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Education a man needs today as depicted in upanishads

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Abstract

It contains with the Samhitas of RigVeda Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda and later it is developed in to Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. The study of Vedas requires authenticity on Vedangas. Upanishads teach the Vedanta ie Philosophy. There are six types of theistic philosophies Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaisheshika, and Mimāṃsā & Vedānta Philosophy. Upanishads along with darshanas teach the philosophy along with many things that could help humanbeing to develop him as perfect humanbeing. The Upanishads particulaary have discussed the education that could be useful for the people even in these modern days. This essay highlights some of the points related to Education a man needs today from important Upanishads.

Keyword: Upanishads Brihadaranyaka, Taittiriya, Chandogya, the two types of Vidya Para and Aparā

Introduction

“सहनाववतु। सह नौ भुनक्तु। सह वीर्यं करवावहे। तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु।
माविद्विषावहे। ओम् शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः” ॥

The Chandogya Upanishad tells us the story of Nārada who approached sage Sanatkumāra asking him to take him across this ocean of sorrow in which he finds himself in spite of his vast knowledge of several subjects. Sanatkumāra asked him what subjects he knew.

Nārada reeled over a long list of the subjects he studied and mastered- the four Vedas, history, mythology, grammar, the rites for the manes, mathematics, and the subjects of natural disturbances, mineralogy, logic, ethics, and etymology and so on ¹.

Sanatkumāra said: "All these, whatsoever that you have learnt are merely names". यद्वै किञ्चित्
अध्यगीष्ट नामैवेतत् ² ॥ He seemed to be saying what Shakespeare's Hamlet said to Polonius: "Words words, words " ; in a totally different context, of course.

We also know the story of the Pandit and the boatman. The Pandit was trying to sound the depths of the boatman's ignorance. He asked the boatman, who was ferrying him, if he knew grammar, etymology, astrology and so on. And the boatman patiently replied 'no' to all the questions. The Pandit pitied the boatman and said that he is lost. Suddenly, the boatman asked the Pandit if he knew swimming. And when the Pandit said no, the boatman said: 'Sorry Sir, you are lost. We are caught in a storm.'

These two stories relate to two types of guru, Tirthaṅkara. One helps us to cross over Death, called Life. "avidyaya mrityum teertva" which means "having crossed death through avidyā, ignorance" The other takes us to the shores of immortality. "Vidyayā amrithamashnute" says the Upanishad ³.

These two stories stress the need for synthesizing the worldly science and the world less spirit, the secular and the spiritual, knowledge and wisdom, aparā and parā, Avidyā and Vidyā.

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¹ ऋग्वेदं भगवो अध्येमि यजुर्वेदं सामवेदम् आथर्वणम्, चतुर्थमितिहासपुराणं पृथक्च वेदानां वेदम् पित्र्यं राशिं देवं निधिम्

वाकोवाक्यमेकायनं देवविद्यां ब्रह्मविद्यां भूतविद्यां क्षत्रविद्यां नक्षत्रविद्यां सर्पदेवजनविद्याम् पतद्भगवो अध्येमि।।

² yad vai kincha etad adhyageestha nameva etat"- Chandogya Upanishad. 7.2.3

³ अविद्यया मृत्यं तीर्त्वा विद्ययामृतमश्नुते। Ishabasyopanishad

It is a common allegation against the Indian Society that its educational scheme is centered on individual salvation, and that it does not focus on improving the skills necessary for the economic upliftment of the masses. It is an altogether different question if the knowledge revolution, which we claim we are witnessing, does lead to an egalitarian distribution of material wealth to all the sections of the society. The charge is that the Indian tends to look inwards more than outward. We blame this "monumental inwardness" in the words of Amitav Ghosh, for lack of scientific progress in India. But this allegation is charged with ignorance. Ancient Indian made astounding progress in every scientific discipline. They called the Earth 'bhoogolam' long before Copernicus and Galileo. They called the universe 'Jagat' Millennia before the modern astrophysicist hesitantly stated that the whole universe seems to be in a state of motion. They knew that not only the Earth, but the stratosphere rotates. For, if the Earth alone rotates, an object that goes up cannot fall at the same place, as the earth shall have moved away. In every branch of physical and natural sciences they have gone to incredible details, to the Infinite- simals, hair rising hair splitting. 'The Interpretation of Dreams' by Sigmund Freud is considered a path breaking work in the west. The Muṇḍaka Upanishad, millions of years ago, understands the importance of the dream state in the study of the one consciousness. These were the days in the west when there was hardly any scientific search. Much later, very much later, when science started making what they thought 'discoveries', the scientists were branded heretics and burnt alive. These very people now ridicule the Indian Society as underdeveloped in scientific fields.

However, it is true spirit India, for partly historical reasons; fell backward in science and technology. And the west made giant strides in the material area. India's neglect of the science and technology resulted in poverty and social stagnation. And the west's neglect of the inner development led to a society of neurosis. The west is turning to the East for solutions to its spiritual problems. And India is looking up to the World Bank and the IMF. So, the solution to the common 'Western Science coupled with *Vedānta*'.

But, the real question is how much of what?'

The Muṇḍaka Upanishad speaks of *parā* and *aparā vidyā*. The *aparā vidyā* encompasses all the worldly knowledge, the Vedas, the Vedāṅgas, every text and every branch of external science, that is to say, all 'words'. The *parā* is 'The word' that is beyond the words.

The *parā* is an exploration of the Infinite inner universe, a chanting of the pathless path to mukti. As Parāśara puts it, "*Sā vidyā yā vimuktaye*"⁴ (That is true learning which liberates).

But, the two, the secular and spiritual are not contradictory. In fact, Indian thinking did not recognize the validity of the dichotomy of the secular and the spiritual. They are different points on the same scale. That which neglects the one at the expense of the other is not a properly integrated educational scheme. In the words of Swami Vivekananda again: "The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion - is it worth the name?".

Let us see what the Upanishads say on this-

"*andham tamah pravishanthi vidyamupaasate. tato bhuya iva te tamo ya u vidyaayaam rataah*"⁵. ("Those who are devoted

to avidyā enter into blinding darkness. Into greater darkness, as it were, do those, who delight in Vidyā".)

Here the term Vidyā may be taken to mean the Para vidyā and Avidyā may be taken to mean *Aparā Vidyā*. Shankara, though does not assign these significations to these terms. He gives a different interpretation to this verse in the context of his philosophical position on the irreconcilability of Karma and *Jñāna*. Many have disagreed with his interpretation. Let us also not confine the meaning to the context of Shankara's philosophical position. Anyway, to disagree with Shankara and discard his interpretation is a mark of modernity and progressivism.

The *Isha* verse, which also occurs in the Brihadāraṇyaka upanishad⁶ points out the perilous, fallacy of pursuing the worldly or the spiritual in isolation and to the exclusion of the other. A society that neglects the arts and sciences of the world plunges into darkness and death. The masses caught in the web of poverty and debt; choose death as a way out. That is the death the Upanishads are speaking of our society is now in that terrible state of darkness and death. This is the result of exclusive devotion to *vidyā*. *Avidyā* is equally important. In fact, it is more important and should come first. Give bread first. God can wait. *Avidyā* is essential and imperative to lift the society out of the morass it has sunk into the morass of economic inequality, social indignity.

While there can be no two opinions about the need for the economic upliftment of large masses of people in our society, it may be worthwhile to review the position that obtained as recently as half a century ago. Even surveys conducted by the British government revealed a sound educational system that obtained in the villages before the British came in. With far fewer funds, sometimes with no funds, people were educated. Leave the village schools alone. The vocational training that was imparted at the family was sufficient to keep the villages self-reliant for their needs.

The British government robbed these skills of the village crafts. Their hands lost their skills. It is no less an atrocity than cutting off their hands.

The present education policy is that no one should learn without paying for it. That is the beginning of the trade of education, displaying the traditional trades that were handed down from father to son.

Another aspect of our educational philosophy is that education is a right. And everyone scrambles to collect his rights. We want education, whether we need it or not. We spend millions on things which do not require teaching. For example, the teaching one's mother tongue, Is it necessary to teach it? Even natural activities are being taught, parenting, husbanding. And what not. There is no speaking of the mad rush for college degrees, which are needless, worthless. Everything has to be learnt, of course, at a price. Common sense has become uncommon, and a commercial commodity. We go on adding degrees to degrees, which do not increase wisdom, which do not produce a complete man. Man is totally dehumanized, unfit for social life and unwilling. No one knows how to rehumanize the dehumanized man. You can turn a fish into stew. But no one knows how to reverse. There are two reasons for this mindless rush for so called education. One is the failure of traditional trades and crafts. The other is the superciliousness of the educated towards the uneducated. It is this same superciliousness, this unseemly attitude of high

⁵ अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति विद्यामुपासते। ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ विद्यायां रताः। (Isha upanishad. 9.)

⁶ 4.4.10

⁴ सा विद्या या विमुक्तये।

and low that led to the collapse of the caste system. It is because some castes considered themselves as high and looked down upon other castes as low that the caste system failed. It is the failure of Vedic Vision of oneness of all existence. We may not aspire to attain the lofty levels of illiteracy of a Ramakrishna Paramahansa. But it is also not necessary to look upon education as an essential element of culture. 'How much land does a man need?' This is the title of a story by Tolstoy. We can talk of a revival of the bygone glory only when we redefine our educational goals. The glory of the teacher depends on the type of education we seek reflects the needs of the times and the structure of the changed society. In many times there are teachers, necessarily few, who uphold the glory of the noble profession, whether in the secular or in the spiritual subject. And we should strive to give them the glorious recognition they deserve.

Reference

1. Brihadaranyakopanishat
2. Chandogyopanishat
3. Mundakopanishat
4. Taittiriyanopanishat