

Discovery of gratitude

Ashok Da Ranade

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My e-mail gets clogged with free offers, exhortations and suggestions about how to actively express my love, affection, sense of duty or responsibility to members of the public, and to my teachers, my father, my brother, my sisters et al. I ruefully remember a Keertankar's comment: "If you need to be reminded of your culture, how can you hope to become cultured? And I thought of gurupoornima! As reformers, we have been observing gurupoornima, never realising that this is Guru's Day!

On the full moon day of the Hindu Ashadha month Vyasa, the archetypal preceptor, is to be worshipped to get his blessings in carrying on the task of vidyadhyayana (acquisition of learning). Disciples regard their guru and his wife to be greater than their biological parents. (Is it not true that children listen to the 'Miss' in the school than Mummy at home?) On this day, disciples express respect for the guru and gurupatni, as also for what they stand for. At the same time, with a celebratory attitude, disciples also reaffirm their own commitment to the cause of learning.

I do come across many who are suspicious about the term guru and the institution it indicates. Admittedly, they have reasonable grounds! Where are the gurus these days - we are frequently asked! Indian tradition provides some useful clues in the matter. It maintains that there are teachers, professors, acharyas and finally gurus. All of them are of course engaged in the same difficult mission of passing on something to equip the receiver to contribute his or her own to life and society around. But there are significant differences between these four entities. Teachers may pass on information, skills and crafts. Professors, in addition to skills, etc. also communicate knowledge. Acharya reaches still further by adding a wide perspective to what is transmitted. However, the guru, the ultimate 'giver' provides, in addition to everything else, insight! Information and skills make receivers 'able'. Professors, through addition of knowledge allow receivers to become 'efficient'. Acharya enhances the 'effect', while the guru imparts 'wisdom'!

In Indian history, as well as mythology, the *guru's* role and his relationship with his disciple are extensively dealt with. The *guru-shishya* tradition is not confined to the elite strata and arts, hence it acquires a 'really' cultural importance. From

metaphysics to thievery and from music-dance-drama to crafts is certainly a wide arc. Therefore it is not surprising that a clever but a minor thief named Sharvilaka in the renowned play by Bhasa swore by his *guru* and so do those skilful carpenters in Mumbai flats or the wrestlers still entertaining village crowd fairs etc.

Some interesting features of this traditional bond were for example:

- A guru should not take fees from his disciples, otherwise the guru slides down the scale to the status of a trader selling his wares.
- A chhatra (a term synonymous with shishya) is called so because he not only protects the guru from natural elements, but also from spiritual pitfalls through his devotion.
- A true guru wishes his training to be so effective as to enable the disciple to defeat the guru himself!
- A guru who imparts training to all, irrespective to the receivers' abilities or eligibility is guilty of a sin.

My first guru, Pandit Gajananrao Joshi's son wanted to learn the tabla from Ustad Ahmedjan Thirakwa. The Ustad insisted that a proper initiation ceremony known as Gandabandhan takes place. This ceremony can be a very elaborate affair. This meant that the disciple spends a lot of money to include the nazar (respectful offering) to the guru and presents to the guru's relatives. As a consequence, on the disciple's face was writ large anxiety and worry! The Ustad asked him the reason - which was hesitantly conveyed to him through indirect channels. The Ustad sternly called for the disciple - who came with the alacrity of a lamb led to the slaughter-house! The Ustad thundered at him, "You fool! Of course you have to give nazar and the presents, but who asked to spend money?" To say the least, the disciple was all confusion. The Ustad then added, "I will give you the money and you spend it!"

Unfortunately, another face of the contemporary Indian reality can hardly be overlooked. Somebody pointed out to me in my college days, "Always become a member of a library which charges fees - at least nominally. These libraries are likely to have books; free libraries may have only mutilated catalogues!"