

Guru Shisya Parampara

Guru-Sishya Parampara is the teacher-disciple lineage. Being a civilization that respects experiential knowledge, India holds high respect for the teacher of such knowledge. It is separated from the socio-political structure and spans across social/political divisions since such knowledge is beyond those divisions. This is the institution that kept religion and theological practices and beliefs from occupying place in governance, and also kept the administrative structure from interfering with the institution of knowledge.

The centre of the ancient system of education was the Guru, the preceptor. The ancient schools were largely located far away from the din and bustle of cities in sylvan retreats in an atmosphere of solitude and serenity conducive to mental concentration as the main appliance of education.

There is no doubt that ancient learning placed supreme importance on the Guru. But then it was guru who equipped his disciples with self-sufficiency, the most important survival skill.

Guru's role is directive but at the same time it is interactive rooted in negotiation. In other words a teacher helps a student to construct knowledge rather than to reproduce. Teachers provide tools so that students go for

- i) a problem solving and ii) Inquiry -based learning activities.

It becomes possible when a student is not a passive but active participant in the learning process. The spirit of enquiry, questioning and requestioning was a dominant part of the ancient system: *prasnena*, *pariprasnena* and *pratiprasnena* i.e. straight questioning (*prasnena*), when the student is not satisfied he asks again (*pariprasnena*) and then a situation may arrive when the

student may say, I accept your answer but can there be another answer to the query(*pratiprasnena*).

But any kind of questioning or requestioning should not display the student's false ego or insolence. Hence it is said; learn by humble reverence, by enquiry and by service:

tad viddhi pranipatena, pariprasnena sevaya

Acquisition of knowledge through experiences and reflection which conducts a student to go beyond

“knowing about” to

“knowing how” and

“being able to do”.

When Lord Buddha said “atmodipo bhava” “be a lamp to yourself.” It does not mean that the teacher will provide you the lamp. The teacher will just teach you the process of how to make a lamp—he will not hand you over the lamp. The lamp will have to be made by the student.

The cottage of each guru became a residential school- the gurukul. The teacher's admission of the pupil was a solemn and sacred ceremony known as *upanayana* or initiation *ceremony*. The ceremony took three days, during which the teacher held the pupil within him to impart to him a new birth, whence the pupil emerged as a dvija or twice-born. His first birth he owes to his parents and second birth is spiritual: it unfolds his mind and soul.

A teacher acts as a cognitive guide and creates environments in which the learner interacts meaningfully with academic material and adopts a method to impart and imbibe education that can balance mind and heart and body and spirit.

During residential pupilage the student had to live a controlled life determined by the institution of *brahmacharya*. Education was a mode of life characterized by self-control.

A student's duty was to walk to the woods and collect fuel. His second duty was to tend the teacher's house and cattle and live with his teacher as his *antevasin (companion)*. A teacher is a guru as well as an *acharya* which means the one who teaches good conduct and behaviour. An *acharya* is like a drill master, demonstrating the values in their lives before asking the students to follow and practice whatever they profess.

It is (i) his own thinking, (ii) his discipline of mind and (iii) refinement of taste that he is able to pass on to his students. Tending the house was training for him in self-help, in dignity of labour.

From the stories of many women scholars and philosophers of great height like Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra, Kadru, Devjani, Viswambara etc one can realize that during Vedic period, about 5000 years ago, women had the freedom to receive education, write treatises and participate in debates on philosophical speculation.

The gurukul education of 12 years ended with *samavartana*- the convocation ceremony which was the last day of a student's life in the ashrama or the gurukul.

On the scheduled date, the snatakas, the graduates had to confine themselves indoors till midday, lest the morning sun should feel inferior to the lustre and brilliance of the students. Then the students after renouncing their gurukul dress bathed in scented water. Richly dressed, the student offered guru-dakshina and prayed that he be liked by all. The teacher after performing the usual rituals defined the responsibilities of the student in the subsequent phases of life. Thereafter the teacher gave the convocation address in the form of commandments:

Speak the truth and practice righteousness: *satyamvada, dharmam chara;*

Don't neglect your self study:

Swadhyayan ma pramadh;

Don't resist from doing your work in a dexterous way:

Kushlan na pramaditavyam

Worship mother, father, teacher and guest as God:

*Matridevobhava, pitridevobhava, acharyadevo bhava,
athitidevobhava*

There are many others, but I would like to confine myself into these to prove that i) morality, ii) codes of conduct, iii) modesty, iv) duty, v) wisdom and reason, vi) worldly knowledge for a profession/vocation as well as higher goals of life were goals of education.

The guru-shishya tradition, lineage, or *parampara* denotes a succession of teachers and disciples in traditional Indian culture and religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism. It is the tradition of spiritual relationship and mentoring where teachings are transmitted from a *guru* "teacher" to a *śiṣya* "disciple" or *chela*. Such knowledge, whether it be Vedic, agamic, architectural, musical or spiritual, is imparted through the developing relationship between the guru and the disciple. It is considered that this relationship, based on the genuineness of the guru, and the respect, commitment, devotion and obedience of the student, is the best way for subtle or advanced knowledge to be conveyed. The student eventually masters the knowledge that the guru embodies.

The teaching and learning (way of education) in ancient India from Vedic period till today is followed on oral tradition based on Guru-Shishya Parampara (the Teacher-Disciple tradition) be it a learning of sanskrit or music. Students stayed in the ashram of Gurus, till they complete their education. Their needs of lodging and boardings are fulfilled by ashrams and students also offer their

hard labour for collecting needful and get education, which is based on Shruti (hearing and repeating) and Smriti (memory what they learn and produce) after their Gurus taught. We still can trace this system in sanskrit learnings in all the four corners of India, as well as in music also.

Certain scholars make a slight distinction between Gurukula system and Guru-sishya Parampara, though the mode of learning, on principle, was almost the same. The difference is that the Gurukula system can be compared to the present day residence or boarding school. Thus, a group of students lived with and studied under one single Guru, till they completed their education. It may be noted here that from Vedic times, any art form, including music, was taught through this method.

The *Guru-sishya Parampara* is considered as learning on a one-to-one basis (the teacher and a single student), the student being a part of the teacher's household and learning without any time bindings, as per the teacher's convenience.

The *Gurukula* system is an effective medium to preserve traditional art forms without losing the values for this many generations. The family tradition of imparting education was also prevalent and this trait was also responsible in preserving the Indian music system of different gharanas – both Hindustani and Karnataka. The student had the advantage of being in the presence of the Guru all the time, along with the freedom on the part of the Guru to teach according to individual talents and capacities. More importantly, through constant observation, a good student could imbibe the central features of the Guru's music and his personality. The reverence for the Guru and strict obedience were part of the *Gurukula* tradition. Until recently the *Gurukula* system was hailed as the most useful system for music education, also because one pursued the art full-time and had the scope to do so.

Several prominent musicians and composers have been a product of this system.

In Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism the Guru, the spiritual mentor ranks in stature second only to God. In fact in many traditions Guru is valued even more than god. It is the Guru who introduces you to god. There is a famous couplet of kabir, which says that kabir is perplexed to see both the guru and god standing before him and he can not decide whose feet he should touch first. In the second line of the couplet Kabir says, I bow to you. O guru, as you show me the way to God:

Guru govind dou khare kake lagu pay,

Balihari guru apno govind deo batey

- Guru is a human form through which the power and grace of divine can manifest. The one divine teacher, called Ishwara who speaks through innumerable human gurus .

The famous historian, A.L.Bhasham has once said in his book, 'Wonder that was India' that the remarkable system of mnemonic checks and the patience and brilliant memories of many generations of teachers and students preserved the Vedas for posterity in much the same form as that for in which they existed nearly a thousand years before Christ. The best part of it that even today this system of guru shishya parampara is to be found in different parts of India where traditional instructions in Sanskrit learning and music are imparted much in the same way as was done thousand of years ago in India.