Accountability of Teachers in Vedic Period

Suchitra Mitra

The word teacher itself reveals the accountability of its own, as a responsible guide, who is able to impart knowledge that is explicable of different branches of studies.

In order to explain accountability of teachers in vedic period, it is noteworthy to say that the word Guru or teacher was uttered in a very dignified sense. Guru means one who is revered for his greatness.

Teacher was designated with utmost reverence (आचार्य देवोभवं) (Taitt Ar 7/11/2); he was regarded as a guardian of sacred knowledge (द्रष्ट्राणम् Rg X/ 125/5); an exhibitor of divine illumination (व्योतित्त्वांतः प्रजासुः) (Yej 34/3) as well as medium of highest attainment (येथे इत्यतद्विदु: ते अयुत्त्व्यामान शु:;) Rg I/165/23), Former sources and philosophical evidences reveal that the method of teaching was well planned and progressive.

Teacher was accountable for educating the pupil to reach the highest gole of life. Teacher himself set up the school and governed it there was no third person between teacher and taught in the field of education. Under the guidance and control of teacher-student built up their mind and body. Some time teacher accepted his students only on some verbal agreements for the whole life.

His efficiency in teaching was so remarkable that he admitted a young boy as a mere student and made him proficient in the subject (प्रष्ठित); by giving complete education
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In the Vedic period, teachers were said to have deep knowledge in Vedic studies and had to devote long periods to master the material. Their fundamental aim was to develop the mental potentialities of their students. Students were inspired to be attentive and concentrate on their studies. Instructions were given verbally and the method of teaching was scientific in character. Students were made familiar with their surroundings so that with the help of common objects and events, problems could be solved by logical interpretations. It was the responsibility of a teacher to clarify the importance of speech, mind, will, thought, memory, faith, and other mental activities to his student at the time of teaching, in order to enforce them to observe the precepts of life, abstaining from luxury, extravagance, and voluptuous thoughts and actions. Students were instructed to confine their attention not only to the Vedic texts but also to know the scientific and techniques for proper understanding of Vedic texts.

Moreover, the teacher wanted to develop intellectual capacity as well as the sense of responsibility of his student. Further, the responsibility of the Vedic preceptor was to clarify the significance of religion. Here, Dharma means ritual performance. Students should know ritual duties as...
prescribed and specified in *Yajurveda*.\(^{15}\)

Student was motivated towards every action which was propitious.\(^{16}\) Teacher also knew that through austere devotion one could achieve that final goal which is beyond one’s reach.\(^{17}\) He stated to his pupil that God accepted only the worship of such a person who had purified himself through ‘*Tapas*’\(^{18}\). For instance Guru Rishabh warned his sons by saying that they should engage themselves in holy tapas, by which mind would become stainless and they would obtain the supreme bliss of *Brahmana* (ब्रह्मण)\(^{19}\).

It is said that the knowledge of *Brahmana* can only be attained with the aid of a proper teacher. Vedic teacher was able to impart supreme spiritual wisdom to his son or a disciple, whose conduct and decent was known and had served him atleast one year with perfect self-control.\(^{20}\)

Rishi Varun instructed *ब्रह्मविद्या* to his son Bhrigu who was anxious to receive it as paternal gift.\(^{21}\)

Personality development of a student was another responsibility of vedic preceptor. Rishi Yanjyavalkya claimed “*One should learn self control, charity and compassion for personality development.*”\(^{22}\)

Teacher used to advise his student to led a noble life and to acquire knowledge with faith and devotion.\(^{23}\) He realised that respect (श्रद्धा) and faith (शिष्यता) were needed to make the pupils mind receptive to the holy teachings imparted by him.\(^{24}\)

Joy is another part of life. Vedic teacher observed that real joy is a blissful essence in itself. It is generated through dispassion, patience, generosity and other similar virtues. Supreme bliss was known to be the experience of Vedic teacher who was free from desire, Rishi Vedavyasa said in *Mahabharat*—“*The sense pleasures of this world and the great joys of heaven are not worth one sixteenth part of the bliss that comes of the cessation of desire*” (Mbh. XII. CL XXIII. 47).

In Vedic period the abilities of the teacher were not measured only by textbook teaching but by his ethical principals which advanced the moral standard of a student. Student was
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guided according to ethical values followed by some moral teachings—स्वाध्यायप्रवचनानाथ्यां न प्रमदित्वयम् (Taitt. UP. 1/11); सत्यमेव जयते नानुत्तम् (Mund. UP. 3/1/6); तपस्यः या ज्योतिष्मयम् (Br. UP. I/II/128). 25 They were to be acquainted with many sacrificial terms like Diksha, Vrata, Yajna, Yajman, Hotr, Udgātr, Adhvaryu, Devata, Yajman, Agnihotra, Vedika, Juhu, Ahuti and so on. Teacher was to initiate the pupil to perform ceremonial duties to obtain celestial abode. 29 Teacher was expected to be able to impress and impose the idea of existence of the invincible superior which controls the life and death, the bestower of happiness and misery with these fundamental believes the teacher built up the idea of religion.

Vedic teachers tried to train and discipline their students through “Tapas” and abstinence (संयम) Teachers himself used to lead the life of a saint. His personal life was based on ascetic practices, so that student could get inspiration form his excellent ideals.

Vedic teacher was accountable for sublimating society through their sound educational system. These noble teacher could eradicate evil thoughts from human mind and led them to be progressive and civilized. (अत्यन्त: प्रतिकूलतानि फरेषा न समाचारेरूः).

Practice of social services like distribution of wealth to the poor, fellow-feeling, helping attitude and quality of adjustment in every sphere of life were encouraged by the Vedic teacher. He himself dedicated his life for upliftment of society. For attaining higher felicity, teacher advised ‘It needed a good ethical life that will make for better human relationship.’ To realize social unity he pointed out with an interrogation, that when the supreme being was present every where then how could the evil thoughts arise in mind? Vedic teachers clarified the need of social relationship by saying ‘when every body is equal, then the children of the highest spirit is to perform the duty to look after each other with friendly eyes –भूतानि समीक्षे मित्रस्य चक्षुषा चक्षुषा समीक्षामहेः। (Yaj. 36/18).
His earnest desire was to encourage pupil to be in thought, word and deed—सदनूच्छव्यं संवो मनासि जानलाम् (Rig. X/191/1).

Keeping the above description in mind, accountability of a Vedic teacher can be described or follows— It was he:

1. Who was the real custodian of the sacred verses.
2. Who was the orator of social, ethical and religious discourses.
3. Who himself was a consecrate of divine gospel, as well as who could strengthen intrinsic capacity of students.

Like Vedic teachers to day also efficient teachers are felicitated by their admirers. Those who enter the class-room with excellent preparations narrate concepts with good explanations, they are efficient in their profession.

**ABREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Apas.</td>
<td>Apas tamba Dharma Sutra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atharva.</td>
<td>Atharvaveda</td>
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<td>Brh. UP</td>
<td>Brhadāranyakopanishad</td>
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<td>Ch. UP</td>
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<td>Gautam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gopa. Bṛa.</td>
<td>Gopath Brahmana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Griffith</td>
<td>The hymns of Rigveda, Translated by Ralph. T.H. Griffith.</td>
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<td>Kath. Samhita</td>
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<td>Mund.</td>
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<td>Rg. Rig.</td>
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<td>Shan. Sutra</td>
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<td>Shat. Bra.</td>
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1. He, from whom the pupil gathers the knowledge of his religious duties (परम्परा) is called the चार्य (teacher), see Manu II/69; Yajnya (I/15).

2. It was indicated that there are two kinds of knowledge. One, the lower and other the higher study of Vedas, phonetics, rituals, grammar, etymology and astronomy constituted the lower knowledge where as higher knowledge is that by which the imperishable is attained. (Mund. See also Gopath Bra. 1/2/5)

3. यद्य ज्ञेतिरज्ञ विश्वमन्यो लोक व्यवहितमिः।
तस्मिन भौ भवेष चक्षुमान! अमुः लोको अहिते॥ (Rg. IX/113/7)

4. अथ वद आचार्यवचस करोऽति, यदृ आचार्यवं करोऽति स एतम आचिविषिति (Shat. Brà XI/3/3/6)- And when he does the teachers bidding, and when he does any work for the teacher, he redeems that part of his which is in the teacher. (Sacred Books of the East Vol. V)

5. तत्स्य एवं विद्विद्म, एवं चरत सवै वेदा: आचिविषिति, यथा ह वै अर्थिः समविद्यो रोचते, एवं ह वै स स्नात्का रोचते, य: एवं विद्विद्म ब्रह्मचर्य चरति (Shat. Bra. II/3/3/7)

6. प्रथमत्तम एवं द्वितीयो ब्रह्मचर्यविचित्रकाः सूतिः। श्रवणमात्रमात्रमात्रमात्रा द्वारा दार्शनिकत्वं एते पण्य्योक्तं पक्षिता। (Chând. UP 2/23/14)

7. पूर्वां बारोऽर्पणे ब्रह्मचारी थर्म संसारप्रसंसंसितम्।
तम्माज्जात्र ब्रह्मान्व ज्ञेति देयत सवै अमुः साक्षम्। अर्थ्यय: XI/5/5

8. तपः स्वाभाविक इति ब्रह्मान्वम्। See also Manu 2/166

9. Rig 7/103/5; Atharva. 11/7/1; Shan. Gr. Sütra 4/8

10. Preceptor instructed pupil the true importance of the Mantras, the significance of sacrifice and duties of a Brahmachari (see Āps. 1/4/12/1 to 15).

11. Agni, the God of fire Rig 1/143/3, Váta (váyu) the God of wind Rig 10/168/3,4 Marutas, the Gods of thunder-storm; parjanya, the rain God (Rg 5/83/4,10)

12. प्राणापनी जन्मचारां ज्ञानं वाच मनो हदयं ब्रह्मेष्ठां च पुरवस्त्राध्यम् चतुः: श्रोत्र यशो अस्मातु वंडाने रेते
लोहितमुद्रम् Atharva 11/5/24.25

13. नेपतिवर्गो (ब्रह्मचारी) स्वाभाविक न नातिनो न सर्वो न नितीनेवत्। गः- ब्रह्म 1/2/7

14. May thinking power auspicious, never deceived, unhindered and victorious come from every side (Griffith).

15. यानन्दविच थर्मः: यद्र वै अर्थ्यययं कर्म कथासहिता 30/10; Kath; 46/18; Taït. Brà 3/2/1/4; Shat. Brà. 1/7/1/5.
16. The self is attained through veracity, concentration, wisdom and continence.
(Mund. 3/1/5. Translation by Swami Sarvánanda, page 142.)

17. Never be indifferent to the study and imparting of the Veda; (Taitt. UP. I/11). Only the truthful win, not the Untruthful (Mund. UP. 3/1/6). From darkness lead me to light. (Br. UP. I/11/128).

21. The word "czãpkjh" occurs in the Rigveda X/109/5 in the sense of a religious student.
42. Continence, truthfulness, thrice bath a day, wet cloth, sleeping on the floor and food restrictions - constitute Tapas. (Gautam XIX/16)

43. Apastamba. I/1/4/7

44. (Rg. I/89/8)

45. The teacher and the taught must be free from hatred towards any creature. (Taitt. UP 2/1) explanation, by Swami Sarvananda, page-78.

46. Rgveda X/117/1 to 9

47. (Rg. X/19/4)

48. (Rg. X/121/9)

49. (Atharva. 3/30/3)