

Mahabharata and Veda

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INTRODUCTION

Mahābhārata is to be considered as the soul of Indian civilization. The contents of the great epic reflect the nature of the human relation to the society. It is also observed that, the ideas of *Mahābhārata* purify the dirt of the society by imposing its power against the evil. Once upon a time when Vedic knowledge was not so easy to understand by the common man, to fill the gap of that circumstances this epic played a vital role. To make Vedic knowledge so simple to the man, *Mahābhārata* analyzes the significant role of individual by supplying the every needs of his life. As a result *Mahābhārata* stands as the fifth *Veda* to satisfy the ultimate goal of human life i.e. *Puruṣārtha-s* (*Dharma, Artha, Kāma* and *Mokṣa*). It explained the value of human life in light of *Veda*. Here in this proposed research paper, an attempt has been made to highlight the few Vedic ideas which are reflected in *Mahābhārata* in connection to the human life.

The *Veda-s*, regarded as the oldest literatures of the world, are the original sources of the Philosophy of life. The entire literatures of India, the *Upaniṣad-s*, the *Smṛti-s*, the *Purāṇa-s*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* etc all acknowledge the superiority of the Vedas. The word '*Veda*' derives in four roots such as – *vid sattāyam, vid lābhe, vid vicāraṇe, vid jñāne*. All these four derivations stand for four different *Āśrama-s* i.s. *Brahmacarya, Gṛhastha, Vānaprastha* and *Sanyāsa*. Thus *Vedas* themselves have ordained the four *Āśrama-s* of human life. It also becomes evident that by a complete observance of the obligations imposed by the four *Āśrama-s*, an individual can succeed in realizing his ultimate goal.

Concept of Śikṣā –

The term *Śikṣā* (education) is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root '*Śās*' (शास्) which means to discipline, to teach, to instruct, or to control. Similarly the term *Vidyā* (education) is also derived from the Sanskrit verbal root '*Vid*' (विद्) which means to know. Thus the root *Vidyā* really means knowledge. This shows that disciplining the mind and imparting knowledge were the foremost considerations to ancient India which was only possible through *Śikṣā* (education).

Education is a complex idea because we have so many synonyms for the word *Śikṣā* (education). It is highly impossible to express the scope of education through a single term. Though a biologist, a priest, a psychologist, a philosopher, a teacher, a statesman, a merchant give

different definitions of education according to their own outlook. In this connection, the Hindu scriptures and scholars of India have defined the term education in a very systematic way. Indian concept of education is as follows –

1. **Rgveda** denotes “education is something which makes a man self-reliant and self-less.” (Development of education theory and practice by Raghunath Safaya. Page No. 3)
2. **Upaniṣad** says “Education is that which is meant for salvation.” (सा विद्या या विमुक्तये-Samhitopaniṣad)
3. **Bhagavatgītā** says – “Nothing is more purifying on earth than knowledge.” (न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते - Gītā – 4.38)
4. **Yajñavalkya**, the famous Indian legislator says – “Education is that which makes a man of good character and useful to the society.” (Development of Educational theory and Practice by Raghunath Safaya -page no.-3)
5. **Yajurveda** and **Manusmṛti** say “Education by which man enjoys the fruit of immortality.” (अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्ययामृतमश्नुते -Yajurveda-40.11 & तपसा कल्पिषं हन्ति विद्ययामृतमश्नुते – Manu – 12.104)
6. **Ādi Sankarāchārya** opines that “Education in the realization of self.” (आत्मसाक्षात्कारः)

After going through the above said Indian concept on Education, we may conclude that the Education is not merely a means for earning or for living; it is an initiation in to the life of spirit, a training of human souls in the pursuit of truth and the practice of virtue.

To highlight the significance of Education *Kāvyaḍarśakāra Daṇḍi* in his work says, “Education is the source of all illumination.”

इदं अन्धतमः कृत्स्नं जायेत भुवनत्रयम्
यदि शब्दाह्वयं ज्योतिरासंसारं न दीप्यते ॥Kāvyaḍarśa-1.14

To the significance of *Vidyā* (Education) *Mahābhārata* declares in *Śāntiparva*; - “there is no eye equal to *Vidyā*. No penance can equal to *Vidyā*”.

नास्ति विद्यासमं चक्षुर्नास्ति विद्यासमं तपः । Mahā- Śānti - 316.6

“Education teaches us to be aware of sense objects. In support of this, *Gītā* says “He whose mind is not agitated in calamities and he who has no longing for pleasure is a saint. (*Gītā* 2.15)

The most significant aim of Education is to attain *Mokṣa* that is salvation. As a result *Veda-s* and *Upaniṣada-s* strongly instruct that the person, who is out of the cycle of birth and death, He is called *Jivanmukta*; and he can attain *Mokṣa*. (तनौदनेनाति तराणि मृत्युम् -Atharvaveda-4.32.5) The same idea is also reflected in *Mahābhārata*. It is said that a person who knows *Brahma* he is eligible to attain the *Mokṣa*.

ब्रह्मैव विद्वास्तेन अभ्येति सर्वम्
नान्यः पन्था अयनाय विद्यते ॥ Mahā-Udyoga- 44- 14.17

Again it says, the person who does not possess the knowledge of *Brahmajñānam*, he cannot attain *Mokṣa* merely by moving around *Mokṣacakra*.

अविद्वान् मोक्षधर्मेषु बद्धो भ्रमति चक्रवत् ॥ Mahā-Śanti- 287.19

To follow the path of virtue is the another aim of Education where the *Manusmṛti* declares as “*Vedokhilo Dharmamulam*”. As we know there are ten definitions of *Dharma* by ancient scriptures. It is said –

धृतिः क्षमा दमोस्तेज्यं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः
धीर्विद्या सत्यमक्रोधो दशकं धर्मलक्षणम् ॥ Manu 6.91

In connection to this, *Mahābhārata* also has given a specific definition on *Dharma* as –

धारणात् धर्ममित्याहुः धर्मो धारयति प्रजाः
यस्मात् धारणसंयुक्तः स धर्म इति निश्चयः ॥ Mahā- Śānti 108.11

Again *Mahābhārata* instructs that, at the time of learning, a student (*Śiṣya*) must have possesses the quality of humbleness or politeness and by that he can achieve the knowledge from *Guru*. In *Bhīṣmaparva* of *Mahābhārata* it is said – श्रद्धावान् लभते ज्ञानम् तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः (Mahā- Bhīṣma 25.39)

Conecept of Caturvavṇas –

With the creation of the Universe, Lord Brahmā - the creator, has created four different *Varṇa-s* i.s. *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya* and *Śudra*. The origins of four *Varṇa-s* are mentioned in *Puruṣasūkta* of *Rgveda*. The *Brāhmaṇa* is originated from the mouth, *Kṣatriya* from arm, *Vaiśya* from knee and *Śudra* from the foot of the creator *Brahmā*.

ब्राह्मणोऽस्य मुखमासीत् बाहू राज्यन्यः कृतः
ऊरू तदस्य यद्वैश्यः पद्भ्यां शूद्रोऽजायत ॥ Rgveda- Puruṣasūkta-
10.80.12

Brahmā, the creator of the four *Varṇa-s* also specified their duties. A *Brāhmaṇa* maintains his life by reading and teaching *Veda*. A *Kṣatriya* puts his life by protecting others and ruling the state. A *Vaiśya* indulges in the activities of Business. A *Śudra* passes his life by putting service towards above three *Varṇa-s*. From this, it is to be noticed that the activities of the person has clearly and systematically divided to have a smooth function of the society. *Yajurveda* has announced the nature and character of the four *Varṇa-s* as –

ब्रह्मणे ब्राह्मणं क्षत्राय राजन्यं मरूद्भ्यः वैश्यं तपसे शूद्रम् –
Yajurveda- 30.5

Lord Krishna explains about the four *Varṇa-s* in *Gītā*. The fourfold caste was created by me by the different distribution of their *Guṇa* and *Karma*.

चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः - *Gītā*- 4.13

As it is also said a lower grade (Caste) man by his noble action (कर्म) may attain the higher position in the society. In *Sankaradigvijaya*, it is said –

जन्मना जायते शूद्रः संस्काराद् द्विजोच्यते ।

Again *Manusmṛti* says, a man born in a family of a *Brāhmaṇa* may take the position of a *Kṣatriya* or a *Vaiśya* or a *Śudra*. Even though a *Śudra* also may take the position of a *Brāhmaṇa* because of him noble action and qualities. As per the guideline of *Manusmṛti* it is said –

शूद्रो ब्राह्मणतोमेति ब्राह्मणश्चेति शूद्रताम्
क्षत्रिया जातमेवं तु विद्यात् वैश्यान्तथैव च ॥ Manu – 20.65

As we understood from the above said discussion, the entire caste system was not formulated merely by birth, it was meant for the action of the individual being. In this connection, in *Śāntiparva* of *Mahābhārata* declares that –

न विशेषोऽस्ति वर्णानां सर्वं ब्रह्ममिदं जगत्
ब्रह्मणा ब्रह्म सृष्टं हि कर्मभिर्वर्णतां गतम् ॥ Mahā- Śānti 188.10

Significance of truth –

To understand the word ‘truth’ we must observe the activities of Sun and Moon. As tradition says both Sun and Moon are to be considered as the two eyes of the Lord Vishnu. Both of them (Sun and Moon) have their identity to come to the universe day and night respectively because they are the symbolic representative of truth. That’s why *Rgveda* announces that the Sun has revealed truth. (सत्यं तातान सूर्यः Rgveda- 1.105.12) Again *Rgveda* says that the earth is held up by truth (सत्येनोत्तभिता भूमिः -Rgveda-10.85.1).

From these references we understood that the truth is the ultimate object of human life which is to be followed. To teach the Man *Taittiriyaopaniṣad* always guides as “Speak the truth, do your duty, never swerve from the study of the *Veda*.” सत्यं वद । धर्मं चर । स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः – (Taittiriyaopaniṣad-Śikṣāvali – 1.11.1)

As like *Veda*, *Mahābhārata* also explains about the significance of truth. The *Śāntiparva* of *Mahābhārata* said that, “the truth leads one to heaven as a ship to the shore of the ocean”. (सत्यं स्वर्गस्य सोपानं पारावारस्य नौरिव – Mahā- Śānti-288.31) There are 13 forms of truth, which are elaborated in *Śāntiparva* of *Mahābhārata* (Mahā- Śānti- 256.5,8,9). They are –

1. सत्यं - Unchangeable, eternal not incongruent will all the religions and achievable by yoga.
2. समता - a) Equanimity in respect of oneself or friend or enemy.
b) Absence of anger, desire and hatred.
3. दम - Absence of attachment, patience and gravity, fearlessness, pacification of anger. It is achieved by knowledge.

4. अमात्सर्य - Pleasantness, toleration in respect of religion. Truthfulness leads to this.
5. क्षमा- Forgiveness on all fronts.
6. ह्री - Modesty . A modest man is prove to superb welfare, doesn't seek praise, peaceful in speech and thinking. It is obtained by cultivating *Dharma*.
7. तितिक्षा - Endurance is bearing hardship for the sake of *Dharma* and fortune. Its main purpose is keeping the people on the virtuous path of welfare. It is achieved by cultivating patience.
8. अनसूया- Absence of malice.
9. त्यागः - It is riddance from attachment as also from objects of enjoyment through medium of sense organs. It may be achieved only by the absence of attachment and enmity.
10. ध्यानम् - Meditation.
11. आर्यता - An aggregate of auspicious action for living beings. It is achieved by absence of attachment.
12. धृति- Sameness of mood under the circumstances of pain and pleasure. It leads to prosperity.
13. अहिंसा - Non-violence, forbearance developed by absence of attachment, fear and anger.

Ātmā as Brahma-

Upaniṣad explains about the *Ātmā* and its nature to guide the man to understand. *Māṇḍukyopaniṣad* says "All are *Brahma*. This *Ātmā* is *Brahma*." (सर्वं ह्येतद् ब्रह्म । अयमात्मा ब्रह्म। *Māṇḍukya- Āgamaprakaraṇa- 2*)

Again it is said, *Ātmā* (soul) is the prime cause of the whole Universe. From *Ātmā*, the world originated. In this connection, *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* says, "Soul comprehends intelligence. As the spider goes up taking recourse to its web, as small sparks arise from the fire, so arise from the (original) soul all the sense, all the worlds, all the Gods, and all the beings.

विज्ञानमय आत्मा । स यथोर्णनाभिस्तन्तुनोच्चरेद्यथाग्नेः क्षुद्रा विस्फुलिङ्गा व्युच्चरन्त्येवमेवास्मादात्मनः सर्वे प्राणाः सर्वे लोकाः सर्वे देवाः सर्वाणि भूतानि व्युच्चरन्ति।

Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad - 2.1.20

In another *Mantra* of *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* , the nature of *Ātmā* is narrated. It says "This soul is worth seeing, hearing, reflecting upon and meditating upon. By seeing, hearing, reflecting and meditating upon the soul all this known.

आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रातव्यो, मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः । आत्मनो वा दर्शनेन, श्रवणेन, मत्या, विज्ञानेनैदं सर्वं विदितम्। *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 2.4.5*

The great, unborn, un-decaying, immortal and fearless Soul becomes *Brahma*. *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* says

स वा एष महानज आत्माजरोऽमरोऽमृतोऽभयो ब्रह्म भवति । *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad - 4.4.25*

To know or realize *Brahma* meditation or yoga is required. As *Mahābhārata*, in *Śāntiparva* it says when intelligence in conjunction with the attributes of action enlightens the mind, *Brahma* is known by meditation, yoga and concentration. (तदा प्रजायते ब्रह्म ध्यानयोगसमाधिना । - *Mahā-Śānti - 189.2*)

Nature of Vidyā and Avidyā -

The nature of *Vidyā* and *Avidyā* is narrated in *Upaniṣad* in a systematic way. A person who attached with the line of *Vidyā*, he will be strong always. *Chāndogyopaniṣad* says "*Vidyā* and *Avidyā* are unlike each other. What one accomplishes by *Vidyā* with reverence and *Upaniṣad*, only that is highly effectual.

नाना तु विद्या चाविद्या च। यदेव विद्यया करोति, श्रद्धयोपनिषदा, तदेव वीर्यवत्तरं भवति।

Chāndogya -1.1.10

The result of the attachment to *Vidyā* and *Avidyā* is explained in *Īśāvāśyopaniṣad* also. It is said "Those who adore worldly knowledge, they enter pitch darkness. One the other hand those devoted to spiritual knowledge, enter deeper darkness.

अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽविद्यामुपासते
ततो भूयः इव ते तमो य उ विद्यायां रताः ॥ *Īśāvāśya-9*

Apart from the *Upaniṣadic* line of *Vidyā*, *Mahābhārata* explains the weight of *Vidyā* (learning). It says- there is no eye equal to learning. No penance can equal learning. नास्ति विद्यासमं चक्षुर्नास्ति विद्यासमं तपः । *Mahā- Śānti - 316.6*

From the above said discussion it may conclude that, the *Mahābhārata*, the fifth *Veda* explains about the life of man in connection to the path of truth as per the instruction of the *Veda*. Realization of *Brahma* or *Ātmā*, understand the nature of *Vidyā* and *Avidyā* make man perfect to attain *Mokṣa* at the end of the life.

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