

Education under the Kerala Style of Vedic Oral Tradition with Special Reference to Samaveda

Rathi K. N., Dr. Ampili Aravind

(Assistant Professor, Sreekrishnapuram V T Bhattathiripad College, Mannampatta, Palakkad, Kerala, India, 678633)

(Associate Professor, N.S.S. Training College, Ottapalam, Palakkad, Kerala, India, 679101)

Abstract: Sama Veda is one among the four Vedas which includes the collection of hymns with musical content which are used for worshipping god at the time of fire sacrifices. The Vedic education exists right from the Vedic age. The main purpose of the study is to analyse the uniqueness of the education ideas behind the Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of the oral tradition. This study tried to analyse the problems faced by the system even after UNESCO considered it as intangible cultural heritage of mankind and intended to provide some practical recommendations to overcome these problems. The investigators used the Case study method for the research and the primary and secondary data were used for the analysis. The investigators found that the main aim of Sama Vedic education according to Kerala oral tradition is to preserve and transmit the Vedic culture by oral teaching learning method and the curriculum includes the Sama veda text along with its Upanishad Kerala oral tradition is now struggling for existence because of the modernization in Kerala. The investigators intended to suggest that there must be an immediate step from government or some NGOs for protecting the oral tradition of Sama Veda.

Keywords: Sama Veda, oral tradition, Kerala style.

I. Introduction

The oral traditions of Vedas are the means of preservation of culture and tradition of India. Vedic education is the education system followed in Vedic era in India. This education is based on Vedic literature. Vedic literature is divided into two – Sruti and Smriti. Sruti means ‘the heard’ and Smriti means ‘the remembered’. Sruti includes the Four Vedas. Rig Veda is the oldest and considered as chief among the four Vedas. Sama veda is that collection of Vedas used for worshipping and praising god. Much of this content is from Rig Vedic hymns added with musical content. Sama veda is treated as the very basis of Indian classical music. They are all arranged for being sung at Yajnas and yagas.

In ancient India, Vedas were learnt by repetition of various forms of recitation. By means of memorization they were passed down through many generations. The Gurukula supported traditional education system. Education at first was freely available in Vedic society. There are different styles of Vedic recitation in India, Kerala style is one among them.

II. Need And Significance Of The Study

As Historians’ opinion the Vedic civilization existed 3000 years back. From that period onwards the Vedic oral tradition survived till the date. It can be considered as a great cultural transmission through thousands of generations. The oral tradition of Vedic chanting was included in the list of Intangible cultural heritage and Register of best safeguarding practices by UNESCO in the year of 2008. In sociological perspective Education is considered as the tool for cultural preservation, cultural transmission, acculturation and enculturation. Now in this era of globalisation, educational ideas are much different than it was in the Vedic period. Modern education and social change in Kerala are the causes of decline in Vedic culture and oral tradition. The investigators tried to study the educational ideas behind the Vedic education especially of Sama Vedic education here. The method of teaching, practical application and the curriculum of study are explored here. The investigators felt that this study is quiet relevant in this era where the number of Vedic scholars is declining near to zero.

III. Reviews Of Related Literature

III.1. Griffith (1907) studied on the Vedic literature and explained that each Vedas have four parts like Samhitha, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads. Sama veda consist of melodies and chants for worshipping god during the fire sacrifices and the hymns of Rig Veda are re arranged for this purpose by providing musical content. The Samhita of Sama veda come under three branches viz. Jaiminiya, Kauthuma and Ranayaniya and Upanishad of Sama Veda includes Chandokya and Kena.

III.2. Karittunen (1997) studied on the orality vs. Written text of Vedic literature with special reference to Sama veda Jaimineeya branch and found that the oral tradition existed in Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and some parts of Tamil Nadu before a century but at the time of the study there existed in three groups viz. Ayyars of Tamil Nadu, Ayyangars of Tamil Nadu and Namboothiris of Kerala. There were some slight differences in the delivering of Sama ganas among these groups.

III.3. UNESCO (2008) described on Tradition of Vedic chanting, while including it in the list of intangible heritage, as the Vedas embody one of the world's oldest surviving cultural traditions. The Sama veda features musical arrangements of hymns from Rig Veda and other sources and also offer insight into the history and the early development of several artistic, scientific and philosophical concepts.

III.4. Vasanthi(2011) studied on the Sama veda chanting and found that the devotional singing is provided more importance than the text meaning. The music notations are fixed in Sama gana (that part of Sama veda where hymns converted in to music), the pronunciation changes in the notes are treated as sin. Sama veda is treated as notable among four Vedas according to Bhagavat gita because of this musical note. The SamVedic education in Kerala is based on the Jaiminiya branch and was preserved by Namboothiris in Kerala. The Kerala style of oral tradition has some unique characteristics in education like curriculum, method of teaching and practice. Here it is treated as a life style and lifelong education for doing the duty as preserve the Vedic text orally.

IV. Objectives Of The Study

VI.1. Major objective

The investigators want to do a case study on the unique educational ideas in Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition.

VI.2. The other objectives are:

- VI.2.1. To analyse the aim of Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition
- VI.2.2. To analyse the curriculum of Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition
- VI.2.3. To analyse the method of teaching of Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition
- VI.2.4. To analyse the importance of values in Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition
- VI.2.5. To analyse the teacher pupil relationship in Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition
- VI.2.6. To analyse the discipline followed under Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition
- VI.2.7. To analyse the problems faced by the system of Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition.

V. Methodology

In order to find out the educational ideas of Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition, the investigators used the Case study method. The primary and secondary data were used for analysis. For collection of primary data, the investigators used the Interview and Observation method, for secondary data internet sources and document analysis are utilised.

The tools used are Interview schedule for Vedic scholars and Vedic teachers and Opinionnaire for students.

VI. Discussion And Findings

VI.1. The Aim of Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition

The main aim of Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition is to preserve and transmit the oral tradition of Sama veda. The other aims are to develop cultural and personal values, cognitive abilities and musical aptitude among students. The other objective of this system is to prepare students for participating in fire sacrifices where Sama veda are used to chant as worship to the Vedic gods like Indra and Agni.

VI.2. Curriculum followed in Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition Chanting of the text of Sama has been classified as follows:

- A. Archika or Rik- Samhita – This includes the part of Rig veda text chanted in musical accent. There are 112 sections called Oths, each Oth containing 10 to 20 hymns.
- B. Gramageya or Sama – It is music based on the 59th rik of Archika.
- C. Chandrasyama – it is the part of Aranyaka which contains 25 Oths based on the 107th Rik.

The latter two are considered to be the most sophisticated methods of chanting Archika in various musical accents. It will take 5 to 6 years for memorizing these three parts itself for a full time student.

Besides, there are two other ways of chanting which are more difficult and complicated. They are considered to be the highest level of Sama recitation. And they are:

- a. Uha – This can be defined as the Vedavikrti of the chanting of Gramageya of Sama which contains 77 Oths.
- b. Ushani – This is the Vikrti of Aranyaka or Chandrasyama, which is also called Rashasya Gana which includes 16 Oths.

The Uha and Ushani are used for chanting while conducting the fire sacrifices like Yagas or Yajnas. After completing all these, the Upanishad parts are being taught. It is in prose formats while all the others explained above are in poem format, which includes 144 Parts which includes 30 sentences each. There are no Vedic scholars in Kerala who have taught the Upanishads and Ushani completely.

VI.3. Method of Teaching in Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition

The teaching is not bookish but oral and face to face with Hasthamudras (gestures for identifying the voice and pitch variation). The student listens the uttering of teacher and follow him. For the exact recital, the teacher should hold the hand and head of the student and will move it to right, left, upwards and downwards in accordance with the Swara with which that particular word is uttered. So, a teacher can teach only two students at a time. The studied portions are repeated regularly and this method helps to memorise everything learnt. Kinaesthetic techniques are used when learning texts and there is of the deliberate head and hand movements are made to aid memorization of Vedic accents.

The students do imitate the teacher and study the correct pitch and intonation style. They memorize it by repetition. The prescribed sound control and time periods for and between every letter and every word had to be strictly adhered to.

VI.4. The importance of values in Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition

The students must take oath for safeguarding the eternal values of Vedic era like Sathya and Rta. Sathya means truth and Rta means the law, unity or rightness underlying the universe. They must take bath twice a day and do some worship to god and sun. Thus they can attain some spiritual and cultural values.

VI.5. The teacher pupil relationship in Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition

The teacher has prominent role in Sama Vedic education like Vedic era. There is a divine relationship between teacher and taught. The SamVedic education starts right from the initiation ceremony called Upanayana in the age of 5-6 years and ends with the ending ceremony called Samaavathana. In between these ceremonies there are several rituals and worships are taken place with the supervision of the teacher. The teacher should take care of the student as his own child.

VI.6. The discipline followed under Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition

The discipline is very strict in Vedic education; the student is treated as brahmachari. The self learning called Swaadhyaya ie. Memorising the learnt verses is very important. In every morning the student must do prostrate to sun by chanting the verses studied in the day before. The holidays are decided according to lunar called Thithis, The days between full moon and new moon and vice versa. The first day, eighth day, fourteenth day and fifteenth day (full moon or new moon day) are holidays. During those days there is no classes but the practicing of the taught lessons are compulsory.

VI.7. The problems faced by the system of Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition

The Sama Vedic education according to Kerala style of oral tradition survived after thousands of years but now is facing a problem of non acceptance by the society. The number of students enrolling for Sama Vedic education is reducing year after year. The parents are not interested in ancient education and very much interested in Modern education. The Sama Vedic oral tradition was preserved by 21 Namboothiri families in Kerala and they have done the transmission to their younger members. But now the number of members in each family is reducing and only 4 or 5 families are doing this nowadays. They are doing the preservation of oral tradition according to the guidelines of Maharshi Sandeepani Rashtriya Veda Vidya Parishat. There is only one institution which providing Sama Vedic education in Kerala ie. Brahmaswom madham Veda pathasala, Thrissur.

Before 1970 in Kerala feudal system existed and the Namboothiris were land owners. The rulers of the states like Travancore and Cochin were provided some financial assistance for preserving the Vedic culture. Thus the Namboothiris could spend time and money for preservation and transmission of Vedic culture. But at

present the Namboothiris are in need of employment for their living and have no much time and money for the same.

Another problem is the caste system. The caste system was very prominent in Kerala before independence. Then the Brahmins including Namboothiries were the only castes enjoying the right for Vedic studies. Nowadays the students from the other castes are also enrolled for Vedic education, but their number is very nominal even though they provided with financial support from Maharshi Sandipani Rashtriya Veda Vidya Prathisthan under MHRD, Govt. of India under the programme Vedic education for all. The Namboothiries are not in favour of allowing the Vedic scholars from the other castes to participate in fire sacrifices like Yagas and Yajnas.

Maharshi Sandipani Rashtriya Veda Vidya Prathisthan under MHRD, Govt. of India is providing some support for the Vedic education like fellowship for Vedic scholars and stipend for students. They have prepared some audio visual aids for Vedic education. They consider five to ten students to one teacher but it is not apt for Kerala style because one teacher can teach a maximum of two pupils at a time according to this style.

VII. Recommendations

The preservation and transmission of culture is not only a duty of any individual or group of people but of the Government also. In Karnataka, the Secondary Education Examination Board is conducting Veda examination including Sama Veda Samhitha, Aranyaka, Brahmana and Rituals under the category Other examinations. Likewise Kerala also can accommodate the Vedic education in General or Vocational stream of school education. Otherwise the Govt. can establish any institution for Vedic education like Kerala Kalamandalam Deemed University which preserves the traditional art forms of Kerala.

In Tamil Nadu, there are several trusts which were providing Vedic education and they enjoy benefits from the traditional Madhs for doing their services. In Kerala the Non Govt Organisations are very less who are interested in the Vedic culture. If dire steps are not taken for accommodating this stream of education, the well known Sama Vedic tradition according to Kerala style will extinct within a decade.

VIII. Conclusion

The curriculum includes Sama veda and its Upanishads and the method of teaching of Sama Veda is purely Oral and not bookish. The teacher has been maintaining a paternal relationship with child and the discipline followed strictly by the student. Sama Vedic education is struggling for existence nowadays because of the deficiency of Vedic scholars. The attitude of the society is not positive towards the Vedic scholars and their profession in Kerala. The existence of this great tradition is upon the governments' support in financial and other means.

References

- [1] R.T.H.Griffith, The Hymns of the Sāmaveda (EJ Lazarus, 1907).Retrieved on August 18, 2013 from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sv.htm>.
- [2] K.Joshi, The Veda and Indian Culture: An Introductory Essay(Ujjain: Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan ,1991).
- [3] K. Karttunen, Orality vs. written text: mediaeval developments in Vedic ritual literature Electronic Journal of Folklore, (8), 114-126.
- [4] S. Sharma Gana of the Kauthumas (Chennai : Samaveda books 2006) Retrieved on August 18, 2013from <http://www.sanskritweb.net/samaveda/Samaveda Books: Gramageyagana, Aranyakagana, Uhagana, Uhyagana>.
- [5] S. Vasanthi, Discussion on Samaveda Chanting .Retreived on August 17, 2013 from <http://www.adishaktitheatrearts.com/articles/41-adishakti-reseach-article..> Discussion on Sama Veda chanting.