



Jeevan Vidya - how it has impacted me

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From a very young age I have been wondering about the meaning in life. Questions like what is good, why should one be good, what is success have been haunting me from my teens. I had come to the conclusion that all human endeavours (good and bad, selfish and altruistic) are in the ultimate analysis only for personal fulfillment call it happiness, if you like. But I did not know how to go about it, even though the search was there. Another question that deeply troubled me was what was right? How can we define what is right? Because what one person believed to be right other person thought was wrong. So how can we decide what was right?

In search of these answers I left my business an industrial unit I had set up after graduating from IIT. I decided to do something which would give me satisfaction and would reduce inner conflict and where I would not have to compromise too much. I also wanted to lead a more integrated and wholesome life and not a fragmented one (division between home and office, public and private life disturbed me). I decided to do something for the rural areas in the mountains in the field of education. I wanted to lead a quiet life and do something for the deprived section of society. My views, in retrospect, were a bit simplistic and I was naïve.

But working in the area of education was a great learning experience. I realized very soon that the villagers after getting 'educated' started getting alienated from their own family, village, language, life style, value systems, traditions etc. They started harbouring a deep sense of shame and inferiority about who they were. Outwardly this inferiority appeared as superiority or even arrogance but deep down it reflected inferiority complex. So we realized that education instead of empowering was actually disempowering the educated. At best the educated became good imitators imitating those they considered superior. And the yard stick for making this judgment about superiority was not knowledge or wisdom but outward appearances clothes, life style, money, salary, machine, vehicles, English language etc..

Even though our survey demonstrated that the joint family system was better suited for our rural areas where there were small land holdings and the nature of work (farming and animal husbandry) required a large number of working hands; the children and women were also better looked after in a joint families; somehow education was breaking up joint families. Education was somehow breeding individualism and collective spirit and feeling of cooperation were being challenged.

All this disturbed me as I realized that instead of doing good and noble I was doing more harm in a deeper sense. Moreover I was also getting praise for my work from both the community and those who were supporting us by giving financial support. But somewhere I felt like a cheat in all this. I knew that in spite of the praise what I was doing was doing harm at the level of the spirit of the individual. As a nation also I realized this education was making us hollow.

I could understand the reason of this problem by studying Mahatma Gandhi. His writings and speeches, particularly those between 1908 and 1924/25 helped me a great deal in understanding and analysing the problem. He had seen the problem long back. After reading Mahatma Gandhi, I felt that very little had changed since his times outwardly may be a few things may have changed but essentially they remained the same. We were following the same path of 'development' which we were forced to follow then, the same education system, the same set of values. No wonder the British called it 'transfer of power'. Gandhiji helped us diagnose the problem but we could not really find a wholesome solution. We did a few

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experiments in education of teaching by refraining from the textbooks - which were full of assumptions - and teaching subjects (language, math, sciences etc.) by making the local environment and local culture (farming practices, a local festival, local trees and shrubs), the context for teaching the subjects. But still this was not enough. About this time we discovered Jeevan Vidya.

Jeevan Vidya gave me what I was looking for. For the first time I realized that I did not have to depend on others to know what was right. I also discovered that each one of us wants to know what is right and live according to this understanding. I realized that I had within me a faculty that I could get in touch with, which knew what was right. And this faculty was intact in all human beings. That in this way we were all alike. For instance we all craved for trust and respect whether we were 'good' or 'bad'. This is a constant need in all of us. I did not have to go and ask everyone about this but I knew that this was as true for all other human beings as it was for me. This was reality. This was objectivity. On the other hand if we spoke in terms of 'preferences', 'opinions', 'view points', 'taste' then each one of us is different from the other. So through Vidya I could make this important distinction between reality and opinion, preferences etc. Opinions, preferences keep changing but reality remains the same all the time. This was very simple yet a great discovery and I have felt empowered by this one revelation. I now know that in all essential things in life, I have the power to know and realize the reality and take decisions according to what is right. I also realized that there is an order, a harmony in existence we do not need to create it. Until now I did not have a sense of interconnectedness between me and the other (human being and other units in nature). I felt I was separate from the other and I had to do something with the other to be connected or to be away. But now I realized that we are already connected with every unit in existence. So all we need to do is to understand these units, starting with myself and be in relationship according to this understanding. We can understand what we are, we can understand what the other is and essentially we all are similar (our deepest desires are the same; all of us feel good when these inner most desires are fulfilled; all of us act or behave according to our understanding). This has been very empowering. I have discovered that there are two kinds of self confidence one which is based on knowledge of what is right, based on knowledge of reality, the other is based on comparison with the other. The second kind of self confidence is oppressive and full of tension while the self confidence emanating from knowledge of reality, of what is right is liberating and empowering. This realization has given a great relief and also given us a guideline in education.

शिविर के पहले- विचार थे,
आधार नहीं प्रश्न थे, समाधान नहीं,
विचार थे दिशा नहीं । इच्छा थी विश्वास,
संकल्प नहीं । शिविर के बाद - एक दिशा
मिली, दृष्टिकोण मिला, आधार मिला,
सहयोगी मिले ।

प्रजाकत देशपाण्डे
बांच-सिविल, अंतिम वर्ष

Vidya has also given me a great sense of responsibility which is very empowering. I realize that I am the cause in the matter. That I am responsible for what happens to me. Therefore I have, to a large extent become free from blame and complaint. I also feel far more relaxed and sure about what needs to be done. To a large extent my concern about leading a fragmented life has got resolved.