

CHAPTER – 7

GURU SHISHYA PARAMPARA

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Guru Shishya Parampara is the most ancient tradition of Indian classical art form. It has its existence from Vedic era, Upanishad era, Puran era etc. “ In Vedic literature, many examples are found, like Shri Ram’s Guru was Maharishi Vashishth, Shri Krishna’s Guru was Sandeepan, Pandavas Gurus were Dronacharya and Kripacharya, Shivaji’s Guru was Samarth Swami Ramdas, Akbar’s Guru was Sheikh Salim Chishti, world’s conqueror Sikander’s Guru was Arustu and king Vikramaditya’s Guru was Chhanakya.”¹ Many scriptures have given Guru higher status than god as it is believed that Guru can only show the path for the spiritual attainment. In human culture, the importance of Guru is considered to be at top. Not only in India, but in other countries also, the place of a Guru is always accepted as an honourable one. In all religions and all castes, a Guru is seen with reverence and is given respect in every way.

In ancient times, there was there was the facility of Gurukul i.e., the training of any performing art was given in the tradition of Guru Shishya Parampara. Shishya used to leave their parents’ home and used to live with Guru in his Ashram that was called Gurukul. The Shishya used to be in service of their Guru and used to learn from him.

“ The Guru Shishya Parampara is considered very auspicious in Indian culture. Guru is like a craftsman who on the criterion of disciplines converts an ordinary student into a prized diamond. When an unworthy Shishya in the form of iron comes in contact with a worthy Guru in the form of Touch stone that iron becomes gold. Hence Guru is said to be like “Paras”. ”²

¹ Kathak Nritya Partampara – Dr. Prem Dave, Page no : 265

² Kathak Gyaneshwari – Pandit Tirth Ram Azad, Page no : 233

He gives his Shishya all the knowledge by whichever means he can. Parents only give birth to a child and Guru by imparting the valuable knowledge makes his shishya to stand confidently in every aspect. In this context, Kabir has rightly said :

“गुरु दिगम्बरि ।
बलिहारी जितुं सकल दुख, जगि वंद्य (द्वि) बतिय ..”

It means Guru is the only medium who shows the path towards divinity, purity and God. On the other hand, a Shishya should respectfully greet his Guru. In this reference it is important to know that a transformation of student to Shishya can only happen when he / she surrenders the ego in the feet of Guru. Hence, it is truly said that a bad student cannot become a good teacher in his life. On the other hand, Guru is equally fortunate if he has a dedicated and talented Shishya and Shishya is equally fortunate if he gets an intelligent, knowledgeable and generous Guru.

Guru is said to be ocean of knowledge and in that ocean there are many priceless jewels which he does not use for himself, but in fact he distributes his knowledge and through this he brings prosperity to society and world over. It is said that in order to fulfill this tradition of Guru Shishya Prampara would have started.

“ The art of dance, vocal singing, instrument playing are the oldest of art. It has its existence since Vedic era. One requires the efficient Guru who can train the Shishya in the following disciplines of performing arts. During Ramayan era, Maharishi Valmiki gave training to Luv and Kush for the art of vocal singing. In Mahabharat era, Arjun, in the disguise of Vrahnallah gave training for dance to Uttra. Bharatmuni has revealed this truth in Natyashastra. It is also mentioned that Bharat took the training in dance from Tandu muni, as directed by Lord Shiva, and Bharta gave training of dance to his 100 sons. In the first chapter of Natyashastra, the names of those 100 sons is given. Kohal, Vats, Shandalya and Dhutrit were more talented among those 100 sons and because of this at the end of Natyashastra, Bharatmuni himself has said that after him, his four students / sons will work to make permanent on this earth. ”³ Hence, in the area of training of any performing arts, the tradition of Guru Shishya Parampara is followed. This tradition is not only ancient but also alive till date.

³ Kathak Nritya Partampara – Dr. Prem Dave, Page no : 236

As mentioned earlier that Gurukul was the place where Shishya used to reside and get training from Guru. Along with the art form and other sanskars were also imparted. Such training was only possible when Guru and Shishya share long association. Both should have patience, power and capacity and desired interest for learning as well as to make learn. In those days, knowledge was considered a priceless charity. Gurus themselves were in search for such Shishya to whom they could donate or impart their knowledge, and the Shishya, who used to follow the path, will get the reward. Hence, it was rightly said that :

“gṛ[vi]mt kri[si]kri”⁴

In the ancient time, these Gurus were having generous support from kings and patrons. So, these Gurus did not expect any redemption (honorarium) from students. The gifts like land or money that they received from royal patronage was used to maintain their Shishya's life. They used to make their Shishya work very hard. Sometimes, Shishya had to perform some personal services for Guru but they used to do it as a part of training.

Earlier, the Guru used to teach their own descendents and if they used to teach other then only after the one who became official Shishya by performing Ganda Bandh ceremony or either one has to prove its capacity of learning and also after giving a lot of services.

7.1 Ganda Bandh Ceremony :

To become a Shishya in any of the disciplines, one has to follow the Ganda Bandh Ceremony. “ The tradition of organizing Ganda function has a long history, sacred incantations and after putting grains of paddy in mouth of Shishya and tying the red sacred thread, he or she is declared official Shishya. This function is held in the presence of musicians, class fellows of student and in the presence of all, this student is announced as a disciple. Apart from the gifts taken out at the time of Ganda function, no other fees are taken from Shishya.”⁵

⁴Dr. Jagdish Gangani

⁵Kathak Nritya Parampara – Dr. Prem Dave, Page no : 266

Today also, this tradition is present in Kathak dance. Ganda function is organized in same way, may be in small form. Everyday, touching the feet of Guru, taking the blessings before the performance, worshipping Guru on every Guru Purnima etc. is still prevalent and a tradition that is followed even today in Kathak dance. Every year, on the full moon (last week of July or first week of August) comes the auspicious festival of “Guru Purnima”. “ On this day, Lord Shri Krishna performed a puja of Maharishi Sandeepan as a Guru. From that time, this festival is celebrated in honor and respect of Guru.” ⁶ On this day every Shishya presently taking lessons or not, but surely visits his Guru’s house and takes blessings. Shishya, to the best of his ability keeps donation, presents, clothes etc. at the feet of the Guru and takes his blessings. It is believed that this devotion and respect will bring prosperity to the Shishya.

It was said earlier that the ones who were capable of imbibing the hidden secrets of their Guru, that Shishya was considered as most talented. Such Shishya was never told the proper ways of teaching neither they were encouraged. In these circumstances also the dedicated Shishya’s faith and belief in his Guru remains the same. Such dedicated Shishyas are today’s leading artistes.

It is said earlier that Guru not only train the Shishya in that particular art form but also nurture him with other sanskars. In other words, it can be said that Guru makes Shishya expert in other areas like reading, teaching manners, moral civilization, culture, religion, conversation etc. Mother father can give birth to the child, but it is Guru who teaches the humanity to that Shishya. Hence, if a student finds an able Guru, then that student’s aberration ends and a Guru is lucky if he finds a loyal and dedicated student. The effective learning of Guru Shishya Parampara is very much dependent on “Guru Shraddha” i.e. having faith in Guru and his teachings can convert defects into merits. The relation of Guru and Shishya is very much based on emotion and it is Guru’s quality and ability that transforms student into Shishya. Bhagwan Narad had said that egoistic, lazy and restless Shishya cannot pursue / acquire knowledge from Guru.

⁶ *Kathak Gyaneshwari – Pandit Tirth Ram Azad, Page no : 237*

“ Here are the thoughts of some Guru’s regarding Guru Shishya Parampara.

- (1) Pandit Gaurishankar :- Since ancient time, Guru Shishya Parampara is continued in area of dance. On every Guru Purnima, Shishya worships his Guru. Any student who has a firm relation with his Guru can reach to the height of artistic area. While in institution, a student is no more a Shishya and get the limited knowledge in limited time.
- (2) Pandit Sunderlal Gangani :- In today’s time also Guru Shishya Parampara is very necessary, whether it is any discipline of performing arts. “⁷

In today’s current time, art has found its place in academic area. Now the focus of student is divided into many areas. One has to have school teaching along with training in any of the art form. In such situation, one cannot stay with Guru and thus it becomes very difficult to maintain Guru Shishya Parampara as before. But inspite of change in scenario, some discipline and mannerisms is taken from Guru Shishya Parampara and some from institutional system.

In brief, one can say that there is a need to establish such institutions where coordination of modern and ancient tradition methods can be combined. On the other hand, it can be also concluded that dance, music has made an important place in the cultural live of nation. It has become necessary to get compact knowledge of any art form, whether it is from Guru Shishya Parampara or Modern Institutional System.

⁷ *Kathak Nritya Parampara – Dr. Prem Dave, Page no : 268*