

GURU-SHISHYA PARAMPARA

The Guru-Shishya Parampara is a traditional Indian educational system rooted in the spiritual and philosophical teachings of ancient scriptures. This system embodies a profound relationship between a teacher (guru) and a student (shishya), characterized by mutual respect, dedication, and the transmission of knowledge across generations. Spanning various disciplines from spirituality and philosophy to arts, music, and even martial arts, the Guru-Shishya Parampara has shaped India's cultural and intellectual heritage for centuries. The origins of the Guru-Shishya Parampara can be traced back to ancient Indian scriptures like the Vedas and Upanishads, where the transmission of sacred knowledge was primarily oral and passed down from guru to shishya. This tradition was institutionalized in various ancient educational centers such as Takshashila and Nalanda, where scholars and students engaged deeply in philosophical and spiritual discourse under the guidance of revered teachers.

In the Guru-Shishya relationship, the guru plays a central role as a spiritual guide and mentor. The guru is not merely a teacher but also a role model who embodies the values and principles of the teachings they impart. The relationship is often deeply personal, with the guru offering not just academic knowledge but also spiritual guidance and moral support. The shishya, or student, enters into this relationship with a sense of dedication, humility, and surrender. The process of learning involves not just intellectual growth but also personal transformation through the guidance and influence of the guru. The shishya is expected to serve the guru with reverence and assist in various aspects of the guru's life and teachings.

Traditionally, knowledge in the Guru-Shishya Parampara is transmitted orally, often in a one-on-one or small group setting. This direct transmission ensures the preservation of nuances, interpretations, and practical applications of the teachings beyond mere textual understanding. The guru imparts knowledge through stories, anecdotes, and practical demonstrations, fostering a holistic understanding of the subject.

Beyond academic or technical expertise, the Guru-Shishya Parampara emphasizes the holistic development of the shishya's personality. Moral values, ethics, discipline, and spiritual growth are integral aspects of the learning process. The guru guides the shishya not only in academic pursuits but also in navigating life's challenges with wisdom and equanimity.

Over centuries, the Guru-Shishya Parampara has evolved while retaining its core principles. In modern times, this traditional system continues to thrive in various fields such as classical music (Indian classical music like Hindustani and Carnatic), dance forms (Bharatanatyam, Kathak, etc.), yoga, Ayurveda, and even martial arts like Kalaripayattu. In contemporary contexts, the parampara adapts to changing societal dynamics while preserving its essence of personal mentorship and deep learning. Today, gurus may also use modern teaching tools such as online platforms, workshops, and seminars to reach a broader audience while maintaining the personalized approach of the traditional parampara.

Despite its enduring relevance, the Guru-Shishya Parampara faces challenges in the modern era. Changing societal values, rapid technological advancements, and the commercialization of education pose threats to the authenticity and depth of this ancient tradition. Additionally, finding dedicated and qualified gurus who embody the spiritual and moral values integral to the parampara can be a challenge. Efforts are underway to preserve and promote the Guru-Shishya Parampara through educational institutions, cultural organizations, and initiatives that emphasize the importance of traditional knowledge systems. These efforts aim to ensure that future generations continue to benefit from the profound wisdom, values, and spiritual insights passed down through this sacred tradition.

The Guru-Shishya Parampara stands as a testament to India's rich cultural and spiritual heritage, embodying timeless principles of mentorship, knowledge transmission, and spiritual growth. Its influence extends beyond academic learning to encompass holistic development and ethical living. As India and the world embrace modernity, efforts to preserve and uphold the essence of this sacred tradition are crucial for nurturing future generations of scholars, artists, and spiritual seekers who embody its timeless wisdom.

Theory And Experience

■ K.V. SEETHARAMAIAH

Galileo Galilei, Natural Philosopher, Astronomer and Mathematician, acknowledges that he has not met a man so ignorant that he could not learn something from him. He rightly says that everyone has something to learn from everyone. It is literally true. Not only learning, there is something to unlearn from others also if it is for good. Information and knowledge can be acquired through others also. Theory can also be learnt from others and can be taught to others. But experience comes only from personal involvement. It cannot be begged, borrowed or stolen. Books, newspapers, cinemas, TV channels are the important source of information and knowledge. Friends and relatives also play important role in contributing for the knowledge. Knowledge is power. This is often attributed to Francis Bacon, one of the leading figures in natural philosophy and in the field of scientific methodology. But Frank Zappa, a prolific workaholic, says "Information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom. Wisdom is not truth. Truth is not beauty. Beauty is not love. Love is not music. Music is THE BEST!". Albert Einstein, German born Theoretical Physicist, is of the view "Information is not knowledge". Oxford Dictionary defines "Information" as "facts or knowledge provided or learned as a result of research or study". Experience is also a main source of knowledge. John Naisbitt, author of Megatrends says "We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge". Information is also defined as a collection of data or facts. Knowledge is the understanding and application of that information. Knowledge can be classified as theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. For good output, both theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge are absolutely necessary. That is why, Immanuel Kant, German Philosopher, aptly says that experience without theory is blind but theory without experience is mere intellectual play. Theoretical knowledge is acquired by understanding the problem and experience is gained through practical work. An officer without experience at grass-root level can hardly guide and lead the staff under his control. Rather, the staff control the officer. Officers with little or no practical knowledge fall prey to the sinister designs of staff under their control. A number of officers act as the signing machines unable to comprehend the nature of work carried out by their subordinate employees. Vast service but no experience. Involvement in the work gives experience. Sometimes there will be wide gap between theoretical knowledge and working knowledge. "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn", says Benjamin Franklin, American Polymath. For learning, involvement is absolutely necessary. Learning is prelude for experience. Theoretical knowledge comes from reading books and watching what the others do. But experience comes only when that theory is translated into practice. Theoretical knowledge without experience and experience without theoretical knowledge is like a single wheeled cart. But knowledge is more an offshoot of experience than theory. Many people seek opportunities to have experience. But they may not get. There are many people who have the opportunity to gain experience but they do not make use of that opportunity. Experience is not something that can be got without application of mind and hard work. Theory and experience are inseparable part of life. That is why it is said, see and know, and do and learn. Theory and Experience are the foundation of knowledge.

■ O.N.KOUL

In 2024, Guru Purnima falls on Sunday, July 21. Guru Purnima has both historical and spiritual roots and is believed to have started with the Vedic tradition of ancient India. It is popularly known as Maharashi Veda Vyasa's birth anniversary who was one of the most important Gurus in history.

He is the author of the Mahabharata and Puranas and is said to have read and classified the Vedas into different sections to make the Veda study easy for humans.

It is believed that Ved Vyasa was born on this day and thus to commemorate his efforts and the different gurus who make our life worth living and easier at every stage of life Guru Purnima is celebrated. Though the practice of observing Guru Purnima started years ago, it is still relevant today.

It is especially important to teach the kids the importance of respecting, honoring, and appreciating the men and women, who in the form of Gurus make their life better and worthwhile. The word guru in itself is very sacred when we think about it. It can range from our parents who teach us high and lows of life to the sellers we see roaming on the streets who can give the right people amazing business and sales lessons. And no matter in what form we see them, a Guru is always someone who removes darkness and ignorance from the lives of others. Overall, while Guru Purnima is one dedicated to the teachers in life, it can attract charitable and donating causes. Charity and donations are an important part of many religions and traditions, so even Guru Purnima witnesses things like these where people go out of their way to organize Langars, Bhandaras, donations and the like.

Guru Purnima is celebrated with great

■ M R LALU

Guru Purnima is a reminder. It comes every year reviving our understanding of the cherished values of the Guru-Shishya tradition. Remove this ideal transition of knowledge from one generation to the next, India as a nation would cease to exist. In its entirety, India can be defined as a landscape that idealized this great tradition that existed and passed on to generations from the ages of sages. In principle and practice India's spiritual inheritance survived through this tradition. And whenever there had been a decline of values in the Indian society, there appeared a person to light a million lamps of spiritual effulgence. The first lamp goes on shining for centuries with undiminished light. This, with the brightness of supreme spiritual exuberance is the Guru and the lamp that is lighted from it is the disciple. This remained a profound way for transmitting the great knowledge that India possessed for centuries.

Many enlightened masters came and illuminated the minds of people on various subjects. Guru, according to our scriptures, is someone who removes the darkness in us. This needs to be understood with clarity. 'GU' means darkness and 'RU' means who removes it. Darkness is mostly internal and by removing it the disciple is all set to fine-tune his essential self with the supreme and thus relieved from all perennial contradictions of life. So we are supposed to pay our obeisance to the Guru on the day of Guru Purnima. In the West, this idea of Guru was never prominent to the extent it existed in

Guru Purnima in Hinduism

devotion and enthusiasm all around India and some other parts of the globe. Many people perform special Puja to honor their gurus. These often includes offering flowers, fruits and other symbolic things to the gurus image or the guru in person. On Guru Purnima people also take personal vows and resolutions to improve and better their spiritual practices. This could also include commitments to regular meditation, ethical conduct, and other forms of self discipline. The ancient theory and practice of Guru Purnima has got an important place in Hindu religion and the practice continues to the present day as the people observe and celebrate it with traditional and modern touch and revere their gurus on this important occasion. The day of Guru Purnima falls on the full moon day that is Purnimashi of the Ashada month of the Lunasolar Hindu calendar. This day has a special significance in the Hindu/ Sanatan tradition and the Hindus pay reverence to their gurus and also pay off their debt of showing the path of God realization.

It is pertinent to mention here that in ancient time Aeklavya paid the Guru Dakshina to his guru Dronacharya in Mahabarat time by offering his thumb to the Guru. On this auspicious occasion Hindus revere and remember their gurus and try to satisfy them. The celebration of Guru Purima is marked by spiritual activities and may include a ritualistic event, Guru puja, in honor of the guru or teacher. Gurus have a special place in Sanatan Dharma and the lives without a guru as the torch bearer is meaningless and so gurus are very important and significant in Hinduism and without the role and blessing of a guru, one cannot travel the sea of the world and reach the safe destination.

Gurus are believed by many to be most nec-

essary part of life. On this day, disciples offer Puja and pay respect to their Guru. According to Hindu mythology, Guru Purnima is closely associated with the birth of a renowned sage, the son of sage Praashar. It is believed that this divine child possessed profound knowledge, encompassing the realms of the past, present, and future. Guru Purnima celebrated on the first full moon of the month of Ashada, holds special significance in Ayurveda. This full moon is believed to amplify the energy of gratitude and spiritual connection, making it an ideal time for honoring our gurus and seeking their blessings.

Guru Purnima otherwise called Vyasa Purnima is celebrating the birth anniversary of Veda Vyasa, the legendary author of Mahabharata. Full moon day in the month of June-July is the witness of celebrating Guru Purnima. Hindus, Buddhists and Jains are celebrating this day in various forms. Guru Purnima is that full moon day when the first Guru came into existence. This is the story of who that Guru was according to yogic, Tantrai and Siddha traditions. Shiva was a yogi, up in the Himalayas, who would meditate for years and would break his meditation only to do a cosmic dance of ecstasy. In those times, many young men would go off to Himalayas to seek wisdom and many young men stumbled upon Shiva and watched him day and night. They were unable to understand him and he would be oblivious to human presence hence they left him, except for 7 young men who waited on. They kept observing him for months. He would not even acknowledge them. They begged Shiva that they wanted to have the knowledge bestowed from him, the universal secrets that he had, they wanted them to learn. But Shiva denied and told them that they have to do penance. And they did as was told to them. On full moon day, after 84 years of

astriugency and penance, Shiva looked at the 7 young men, who had turned into Yogi's. Impressed by their persistence to learn cosmic wisdom, he bestowed them the knowledge he wanted to pass on and they imbibed it gracefully and became Sapta-rishis or 7 powerful gurus, who would row, distribute and pass on the knowledge to other human beings. This full moon day, when Lord Shiva became a teacher or guru, is known as Gurupurnima and Shiva is known as Adi-guru. Remember, you don't choose a Guru, a Guru chooses you. And that is what Lord Shiva did. In fact, Guru Purnima is perhaps the oldest form of teachers day celebration. Guru Purnima is a significant day for Hindus, Buddhists and Jains to honor their Gurus. It holds historical and spiritual importance, rooted in ancient traditions. The day encourages self-reflection, spiritual growth, and acts of charity. Guru Purnima holds deep spiritual and cultural significance in India, honoring gurus who dispel ignorance. Derived from Sanskrit, Guru means remover of darkness. For Buddhists, it marks Lord Buddha's first sermon after enlightenment. In Jainism, it honors Lord Mahavira, who achieved his first disciple, Gautam Swami, on this day. Guru Purnima is the day to honor and appreciate all Gurus who have shaped your life and destiny and helped you be a better version of yourself. Be it the Guru in the form of school teachers, or the Guru who helped you set out on the path of meditation, Yoga, and spirituality, or be it your mother and father who were the first Gurus of your life, Guru Purnima is the day to honor and appreciate them all and show them how obliged you are to be under their guidance. To conclude let us not limit honoring of Gurus on this day and as formality, but honor, respect and appreciate gurus all through our life.

Guru Purnima- reminder of a glorious tradition

India. West admired spiritual luminaries as teachers who gave intellectual knowledge. India treated Gurus with reverence and admired them for the spiritual current they were able to set in motion. The tradition existed as the Gurus transmitted their power to their immediate disciples and the disciples carried the light of knowledge further. From the days of the Vedic wisdom to those we admire today as Gurus all have admittedly continued this process. We will see such links and lineages of Gurus exist in scriptures as well.

The greatest aspect of the Guru-Shishya tradition is that even the incarnations of God had to be a part of this lineage. Lord Rama and Lord Krishna are known to have gained their knowledge under great masters who were eminent Gurus of those days. The political system that existed then had provided profound examples of rulers being servile to the spiritual power and knowledge of their Gurus, who in turn advised the Kings when the country was flooded with adversities. An ideal desire in every aspirant of knowledge was that a Guru must teach him and lead him to light, lead from death to deathlessness and lead him from untruth to truth. The ancient Gurukula system provided platforms to this aspiration for gaining knowledge to flourish in the inner depth of a person and help him receive it from an accomplished Guru.

Experiential learning was the path that the intellectual luminary in the Guru would put the disciple through. This was an excellent aspect of preserving knowledge and keeping the educa-

tion system intact. Down the line, the period of external invasion that lasted for centuries could dismantle this firm establishment of spiritual lineage. But to revive it did happen occasionally. How deep and practical was the practice of Guru-Shishya tradition can be understood from Swami Vivekananda's words. Once, a Christian friend of Vivekananda asked him if he believed in Christ. Since Vivekananda admired Jesus the Christ, his friend told him to get baptized. But Vivekananda made him sense the reality as to what true baptism was. He said mere sprinkling of water on a person would not bring any spiritual transformation in him. That would happen only when a living illumined soul passes his power to transform a person's life. Vivekananda's quest for finding a Guru ended in Ramakrishna.

Guru Purnima is again an occasion to remember Bhagwan Ved Vyas. He is known to have rearranged the Vedic knowledge in an admiring way and the one who penned down one of the greatest epics, the Mahabharata. He is known for the incredible essence of the Vedic wisdom that he codified and ever since got promulgated through various generations. Lord Shiva is known as the Adi Guru, the one from whom the knowledge system began to make its first flow. Interestingly, there are instances in which he is known to have shown his respect to the Guru Tattva, the essential aspect of a Guru centric learning. Why did we value this tradition of passing knowledge as the best? The impact of having a Guru in a person's life is known to bring tremendous trans-

formation. This, according to the scriptures and testimonies of great masters, is proof for the master delving into the depth of the supreme reality while helping the disciple to take strides experiencing sparks of realization bit by bit. This intervention of the Guru ultimately takes the disciple to experience the abundance of knowledge dawn in him. Gradually, the darkness diminishes and various talents of spiritual rejuvenation manifest in the disciple.

Even today, India is known for the global presence of its enlightened masters, who, with great involvement continue to disseminate the knowledge of yoga, meditation and India's traditional spiritual wisdom for the universal good. They cover a variety of aspects of life on a global level and cover subjects such as spirituality, environmental conservation, education and many other aspects for the betterment of humanity. India's emergence as a global power has also been a contributory factor. 'Mother India', according to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is still truly potential to once again establish her past glory. He wanted India to become the 'Vishwa Guru'. His government has consistently been putting its efforts to see this dream materialize. And in actuality, it is a matter of time; that India, with its ethical imperatives of Dharma (righteousness), has been exemplifying its ancient values across the world. "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (world is one family) was an inspiring theme that India echoed as its march towards accomplishing its global vision of becoming a Vishwa Guru, a global teacher.

The Issue of Cancer Management

Most of patients are condemned to death for want of treatment as cost of anti-cancer drugs is unaffordable for them

■ SAJJAD BAZAZ

Some time back I came across a few master pieces of opinion articles written by some oncologists about the widespread of cancers taking heavy toll of human lives. One can understand how frightening it is and how dangerously cancer has assumed the epidemic nature at our place. It was a wonderful read to go through the suggestions dished out by some renowned doctors having immensely contributed to the field of medicine, to fight out cancer.

It was also hair-raising to come across the cancer scenario in Kashmir where the author of an article quoting 'credible' data mentions detection of 51,000 cancer cases in 4 years (2019-2022) in Jammu & Kashmir. The author has pushed for a serious study on cancer in Kashmir.

Another write-up while picking cancer as one of the predominant causes of mortality and morbidity in elderly people, has listed some useful guidelines to live a healthy, happy life.

Of course, fighting against cancer is not a child's play. It needs a definite agenda to combat it effectively. However, it's also a fact that fighting cancer to the finish bears a question mark when its increase has been epidemic in nature despite all out efforts of our medical scientists to nip the evil in the bud.

A World Health Organization report reveals that the burden of cancer is growing. In 2021, the world crossed a sobering new threshold - an estimated 20 million people were diagnosed with cancer, and 10 million died. On February 1, this year, the World Health Organization's (WHO's) cancer agency published data highlighting the growing burden of cancer around the world, the disproportionate impact of cancer in lower-income countries, and the urgent need to address cancer inequities.

The big picture as reported by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) reveals that new cancer cases have globally increased by 50% and cancer deaths by about 18% between 2012 and 2022. The IARC estimates that the global cancer burden

will continue to rise over the next 30 years, with new cases increasing by 77% by 2050.

If we look at the epidemic nature of cancer, it's the awareness which can serve as a shot in the arm in the fight against cancer. Programmes making people aware about the green pastures where cancer can set its foothold is the best strategy to control its epidemic nature. Precisely, in a fight against cancer, focusing on awareness programmes on a continuous basis makes sense as its uncontrolled spread in populations won't be encouraging for a fight to the finish.

Meanwhile, there is a neglected area which has remained out of the agenda of those who are either leading or pleading a fight against cancer. Yes, the area is treatment expenses which a patient has to incur to get rid of the cancer. The treatment expenses have all along remained a cause of concern for cancer patients. Anti-cancer drugs are usually extremely costly and which makes them inaccessible and unaffordable, especially to the deprived section. Even the diagnosis of cancer comes with the burden of huge economical implications for cancer patients. Most of the cancer patients, especially from middle class and poor families, are condemned to death for want of treatment as the cost of treatment remains unaffordable for them.

A study has shown a wide variation in the prices of most of the anti-cancer drugs available in India. It has recommended that health care providers must be aware of availability of low cost brands or generics available among anti-cancer drugs and prescribe accordingly based on the economic status of the patient for successful treatment of cancers. There is an urgent need to decrease the cost of anti-cancer drugs by the government in order to save many lives due to cancer related mortality.

The current pricing model of cancer drugs bears a huge question mark as far as its affordability is concerned. We have witnessed a significant change in the treatment protocol of cancer patients due to the emergence of several innovative therapies. But the pricing of

these therapies is so high that in most cases the treatment cost is higher than the annual income of the patients. And in this scenario, the patient is left with no option but to get consumed by the disease for want of treatment. It is increasingly difficult for people to pay for care.

Even as you see the cost of the medicine plainly displayed on its cover, the actual cost price of the drug remains invisible. It's wrapped in so many layers like maximum retail price (MRP) that almost no one understands what's really happening. The maximum retail price (MRP) printed on most of the drugs/ a healthcare article is already loaded with unbelievable margins ranging from 100 to 1000 percent!

Over the last few years, I've come across dozens of cancer patients struggling for want of finances and succumbing to the disease midway through the treatment protocol. There are innumerable instances when the high cost of anti-cancer drugs consumed the life of a cancer patient more than the disease itself. Every unit responsible for the pricing and distribution of anti-cancer drugs like stockists, retailers, carrying and forwarding agencies and other liaison agents are involved in the loot.

The darddevilry of the traders can be gauged from the fact that even those drugs, whose prices are ceiled as per the Drug Pricing Control Order (DPCO) decided by the National Pricing Pharmaceutical Authority, are being sold at two to ten times of the original cost whereas DPCO rules state that they cannot be sold at a profit margin of more than 16%.

Why are anti-cancer medicines so expensive at our place? An acquaintance dealing in pharmaceutical trade shared an interesting, but thought provoking point. In our state contraceptives are tax free, while life-saving drugs are sleeved with multiple taxes. Thus, making the drugs costly. Notably, many states in India have exempted anti-cancer drugs from the tax net.

At our place (J&K) depressing instances

galore in abundance when even a financially sound family had to sell-off their assets to meet treatment expenses. Any savings become the first casualty when it comes to availing healthcare facilities - be it diagnostic tests or purchase of medicines. Not only savings go, money is borrowed to foot the medical bills.

So, in the given modern treatment protocol, yet all cancers can be treated, and many can be prevented or cured. But what matters the most is the affordability of the treatment. The only way to help the patients afford the treatment is to make drastic cuts in taxes charged on such drugs. The state government should make anti-cancer drugs affordable by reviewing tax mechanisms. Let all life-saving drugs be made tax-free as these are more important than contraceptives.

What's needed is that these skewed medicine price bites need special focus of the government to bring parity in costing of medicines. Otherwise, current pricing of anti-cancer drugs is only condemning patients to death. Let's hope the government comes out with strategies that would ensure affordable healthcare costs and a well-guarded health portfolio across populations in the state.

Notably, last year in January, a parliamentary panel in its report on cancer management in the country has asked the government to provide free cancer treatment to middle-class households through a government-funded health insurance scheme and to cap cancer diagnostics and treatment services in government and private hospitals. It's worth mentioning that cancer care players had also planned to seek tax relief on reagents & consumables required for cancer diagnostics and on some of the anti-cancer drugs from the government in the Union Budget 2023. But nothing of that sort was mentioned in the budget. Let's hope the government extends such tax relief in the forth coming budget.

(The author is former Head of Corporate Communication & CSR and Internal Communication & Knowledge Management Departments of J&K Bank)