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Tradition and hereditary of teacher and disciple in Sanskrit literature

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Introduction

Winternitz says “if we wish to understand the beginnings of our own culture, if we wish to understand the oldest Indo-European culture, we must go to India, when the oldest literature of an Indo-European people is preserved” and Max Muller father of Indology in his work “What can India teach us” observes “Take any of the burning questions of the day whether it be laws or customs or primitive art or primitive science everywhere, you have to go to India, whether you like it or not because some of the most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India and in India only”.

The definition of Teacher and Disciple

These observations hold good even in the case of the teacher, disciple relationship, - a perfect synthesis of the best human relationship forged by our ancient people. The teacher is referred to by the terms विद्वान्, आचार्य, पण्डित, वेदवित्, श्रुतिपराग, बहुश्रुत, गुरु and संस्कारसम्पन्न etc. the student is referred to as ब्रह्मचारी, विद्यार्थी and अन्तेवासी etc. All these terms employed with reference to गुरु and शिष्य have wider meaning. For example the ieg© is defined as one who removes the inner darkness present in the heart of the student and lightens his soul with the lamp of knowledge.

गु-शब्दस्त्वन्धकारस्याद् रु-शब्दस्तन्निरोधकः।

अन्धकारनिरोधित्वाद् गुरुरित्यभिधीयते। (इति विद्वज्जनवचनम्)

And the disciple is called शिष्य which means शासयितुं (or) शास्तुं योग्यः शिष्यः i.e. one who can be disciplined. In this way गुरु-शिष्यसम्बन्ध ad developed in an ideal manner in Indian society. The Vedas, otherwise known as श्रुति are the result of this oral tradition maintained intact by the harmonious गुरु-शिष्यपरम्परा ।

Our ancient educational institutions गुरुकुलाः were the main centers of education till organized institutions came into existence. The teacher who takes charge of immature children and makes them worthy and useful citizens in society was naturally held in high reverence. It was the duty of the teacher to lead the student from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. The lamp of learning is concealed under a cover and the teacher removes it and lets out the light.

यथा घटप्रतिच्छन्ना रत्नराजा महाप्रभाः।

अकिञ्चित्करतां प्राप्तास्तद्विद्या चतुर्दशः॥ (याज्ञवल्क्यवचनम्)

A teacher was also expected to regard his pupils with affection and kindness, infact he was to look upon them as his very children. Such an attitude on the part of the teacher was all the more necessary, for in majority cases a student left his natural home at a tender age and came to live with the teacher as a member of the latter's family. Under such an arrangement the entire personality of the child was principally of the teacher's making.

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With the rise of Vedic knowledge and several systems of Philosophy in the age of Upanisads, the reverence for the teacher (गुरु) became still more intensified, for spiritual salvation depended almost entirely upon his proper guidance.

नैषा तर्केण मतिरापणेया,
प्रोक्तान्ये सुज्ञानाय प्रेष्टा। (कठोपनिषत् 1.2.9)
तद्विज्ञार्थं गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत्,
समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम्। (मुण्डकोपनिषत्, प्रथममुण्डकम्,
द्वितीयखण्डः 12 श्लोकः)

So a student who wanted to comprehend the nature of परब्रह्मन् the ultimate and absolute truth one must approach a real teacher who has समुन्नत जन्म, संस्कार and विद्या-

जन्मना जायते शूद्रः संस्काराद्विज उच्यते। (स्कन्दपुराणम्, भाग-6.
नगरकाण्डः, 239 अध्यायः।)

So a competent and systematic teacher who would unreservedly place at the disposal of his pupil the essence of all his experience was naturally glorified. This glorification of the teacher must have produced great psychological influence on the students for childhood is the hay day of personal influence. The student should have absolute faith (श्रद्धा and भक्ति) in the teacher and also in relationship is symbolically represented in the famous sloka.

चित्रं वटतरोर्मूले वृद्धाशिष्याः गुरुर्युवा ।
गुरोस्तु मौनं व्याख्यानं शिष्यास्तु छिन्नसंशयाः ॥ (दक्षिणामूर्तिस्तोत्रम्,
श्लोकः -3)

From this it is evident that पारमार्थिकज्ञान can be imparted only through silence and in a state of meditation. Since the teacher was held in high veneration, he was naturally expected to possess several qualifications. The student should look upon the teacher as ideal person of very high character. He was to be patient (संयमधना महनीयगुणात्मा) and treat his students impartially. Above all he should be a sound scholar in his own branch of knowledge and he was to continue his reading throughout his life.

यावज्जीवमधीते विप्र

Profound scholarship however was not sufficient for the teacher. He must have a fluent delivery, readiness off wit, presence of mind, a great stock for interesting anecdotes and must be able to expound the most difficult texts without any difficulty or delay.

प्रवृत्तवाक् चित्रकथः ऊहवान् प्रतिभानवान्।
आशु ग्रन्थस्य वक्ता च यः सः पण्डित उच्यते॥ (महाभारते,
विदुरनीतिः 33.33)

In short he should be not only a scholar but also an adept in teaching, then only he would be a great teacher.

शिष्टा क्रिया कस्यचिदात्मसंस्था
सङ्क्रान्तिरन्यस्य विशेषरूपा ।
यस्योभयं साधु सशिक्षकाणां
धुरि प्रतिष्ठापयितव्य एव। (मालविकाग्निमित्रम्, 1.15)

The teacher must further be able to inspire as well as to instruct, his piety, character scholarship and cultured life should be able to exercise a subtle and permanent influence over the young students sitting at his feet for their lessons.

सत्यञ्च धर्मञ्च पराक्रमञ्च भूतानुकम्पां प्रियवादितां च
द्विजातिदेवातिथिपूजनञ्च पन्थानमाहुस्त्रिविदस्य सन्तः॥
धर्मे रतास्सत्पुरुषैस्समेतास्तेजस्विनो दानगुणप्रधानाः।
अहिंसका वीतमलाश्च लोके भवन्ति पूज्या मुनयः प्रधानाः ॥
(रामायणम्, 2.101.30, 31, पृ. 354)

Disciple's Life: A student should strictly follow the daily routine as prescribed by the teacher like doing सन्ध्यावन्दनं etc. His life should be characterized by dignity, decorum and self discipline and should devote to acquire a sound grounding in the subject of his choice but also in the culture and religion of his times. In order to infuse piety, it was therefore laid down that they should regularly offer prayers both morning and evening. In order to inculcate good conduct and manners, it was insisted that they should show proper courtesy and respect to their elders and teachers (शुश्रूषस्व गुरुन्). In order to develop character, emphasis was given on morality, lying, slandering and backbiting were never to be indulged in.

मितनिद्रा मिताहारो मितवस्त्रपरिग्रहः।
मितभाषणमेकैकं भूषणं ब्रह्मचारिणाम्।
(पाताञ्जलयोगदर्शने साधनपादः, 30.4 ब्रह्मचारिणः लक्षणानि।)
सुखार्थी चेत् त्यजेत् विद्यां विद्यार्थी चेत् त्यजेत् सुखम्।
सुखार्थिनः कुतो विद्या कुतो विद्यार्थिनः सुखम्। (चाणक्यनीतिः,
10.3)

Firm faith in sacred works, good natural power of comprehension, intrepidity well cultivated power of speech, well timed action and presence of mind – these qualities guarantee success in the works undertaken by a student.

शास्त्रेषु निष्ठा सहजश्च बोधः
प्रागल्भ्यमभ्यस्तगुणा च वाणी। (सिद्धान्तशिखामणिः, 10.29)
कालानुरोधः प्रतिभानवत्त्वम्
एते गुणाः कामदुघाः क्रियासु। (सुभाषितम्, पृ. 833)

Conclusion

These useful habits during the formative period of childhood were expected to be of good use to them throughout their life. Students were to attend their classes regularly and listen to lessons attentively and master and digest that the teacher taught.

The relationship between teacher and pupil was regarded as filial in character (पुत्रमिवैनमभिकाङ्क्षन्) by our people. Apart from imparting intellectual education and helping spiritual progress he was the spiritual father of his pupils and was held morally responsible for their drawbacks. He was always to keep a guard over the conduct of his pupils. He should also let him know what to cultivate and what to avoid and what he should be earnest and what he should neglect.

गुरुशुश्रूषया विद्या पुष्कलेन धनेन वा।
अथवा विद्यया विद्या चतुर्थं नोपलभ्यते॥

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