacher and taught is vital to education, provides a strong foundation to mould the external forms of teaching and to focus on the internal values of the same.

It is only due to personal touch or the human factor that the Vedic *ācārya* (*Hardas, Balashastrī*, Glimpses of the Vedic Nation) can claim to purify the whole personality of the pupil in all aspects and the disciple can pray to the teacher to transmit all the noble virtues that he has in him.

As far as the methods of teaching and learning are concerned, it may be asserted that in Vedas we find words like *adhyāyana*, *pravācāna* and *śravaṇa* (Santosh Kumar Das. The Education System of The Ancient Hindus) only and nowhere we come across words like *path* or *likh*, so it is mainly a method of lecturing on a part of teacher and method of listening or memorising on the part of student, reading and writing do not seem to be popular. Even otherwise, the Vedic tradition, being an oral tradition, lays greater emphasis on the sound of the spoken word, *śabda*. Therefore, recitation by the teacher and repetition by the student plays an important part in the Vedic Philosophy of education as is also evidenced by a verse in *Rgveda*.

Besides this questioning, contemplating and comprehending are also significant for the disciple so as to reach the inner secrets of learning, in fact the verses highlight all of these processes. Moreover, it is also suggested that the teacher should employ such interesting ways to teach that the student does not

forget his teachings, rather he absorbs them and realises them, there are several prayers to this effect that the Vedic *ācārya* explains the objects of heaven and earth with ease and clarity as *śiṣya* protects them through his tapas, in this mutual respect and reciprocation, the devas are satisfied and they feel happy. It is this living and loving relationship between the teacher and taught that constitutes the cornerstone of success for Vedic Philosophy of education.

On the basis of above, it may be asserted that togetherness of the guru and *śiṣya* is the watchword for Vedic education. The *ācārya* is held in high esteem in Vedic thought and the disciples are expected to have greatest reverence for him, since the treasure of knowledge can be obtained by reverence only. Education in Vedic Philosophy is not merely an objective, formal instruction of facts that can be imparted by an erudite scholar, but it is a complete code of life, a principle of knowing the roots from which knowledge springs and grows. It can, therefore be achieved only under the guidance of, and in communion with, an enlightened teacher, no less than *ṛṣi* as a guru symbolises the perfect synthesis of mature worldly wisdom as well as high spiritual awakening while the *śiṣya* as a *brahmacārī* represents a genuine seeker who is dedicated and committed to know and learn and is not satisfied until and unless he is totally immersed in the depth of knowledge; he is ready to toil till he is submerged in the stream of consciousness. This is precisely the background of calling him a *snātaka*, the bathed one, after he has completed his course of listening.

It is in this context that the reverence for the guru comes naturally and is not imposed externally; rather the seeker is psychologically impelled to have faith and respect for the teacher. Moreover, the knowledge which is being sought here is not ordinary bookish information and there are no other means of communication for transmitting it, hence all the more exceptional reverence was assigned to the teacher. The term *śiṣya* signifies that the seeker needs to be taught and ordained in such a manner that he is ready for self-sacrifice and consecration so as to carry the tradition of learning forward.

It is true that in later periods, there was a degeneration of this noble position assigned to the teacher in Vedic thought, it was when *ṛṣi* or the illuminated seer came to be replaced by one who was only a *paṇḍita* was also substituted by bookish teachers of the classroom. This process of degeneration gave way to the practice of *guruḍom* where hierarchy and not wisdom was weighed more in terms of respect, but it does not, in any way, diminish the value of Vedic *ṛṣis* who were teachers of mankind and who commanded reverence by the sheer dint of their selfless and sublime disposition. (*Kireet Joshi*, The Good Teacher and the Good Pupil, The Good Teacher and the Good Pupil).

The teacher, on his part, is aware of the limitation of his being a spiritual guide up to a certain point and yet he devotes all his potencies to arouse, awaken and develop the capabilities of the disciple to utmost perfection. Hence the teacher is only a guide to direct and lead the pilgrim of quest to his goal, but he is not the goal himself. He is there to help the disciple to choose the right path, then identify and develop his potential in the same manner as he acquired from seniors. Subsequently this disciple would also, be a guide and repay his debt by passing on the treasure of knowledge to posterity. This is an ongoing process of preparing generations of teachers and disciples and

maintaining the continuity of tradition. It may, therefore be asserted that the Vedic tradition is a constant, unbroken chain of *guru-śiṣya* relationship.

Today like all other systems of human society, education has also become utilitarian in character, where there is no intrinsic relationship between the teacher and taught, Vedic Philosophy of education is more than relevant in the sense that it provides a model of integral approach towards learning where the guru and *śiṣya* are not projected like the master and servant but are depicted as co-travellers dedicated to the same single goal, i.e., pursuit of perfection. Hence, the various aspects of relationship between both of them are not imposed externally, rather they are spontaneous and self-motivated. This is made possible because education, like all other aspects Vedic thought, is permeated by the perennial principle of *yajñā*, of sacrifice wherein both the guru and the *śiṣya* offering their best for kindling the divine light of knowledge a keeping it aflame. The attainment of this supreme knowledge is like tasting the divine soma, the bliss of begetting this benign boon is beyond words. But the amount of devoted discipline or *tapas* which is required to reach this goal is observed by both guru and *śiṣya* in such a friendly manner that they invoke each other with loving prayers. *Tapas* is the most radiant effulgence coming from the highest knowledge. ("*Tapa uttama mahah*". R.K. Mookerjee in Ancient Indian Education).

CONCLUSION

To sum up, it may be said that the ultimate goal of all education is knowledge, the objective of Vedic education is higher in the sense that it aims at integral knowledge of the Supreme Truth. Here, the guru as *ācārya* is only an external guide, since the real guide is seated within the seeker himself. Till such time that the seeker realises this truth for himself, he not only has to depend upon the teacher but also have the possible reverence for him as a symbol of the Supreme.

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