

The Upanayana in the Sūtras

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ABSTRACT :

The Vedas are called as the first literature of the world, where the education system of the then Indian society is nicely portrayed. In ancient Indian society, the character of an individual was formed by performing saṁskāras. The Hindus performed some saṁskāras for receiving education. Among the Kalpasūtras, the Gṛhyasūtras and the Dharmasūtras have mentioned about the saṁskāras connected with education, domestic rites such as marriage, śrāddhas and five great sacrifices called *pañcamahāyajña*, viz., Brahmajajña, Pitṛyajña, Devayajña, Bhūtajajña and Nṛyajña, etc., which are fully related to the human life of then Indian society. They describe some saṁskāras which are related to education, viz., Upanayana, Vedavratas, Upākarma, Utsarjana and Samāvartana.

INTRODUCTION :

During the *Sūtra* period, the Vidyārambha *saṁskāra* did not come into existence, which marks the starting of primary education. It originated as a *saṁskāra* after the *Smṛiti* literature. A.S. Altekar states that it was, probably, performed with the Cūḍākaṛaṇa or tonsure ceremony for a very long time.¹ In this context, Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* states thus- *vṛttacaulakarmā lipiṁ saṁkhyānaṁ copayūñjīta*² The *Uttararāmacarita* of Bhavabhūti also mentions in the relevant context as – *nivṛttacaulakarmanośca tayostrayīvarjamarāstisro vidyāḥ sāvadhānena manasā pariniṣṭhāpitāḥ*³ In later period, the Vidyārambha was regarded as the beginning of primary education and the Upanayana marks the beginning of secondary education.⁴ In this chapter, a humble attempt has been made to analyse the educational saṁskāras of the with their ritualistic performance as portrayed in the Gṛhyasūtras and the Dharmasūtras.

The Upanayana in the Sūtras

The Upanayana stands at the head of all the saṁskāras relating to education. It is derived from the root $\sqrt{nī}$ with the prefix *upa* and suffix *anaṭ*, which literally means leading or taking near. It originally meant taking near to the teacher for instruction. The Gṛhyasūtras clearly mention this sense of the word *upanayana*.⁵ It can be derived and explained in two ways viz., taking near the teacher and the rite through which the boy is taken to the teacher.⁶ The first sense appears to have been the original one and when an extensive ritual came to be associated with Upanayana, the second came to be the sense of the word.⁷ The *Āpastambadharmasūtra* states that the Upanayana is the sacrament of a person desirous of learning.⁸ It accepts the second

explanation of the word. From this concept, it is clear that firstly, a boy was taken to the teacher for learning, but no special ceremony was performed for that. In course of time, a religious ceremony was performed for taking near the teacher. In this context, in the *Māṛḍatta* commentary of the *Hiraṇyakeśigṛhyasūtra*, it is stated thus --- *vedādhyayanāyācāryasamīpanayanamupanayanaṁ tadevopanāyanamityuktaṁ /tadārthaṁ vā karma*⁹ Haradatta In his *Anākulā* commentary of the *Āpastambagrhyasūtra*, states that it is called Upanayana by which a boy is taken to the teacher.¹⁰ Sudarśanācārya also explains the term *upanayana* in his commentary of *Āpastambagrhyasūtra* thus --- *upanayanamiti karmanamadheyam/ kumārasyācāryasamīpanayanamasmin karmaṇītī* /.¹¹ In this context, Shree Kishore Mishra in his *Pīyūṣakaṇā* commentary on the *Kauśikasūtra* states that it is a rule of taking near a boy to the teacher by his father, guardian, etc., for the superiority of the teacher in work.¹² In the *Sūtra* period, the proposal of the student for studentship and its acceptance by the teacher is the central point in this ceremony. But, later on, when the mystic significance of the Upanayana increased, the idea of the second birth through the *Gāyatrīmantra* overshadowed the original idea of initiation for education. The *Gautamadharmasūtra* mentions it as a second birth of its performer.¹³ In his second birth, *Sāvitrī* is the mother and *ācārya* is the father.¹⁴

ācārya, i.e., preceptor means a person from whom the student receives initiation or learns the *Veda*.¹⁵ In the presence of father, he is first preferred as his preceptor. Haradatta states in the relevant context thus --- *piturabhāve yasmātpuruṣat...*¹⁶ The term *upanayana* is used as *upāyana* in the *Mānavagrhyasūtra* and the *Kāṭhagrhyasūtra*.¹⁷

In this context, the *Āpastambadharmasūtra* also mentions the word thus- *asūdrāṇāmaduṣṭakarmanāmupāyanam vedādhyayanamagnyādheyam phalavanti ca karmāṇi*¹⁸ Again, Manu use the term *upanāyana* instead of Upanayana – *garbhāṣṭame'bde kurvīta brāhmaṇasya upanāyanam*¹⁹ In the *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra*, the term *mauñjibandhana* is used as the synonym of the word *upanayana* as the boy was symbolized by wearing girdle made of Muñja grass.²⁰ The term *vaṭukaraṇa*, *vratibandha*, etc., are also used as the synonyms of Upanayana. *Vaṭu*,²¹ i.e., a boy is taken to the teacher for learning, so it is called *vaṭukaraṇa*.

Conclusion :

In ancient Indian society the Upanayana ceremony was performed for receiving education. It signifies the admission of a pupil to Vedic studies. The Vedic education system was established on the constant association between the preceptor and pupil. The function of the preceptor leads the pupil from the darkness of ignorance, to the light of knowledge. The ancient educational system evolved in its own appropriate method of study.

End Notes :

- 1 Vide, Altekar, A.S., *Education in Ancient India*, p.2
- 2 AŚ., 1.2
- 3 Uttara., 2
- 4 Vide, Pandey, Rajbali, op.cit., p.107

- 5 i) athainamabhivyāhārayati/brahmacaryamāgāmupa mā nayasva
brahmacārī bhavāni devena savitrā prasūtaḥ/HGS., 1.5.2
- ii) brahmacaryamāgāmiti vācayati brahmacāryasānīti ca/PGS., 2.2.6
- iii) brahmacaryamāgāmiti vācayati/GGS., 2.10.21
- 6 tatropanayana śabdaḥ karmanāmadheyam..... tacca yaugikamudbhi dnyāyāt/yogaśca bhāvavyutpatyā
karaṇavyutpatyā vetyāha bhāruciḥ/sa yathā upa samīpe ācāryādīnām
vaṭornayanamprāṇamupanayanam/ samīpe ācāryādīnām nīyate vaturyena tadupanayanamiti vā/
..... tatra ca bhāvavyutpattireva sādhyasīti gamyate/śrautārtha- vidhisambhavāt/ *Saṃskāraprakāśa*,
Quoted by Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra*, op.cit., Vol. II, Part I, p. 269
- 7 Vide,Ibid. Kane, P.V., op.cit., Vol. II, Part I, p.269
- 8 upanayanam vidyārthasya śrutitaḥ saṃskāra iti/ĀDS., 1.1.9
- 9 *Mātṛdatta*, on HGS., 1.1.1
- 10 *yena ācāryakulamupanīyate kumāraḥ tadupanayanam nāma karma śrautaḥ*
puruṣasaṃskāraḥ/Haradatta on ĀpaGS., 4.10.1
- 11 Sudarśanācārya, Ibid.
- 12 *kriyāyāmācāryasya mukhyatvāt pitrādīnā abhībhāvakena acāryasya samīpam*
śiṣyatvasamudbhāvannāya māṇavakasya prāṇamūlako vidhirupanayanamiti phalati/Shree Kishore
Mishra on Kau.S., 55.1
- 13 tad dvitīyam janma/GDS., 1.1.9
- 14 atrāsya mātā sāvitṛī pitā tvācāryaḥ tena dvijanmatvasiddhiḥ./ Haradatta,Ibid.
Also vide, MS., 2.170
- 15 tadyasmātsa ācāryaḥ/vedānuvacanācca/GDS., 1.1.10,11
- 16 Haradatta, Ibid., 1.1.10
- 17 MGS., 1.22.1
Also vide, KāGS., 41.1
- 18 ĀDS., 1.1.6
- 19 MS.,2.36
- 20 māturagre vijananam dvitīyam mauñjibandhane/
atrāsya mātā sāvitṛī pitā tvācārya ucyate//VDS., 2.3
- 21 upa samīpe ācāryādīnām vaṭornīrnyayanam prāṇamupanayanam/ VMS., Quoted by Pandey,
Rajbali, op.cit., p.115

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