

The Sublimity of Paravidya in Education

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The article aims to reveal the two branches of knowledge as suggested by Vedichymns, especially Mundakopanishad - paravidya and aparavidya. In the past the rishis taught these two vidyas to their disciples and advise them to be free from the influence of aparavidya as it give sorrow, suffering and rebirth and encircle man in karma. Modern system of education gives emphasis on aparavidya and ignore paravidya Upanishad. ople in the world can claim a tradition and scriptures as numerous or as ancient as Indians. Hindu literature is the earliest, extensive and comprehensive writings in the world. They together called - Sacred wisdom of the Hindus- includes the Vedas, Upanishads, the puranas, the Epics - Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita. Among them, Vedas constitute the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature. The Vedas are called Apaurusheyatva ("being unauthored"). It implies that the Vedas are not authored by any agency, be it human or divine. The Vedas, were originally transmitted by a phenomenal human chain of memory, and only written down centuries after their actual compilation. This oral tradition still exists in India today. Apaurusheyatva.

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Introduction

Professor Klaus K. Klostermaier writes: "Since ancient times India has been famous for its wisdom and it's thought. The ancient Persians, Greek and Romans were eager to learn from its sages and philosophers. When, in the eighteenth century, the first translations of some Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita became available to the West, European philosophers rhapsodized about the profundity and beauty of these writings.

Here they encountered a fusion of philosophy and religion, a deep wisdom and a concern with the ultimate that had no parallel in either contemporary Western philosophy or Western religion. Indian philosophy is highly sophisticated and very technical and surpasses in both in volume and subtlety. Sir William Jones was always impressed by the vastness of Indian literature. He wrote: "Wherever we direct our attention to Hindu literature, the notion of infinity presents itself." In fact, Hinduism has always laid great stress on Pramanas (the means and instruments of correct knowledge).

Hindu philosophers have discussed at great lengths the Science of Noetic. The famous German scholar of the Vedas, Max Muller says: "In thus giving the Noetic the first place, the thinkers of India seem to have again superior to most of the philosophers of the West. "The system of education followed by our ancestors is collectively termed as Vedic system of

education. Etymologically the term Veda is derived from the Sanskrit word वेदाः Veda, or knowledge.

In appearance the term conveys different meaning to different context namely, 'knowledge', wisdom', 'reality', 'truth', 'self', etc.

True knowledge (paravidya and aparavidya)

According to the Vedas there are two types of knowledge paravidya (transcendental knowledge) aparavidya (material knowledge). In the Mundaka Upanishad, a student named Shaunaka goes to an enlightened sage, Angirasa, and asks a very pertinent and profound question, with great courage, thus: "What is that, O Bhagavan, through the knowledge of which everything becomes known?" Angirasa was happy to hear the meaningful question, and started his discourse by classifying the entire spectrum of things to be known into two categories: The paravidya (higher knowledge) and the aparavidya (lower knowledge).

The Upanishad says that both paravidya and the aparavidya are valuable, when it says:

(Mundaka Upanishad 1- 1-4) ("Two kinds of knowledge have to be acquired: thus the Knowers of Brahman have declared. These are (i) the lower and (ii) the higher.")

Tatpararṅ vedoyajur vedahsama vedo' tharva vedaḥśikṣakalpo vyakaraṇam niruktam chandojyotiṣam iti, athaparayaya tad akṣaram adhigamyate. (Mundaka Upanishad 1-5).

(Of these the lower one consists of the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, the Atharva Veda, phonetics, rituals, grammar, etymology, prosody and astronomy. But the higher one is that through which the Imperishable is attained.)

The aparavidya in the Upanishads

The specific name aparavidya should not imply and demeaning of the so-called Lower Knowledge. The aparavidya encompasses the entire spectrum of 'objects', that is, anything that can be objectified by our senses or mind. Anything that can be 'seen' is an object of aparavidya. Also, the aparavidya helps us to realize the ephemerality of the objective world. It enables one to earn one's bread and helps one to understand each object of universe separately. It is the intellectual knowledge. Under this category come all our worldly knowledge, such as - science, arts, commerce, management, technical knowledge, etc. We are depending on science or arts or technology seeking pleasure, comfort and happiness in our life.

It gives humans pleasure and happiness and also stretches irrepressible emotions – happiness, anger, grief, depression, fear, gluttony, mood out, boredom, love, attraction, affection, etc. All these are related to mind, ego (ahamkaram) and intellect. It is essential for man to live in this world, but hardhearted use of aparavidya or lower knowledge creates problems or spoils our mind. The so called lower knowledge closely blends our self with body. So, emotions and problems of worldly life spoil one's intellect, mind and body. So, use of aparavidya in our daily life requires carefulness (jagrata, cheta).

Paravidya in the Upanishads

The second category of knowledge is the paravidya, or higher level and form of knowledge. It gives insight into the true nature of the world. It gives the consciousness that all the worldly things we see with our naked eyes are not eternal but perishable. Even our emotions and feelings are not permanent and may change from place to place, time to time and person to person. Thus, reliance on the worldly possessions, emotions and feelings, and material things gives one sorrow and sufferings. It forces one to do karma and take re-birth.

One should realize that everything which can be seen is changing, thus the imperishable can never be an object of our knowledge or trust. So, the study should be about the very knower, his own self, his own essence, which can never be seen by our senses. One should know the meaningless of doing activities here for worldly things. It doesn't mean that all should live in this world without doing, working, exploring or investigating anything but before doing, learning the simple principle that all material objects are perishable and all emotions and desires are not permanent. It is our misconception that the real world is true.

On the other hand, the paravidya or higher knowledge destroys ignorance or that which leads to perfection or the means of attaining oneself with the true existence. Brahma-vidya is the technique or the Science enabling one to reach absolute Experience. This Knowledge is attained through great effort in the forms of viveka, vichara, vairagya and abhyasa. Such instruction was given to the pupils in ancient Vedic period. The higher vidya is the Knowledge propounded in the Upanishads.

The ancient Indian gurus (teachers, scholars) gave emphasis on the paravidya and encouraged their disciples to practice aparavidya for sustainability. For subsistence our body needs job, money, cloths, dwelling place and family and for exercising these aparavidya is essential. But at the same time, one should be vigilant of the 'attachments' branded by aparavidya. The simple way to free from the bandage of aparavidya is the awareness about the matter that 'I' am not the 'Body', I am not the 'Mind' and I am not the 'Intellect' (mano – budhi -ahamkaram). All these may decay, or change or perish.

The essence of paravidya revealed from the words of Shree Sankaracharya Naahammanushyona cha deevayakshow Na Brahmana Kshatriya vaisyasudra Na brahmacharinagrahevanasto Bhisurnachahamnijabodharoopa. (Hastamalakagitam 1-2)

(I am not man, not demigod or Yaksha, not Brahman, Kshatriya, vaisya or sudra (not belonging to any of the varnas), not brahmachari, householder, forest-dweller or sanyasi (not belonging to any of the four stages of life); but I am self-knowledge alone.) (Hastamalakagitam 1-2).

Conclusion

The conclusion of this brief discussion is that vidya, the system of Vedic knowledge balances our mind and intellect. Propounded by the highly enlightened sages of ancient times, the vidyas form the base of human personality and instruct the learners to be able to separate the

essence of knowledge from less meaningful ones. Finally, they put emphasis on the very essence of the Vedic system of education as Self-awareness.

A Brief Description of the Vedic System of Education

The important aims of education in Vedic period are:

- Education for other world lines
- Character formation
- All round development for Personality
- Intellectual Development
- Spiritual Development
- Preparation for living
- Preserving and Transmitting Culture
- Education only a means and not an end in itself

Curriculum

1. Vedic Literature

- The Rig-Veda
- The Yajurveda
- The Sam Veda
- The Atharavaveda

2. Vedangas

3. Hetuvidya

4. Silpa- vidya

5. Physical Education

6. Stress on other worldliness

Methods of Instruction

The important methods of learning are:

- Listening (Sravana is listening to words texts as they uttered by the teacher)
- Deliberation (Manana or Chintan is the process of deliberation or reflection of the topic taught)
- Meditation (Nidhidhyarama represents the highest stage)
- Illustration
- Project Method

Duration of Education

In the house of the teacher, the student was required to obtain education up to the age of 24, after which he was expected to enter domestic life.

Role of Teacher

The teacher or acarya in the Vedic age was responsible not only in imparting knowledge – religious as well as secular, but also in molding the character and personality of the pupils of his asrama. The acarya of the Gurukula system was an affectionate father, an effective teacher, and a person of high moral and spiritual qualities. He maintained discipline by the influence of his personality. He was sincere and honest to his work. He taught with his heart and soul. He also performed the functions of a householder performing the five daily yajnas and observing vows. He led a disciplined life.

Role of Mother in Education

A mother should impart education to her children so as to broaden their horizon. At this stage good manners are to be taught so that the children behave properly with the elders and in assemblies.

The Student

The student in the Vedic school was called brahmacarin. He had to dedicate his life for the sake of gaining knowledge, leading an enlightened life. In his formative life he must lead an austere and disciplined life. The Upanishads clearly describe the qualities required for a brahmacarin. A student had to be calm, patient, self-restrained and self-denying. The student's prayer included his longing for the realization of a full life. Thus, the main aim of the Vedic educational system was to produce a rational individual, free from passions, full of universal affection, continuously self-educating and striving to reach the highest goal.

Gurukulas were the dwelling houses of gurus situated in natural surroundings away from noise and bustle of cities. Parents sent their wards at the age of five years to nine years according to their castes after celebrating their Upanayan Sanskar. Pupils lived under the roof of their guru called 'antevasin' under the direct supervision of their Guru. Gurukula as the name indicates was the family of the teacher and his residence where the students used to stay during the period of study. Gradually, the Gurukula were extended to include a number of buildings. However, the institution was built up around the family of teacher.

The primary duty of the student was to serve the teacher and his family. The students were like sons of the teacher and the whole institution lived like family. Parishads were bigger educational institutions where several teachers used to teach different subjects. This may be compared to a college Parishad in Upanishads, has been used for a conference of learned men, assembled for deliberations upon philosophical problems.

Later on, the 'Parishads' were set up at the places where learned men lived in good number and gradually these institutions became permanent centres of imparting knowledge. In the words of Dr. R. K. Mukherjee Parishad correspondences to University of students belonging to different colleges. Vedic age had, thus, a system of education in which "hearing, chanting and memorizing, played a great part, assimilation of idea took place through a well- planned life of service to teacher, contemplation, all under his guidance. The Vedic period favoured women education.

Reference

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Published where? Name the place

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