

The Policy of Education as Reflected in *Siksavalli* of the *Taittiriopanisad*

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Abstract

The modern system of education has been built primarily upon the foundation of ancient educational ideals and the practices of modern education have been largely influenced by past experiences. Vedic views are the root of our civilization, hence we cannot neglect the sphere of those views from which our civilization has developed to its present form. The Upanisads are the most important part of the Vedic literature. They guide the students through the valuable advices of the preceptors for choosing the correct path in life. The policy of education described in our Upanisads had some special characteristics and it is to be noted that it could be connected to the modern field of education. In this regard, we may refer to the *Siksavalli* section of the *Taittiriopanisad* where education has been handled as a philosophical policy where the teacher stands at the beginning, the students at the end and the subject of teaching in the middle. Through this paper an attempt is being made to interpret the policy of education reflected in the *Siksavalli* section and its utilization in modern educational fields. A query of investigation would also be made to explain how the Vedic people plunged into the world of unknown only with the help of their powerful intellect and deep insight and managed to explain the happenings of the world through their own perception, without any help of modern science and technology. This paper will try to locate the presence and application of the instructions delivered to the students by the preceptor as prescribed in the *Taittiriopanisad*, which can still be implemented successfully in the current educational institutions for a smooth and well managed society. A study of the Vedic texts reminds us of the same procedure to be followed for the smooth functioning of the society.

Keywords : Taittiriopanisad, Siksavalli, Education, Self-knowledge, Brahmachari and Acharya.

Circumstances of the society at present are not very well balanced for all people. Not many can survive with peace and prosperity in today's world. Peace is the only demand at every stage of human life, and this peace could only be attained through spiritualism. When technology and spirituality walk together then the society could be well balanced and well organized. The role of educational institutions is most important in this regard. The modern system of education has been highly influenced by the process of past experiences. Vedic thoughts are the root of our civilization, so we cannot neglect the sphere of those views from which our civilization has developed to

its present form. The Upanisads are the most valuable part of the Vedic literature. They guide the students through the valuable advices of the preceptors for choosing the correct path in life. In this regard we may refer to the *Śikṣāvallī* section of the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* where education has been handled as a philosophical policy. In this paper researcher discussed how spiritual thought could be inculcated among the people of the society by including spiritual scriptures in our educational curriculum. The discussions are further based upon the policy of education given in the *Śikṣāvallī* section of *Taittirīyopaniṣad*.

METHOD

The present paper is descriptive in nature. The paper has been prepared after reviewing the passages of the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*. Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources such as the main text of the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*, translations, various books on mythology, philosophy and religion.

Background & Literature review

Being the oldest literary scriptures of the world, the Vedas always play a key role in the process of exploring the ancient ways and means to see and judge the worldly affairs from different angles of thought. The Vedic Aryans always try to unfold the secrets of the universe as well as to utilize the positive side of the nature for the survival of the humanity by controlling the unwanted i.e. negative forces in every sphere of life. Thus, the Upanisads are full of the basic lessons for controlling our passions and desires through some regulated activities done without any expectation and the attainment of equality with the Supreme Being (Joshi, 2006). A study of the Upanisads shows us the way to keep ourselves controlled, unstressed and undisturbed in present circumstances surrounding the world. By reviewing the original text of the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* it can be said that the primary idea of this *Upanisad* is to guide the students through the valuable advice of the preceptor for choosing correct path of life. Some modern sources of literature explain the thoughts of the original text, which could be helpful for a researcher to understand the education system and its policy of that era. Adoption of these philosophical policies by modern educational institutions may produce a number of jewels among the citizens of this country (Oldenberg, 1997).

Discussion

The *Taittirīyopaniṣad* belongs to the *Kṛṣṇayajurveda*. It is a prose *Upaniṣad* and is divided into three parts, called *Vallīs*. The first part is called *Śikṣāvallī*, the second part is known as *Brahmānandavallī*, the third or the last one is called *Bhṛguvallī*. In this paper the author discusses the significance of the first part, i.e. *Śikṣāvallī* only. The *Śikṣāvallī* consists of eleven sections, each one dedicated to enlightening discussions by Śankaracārya on how one can prepare him/herself for knowledge. According to Śankaracārya knowledge is independent and not something created. One can only perform their duties as prescribed in the scriptures.

The introductory part of the *Śikṣāvallī* mainly deals with pronunciations and phonetics. From this part we learn that in those days students were taught the proper way of chanting the Vedic texts (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/2). This was considered very important because if the chanting and pronunciation were not proper the meaning might change and be harmful for the worshiper. This section also gives details about how we should direct our eyes; how and where we should place our legs and so on and so forth. It is also stated that if one prays the way the *Upaniṣad* expresses, they will be rewarded with children, money, heaven and even Self-knowledge (Sen, 2008). Here the emphasis is laid on the discipline of both body and mind.

The *Śikṣāvallī* also praises the worship of Om, for Om is the symbol of Brahman (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/4). It also connects the link between one thing and another in the world, thereby it sustains the world. The worship of Om brings us both affluence and intellectual eminence, and with these the teacher is able to attract students from every quarter. The chapter also recommends other modes of worship mentioned in the Vedas

such as sacrifices, rites and rituals, and various other sacraments that are to be performed in every step of life.

There are some moral principles discussed from which we should never deviate. Chief among them are truthfulness and righteousness. As a householder we must also respect our parents and teachers, welcome guests and treat them with respect. We are also instructed to help others, but we are cautioned that in doing so we must not show any disrespect to those whom we are helping.

It has been stated in the *Upaniṣad* that Self-knowledge is open to all, irrespective of who we are and what we are. All that is needed is that we acquire the requisite amount of self-discipline. It is self-discipline that gives the purity of mind which precedes Self-knowledge. Praise of the self is thoroughly discussed in the *Śikṣāvallī*, and it is meant to be repeated again and again in order to prepare the mind for Self-realisation (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/10).

The last instructions on moral principles are given to the students who have completed their studies and are ready to return home. Even now, in some educational institutions the essence of these instructions of the *Taittirīopaniṣad*, e.g. “speak the truth, respect your teacher, parents and guests, properly do your duties etc”, are delivered to the out-going students (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/11). These instructions play a pivotal role during the whole life of a student. Through the valuable advices of the preceptor a pupil can choose the correct path in life.

The Educational System during that Period

The system of education was the *gurukula* in ancient India. Students from different families selected a *Guru* and went to live with him for a number of years while they studied. It was

considered as very important to do so. It is not that the students had contact with the teacher only in the classroom; they were constantly with him and were learning all the time. They lived as members of the guru’s family, like his own children and shared the same food, the same comforts and discomforts. There was more than just intellectual communication. They learned as they ate together, as they worked together and they played together. Living so closely to the preceptor the students could watch the kind of life he led, how he studied, how he spent his time etc. and learn from it.

The student or the *brahmacāri*, was regarded as the central pillar of an educational institution in those days. The teachers used to pray for pupils. ‘may the *brahmacāris* come unto me; from here and there, may the *brahmacāris* come unto me; may the *brahmacāris* set forth unto me; may the *brahmacāris* control over themselves; may the *brahmacāris* attain to peace’ (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/4).

The preceptor was also important along with the pupils. The teacher was known as *Ācārya*. *Ācārya* is one who collects or gathers the purport of the scriptures and also practices them and by this he exemplifies it in his own life (*Nikutam*, 1/2). It can be assumed that it gives the indication that we must learn from a person who actually practices what he says. Then his teaching will have proven authenticity.

The teacher represented not only mature worldly and scholarly wisdom but also a high realization. The main task of the teacher was to uplift the aspiration and knowledge latent in the pupil. It awakens the real teacher the Supreme *Brahman* seated in the heart of the learner. The teacher and the student both together pray, ‘may our fame grow equally, both the teacher’s for his teaching and the

student's for his capacity to learn; may we both shine with the radiance of *Brahman*' (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/3).

Some Key Teachings

After completion of their studies, the teacher delivers some final instructions to the home returning students, who are going to start a new life (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/11). The first instruction is 'speak the truth'. According to Śankaracārya truth is what we know to be true by experience and by observation. The next instruction is 'do that which is right'. The scriptures inform us what is right and what is wrong, if there is any doubt, then we should use our own judgment and act upon it. The third instruction is, 'never deviate from studying or learning'. When we keep up the habit of reading scriptures, we will never lose the sight of our goal.

Then the teacher repeats, give the teacher what he likes, to express gratitude to him. Let there be no break in the family line. Having finished their studies the students go back home and are ready to enter the householder's life. The teacher advises them to perform their duties as a householder, marry and raise a family. The student should never deviate from what is right or what is good for all. The householder has every right to seek prosperity. So the teacher says, never deviate from seeking your own welfare or prosperity, but at the same time, you must do it by following the path of truth and righteousness. The student would be advised to never neglect their duties towards the Gods and the ancestors. In those days, performing rites and rituals was a very important duty of a householder. These rituals were done in honour of different Gods and Goddesses and also of the family's ancestors. The idea behind these rituals is that we have an obligation to our deities and ancestors. We must remember

and honour them everyday. It is believed that our forefathers expect us to follow their example and instructions and try to be like them. There are certain gods and goddesses presiding over our families, watching what we are doing and protecting us. So, we must not let them down (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/11).

It is also advised by the *Upaniṣad* that we should look upon our mother as a goddess, and regard the father as a god. The teacher also should be regarded as a deity. Parents gave us our body, but the teacher has given us knowledge. He helped our mind and intellect to grow. As a householder it is our noble duty to feed and look after the guests and they should be treated with the highest respect as if they are also deities (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/11).

Some other instructions are also given by the teacher that, we must respect our teacher and follow him. We should follow what the teacher does, but if he does something wrong we should not follow that. We must show proper respect to those who are very respectable and are superior to us in learning or other qualities. We should never treat anything with disrespect. The manner of giving is very important. According to Śankaracārya we should give as much as we can in a graceful manner. We should give with shyness and humility, as if we are ashamed that we are not able to give more or something better. It is one of the rules of charity to give quietly. Giving with fear means that we should give with a sense of reverence. Śankaracārya says that give with good will, friendship and affection. We not only give the gift but also our love and affection along with it (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/11).

Sometimes a doubt arises in our mind about *Karma* the duty or about *Vṛtti* the conduct. The teacher says that there are people who are thoughtful and use their own judgment. They do good things but not under

compulsion. They act independently and are not forced to do something. We should follow such a person who is noble and intelligent (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/11).

In his concluding remarks the teacher says, “this is the sum and substance of everything I have taught you. These are some basic guidelines which are the instructions of the teacher and of the scriptures. You are now going to begin the life of a householder, so you should follow these instructions of the *Śikṣāvallī*” (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 3/11).

CONCLUSION

It can be said from the above discussion that here the focal point of education is the holistic development of the student which has also been emphasized by Aristotle, Percy Nunn, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda etc (Agarwalla, 2012, p.3). The holistic development signifies the development of social, spiritual, intellectual, individual qualities among the students, which is very important in today’s world to adjustment with the social circumstances, changes and corruption surrounding us. If this policy of education is applied in the present field of education, it will make some corruption free noble citizens, who will lead us to a better and peaceful society. The instructions delivered by the preceptor could remain as a solace in dealing with many problematic issues of modern world. It can be said that higher education is the basis of life long learning; but it could only be possible through the involvement of spiritual education, which has a universal objective of preparing a person for a life long activity too.. Thus, it can be concluded that instructions of the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* could fulfill this requirement of the modern society to some extent.

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(*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/2)
- yaścandasāmsrabho viśvarupah.....//* (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/42)
- sumedhā amrtokṣitah.....//* (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/10)
- vedamanucyācāryo’ntevāsinamanuśāsti.....//* (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1.11)
- āmayantu brahmacārinah svāhā.....//* (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1.4)
- saha nau yaśah; saha nau brahmavarcasam.....//* (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/3)
- ācārya ācāram grāhayati, ācīnotyarthān, ācīnoti buddhim iti vā//*
(*Nīruktam*, 1/2)
- satyam vada; dharmam cara; svādhyāyanmā pramadah.....//*
(*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/11)
- devapitrkāryābhyām na pramaditavyam//* (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/11)
- matr devo bhava; pitr devo bhava; ācārya devo bhava; atithi devo bhava.....//* (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/11)
- aśradhāyā’deyam; śriya deyam; hrya deyam; bhiya deyam; samvidā deyam.....//* (*Taittirīopaniṣad*, 1/11)
- atha yadi te karmavicikīṣa va vrttivicikīṣa va syat/ ye tatra brahmanah samarsinah/ yukta ayuktah/ aluṣa dharmakamah syuh/.....//*
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