



## SVĀDHYĀYA: THE VEDIC MOOL MANTRA OF EDUCATION FORGOTTEN BY INDIANS AND PAYING THE PRICE HEAVILY

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**Abstract:** *The paper is about Vedic practice of Svādhyāya. It's not simply a practice but a complete philosophy which ensures person's complete development. Svādhyāya has two fold meaning- self-study and study of self. Self-study explains the learner about external world whereas study of self is study of one's inner-self. Paper starts with defining the terms "Svādhyāya" and elaborating its origin and references in Vedic literature. Functions or components of Svādhyāya are - Sva-Svaroop (Self-Identity), Sva-Shakti (Self-Power), and Sva-Kartvya (Self-Duty). Paper explains meaning of these terms and justifies how these are outcomes of Svādhyāya. Next section explains advantages of Svādhyāya both from knowledge of material world as well as inner world. It helps in raising moral and intellectual standards of a Svādhyāyee. Then paper explains how Indians are paying price after disconnecting from practice of Svādhyāya under the influence of western education and western life style. The biggest price we had paid is loss of Indian Identity. Finally author suggests introduction of practice of Svādhyāya in education as an instrument for revival of Indian glory. Practice of Svādhyāya should be implemented as a matter of strategy in every aspect of education starting from classroom learning to evaluation. By re-establishing Svādhyāya we will be not lesser than re-inventing Indian identity.*

**Key Words:** *Svādhyāya, Self-Identity, Self-Power, Self-Duty, Vedas*

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One of the great outcomes of the Vedic and later Vedic education system is the practice of Svādhyāya. It is a holistic Vedic philosophy based on Gyaan (knowledge), Karma (Action) and Bhakti (devotion). A learner need to earn knowledge, put in to action and do everything in sprit we call it as devotion. The word *Svādhyāya* has been originally reported in Taittiriya Upanishad's hymn 1.9.1 that emphasizes the central importance of *Svadhyaya* in one's pursuit of Reality (Ṛta), Truth (Satya), Self-restraint (Damah), Perseverance (Tapas), Tranquility and Inner Peace (Samas), Relationships with others, family, guests (Prajā, Prajana, Manush, Atithi) and all Rituals (Agnaya, Agnihotram).

In verse 1.11.1, the final chapter in the education of a student, the Taittiriya Upanishad reminds,

सत्यंवद । धर्मचर । स्वाध्यायान्माप्रमदः ।

Speak the Satya, follow the Dharma, from *Svādhyāya* never cease.

— *Taittiriya Upanishad, 1.11.1-2*

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svadhyaya>)

The Svādhyāya is a compound word consists of two parts 'Sva' and adhyaya. 'Sva' implies 'self' and 'adhyaya' means 'investigation or inquiry'. Thus the word/concept Svādhyāya has two fold meaning- self-study and study of self. Self-study dimension is about study by self, traditionally means recitation of Vedas, scriptures and study of other sacred books, whereas, study of self is interpreted as self-analysis, introspection, reflection on self, one's own reading, observing one's own behavior and actions ultimately acquiring control over oneself and mastery over one's resources. Why one should do self-study and why to study about one self is the matter of discussion here in this paper. It has been well known fact that self-study is an entrepreneur which requires as well as reinforces strong commitment, self-confidence, time management and daring to take initiatives. All inventions big or small have been consequence of concerted efforts by virtue of self-study as well as study of self.

## SVĀDHYĀYA IN YOGA

It is fourth Niyam (rule) of five Nyamascomponents of second limb of eight limbs of AshtangYog outlined by sage Patanjali in Yoga sutras.Patanjali says-

*"Study, when it is developed to the highest degree, brings one close to higher forces that promote understanding of the most complex."* -The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, 11.44



The most complex is nature and creator of the nature i.e. The God. As evidence according to VyasaBhashya, Svādhyāya is: (i) japa, or repetition, of purifying mantras such as the sacred syllable Om; and (ii) the study of scriptures on liberation. It is further said that (iii) deities (devas), sages (rishis) and adepts (siddhas) reveal themselves to one who becomes naturally inclined towards Svādhyāya. Thus it becomes one's nature or character and one remains occupied in performing their works (Swami Veda Bharti, 2001). This is the meaning derived from the three sutras. Other widely accepted meanings given to Svādhyāya include: (iv) study of one's own personality in its totality; and (v) some form of meditation practice involving self-observation, such as antarmouna (Swami SatyanandaSaraswati, 2001)

These definitions and elaborations of the concept reveal that both Vedas and Yoga give too much importance to the practice of Svādhyāya. In fact Yoga is also a byproduct of Vedic system of teaching and learning. Svādhyāya thus should be considered as integral part of Vedic and Yogic life. The paper has an intension to stress that a very Indian should adapt to the customs and traditions of a Vedic life which could easily be routed through the practice of Svādhyāya. Svādhyāya has three basic outcomes namely- Sva-Svaroop (Self-Identity), Sva-Shakti (Self-Power) and Sva-Kartvya (Self-Duty). These functions are elaborated as follows.

### **SVA-SVAROOP (SELF-IDENTITY)**

Self-identity is nothing but knowing oneself and then establishing characteristic personality on the basis of identified strengths. It is actually a combination of both self-study as well as study of self which materialize in to our Identity. Self-study is single most powerful instrument by which human beings come to know about the facts and findings of life and beyond life. Actually when we study anything it is not the content we learn only rather it is also an instrument for bringing our abilities. For instance a student in tenth class is taught Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Language and others. And we find that a student performs very well in mathematics and very poorly in language, teacher interprets that student has great interest in mathematics and poor interest in language. It is not just a sign of proficiency in learning of mathematics rather; it tells learner has aptitude for mathematics. It is not that mathematics is going in (while learning) rather mathematics is coming out from inside (of the learner). This coming out of knowledge plays significant role in making one's self-identity. It is what has also been suggested by John Dewey, the popular American educationist 'learning through experience'. As per his interpretations knowledge is



combination of what we take in from outside and what we bring out from inside by virtue of experience to explore it. When we perform well in a subject it is first step towards establishing our identity.

Self-introspection second dimension of Svādhyāya is introducing one-self with one's true identity. It is not sufficient that we have knowledge about material, but we also need to know the spirit which uses this material. A learner needs to be aware of one's strengths, weaknesses, thinking process (metacognition), instruments of decision making, attitudes, aptitudes, values and belief system and the like. Every individual has characteristics values which makes one's decision making system and hence controls one's actions. These actions when become consistent and known to the concerned person and persons around us we acquire an identity. A person who undertakes practice of Svādhyāya easily identifies these entities hence keeps on modifying them to improve one's Identity.

### **SVA-SHAKTI (SELF-POWER)**

Knowledge is power; no one can deny this fact, especially in the present time of 'Knowledge Revolution'. But it has been always there, only in different forms, structures and parameters to qualify as true knowledge. Who excelled in knowledge was used to be designated as "Brahmin" in Vedic period irrespective of his/her cast and other attributes. And it's a fact that in olden times the whole community in the time of crisis, indecisiveness and for seeking guidance used to look towards the Guru/Brahmin. It was not by virtue of birth but by virtue of knowledge one possessed, that too decided by Acharya/Guru. How they attained knowledge was nothing but Svādhyāya. Chanakya demonstrated this power of knowledge attained through the practice of Svādhyāya. Guru just used to initiate and sensitize the learner towards knowledge, parameters of true knowledge, its methods of acquiring, and its assimilation and other related aspects. The learner/Shishya used to practice these and with the help of devotion and meditation could create new knowledge thus turned out to be a person who could generate power from knowledge. In present times also persons, institutions and countries who based their economy on knowledge and ideas generated by knowledge have exercised much more authority and power compare to those who just have material wealth. For instance knowledge related to soft wares, surveillance, facts, military strategies of a country, research and development have been valued in the sense of "knowledge as power, and the experts in these fields are most looked after, should be



termed as modern 'Svādhyāyee'. In the system of Yoga also Sva-Shakti has been given huge importance for self-realization.

Self-power comes from both external and internal knowledge. The external knowledge is knowledge of matter and men around us, whereas internal knowledge explains our pattern of thinking, our strengths and weaknesses, potentials and limitations. Internal knowledge is more about auditing our software resources including ideas, emotions will power and determination. Both external and internal resources interact with each other to reinforce one another. However more importance should be given to the internal resources, but at the same time basic external resources are still important. Svādhyāya teaches us the optimal use of both external and internal resources. A Svādhyāyee should realize his/her Sva-shakti and apply it for self-improvement and improving all around.

### **SVA-KARTVYA (SELF-DUTY)**

Knowledge is power, but it is power only when it is used, and used in a justified manner. Man is born as a social animal and has duties not only towards one-self, but also towards other fellow beings. These duties are termed as Kartavya the Self-duty. Duty is an obligation which justifies one's existence. Sva-Kartavya means a duty decided by one, i.e. imposed by oneself out of call of one's conscious. When it is self-decision, it is bound to be unique for different individuals, as we observe in case of personality orientation. Svādhyāya helps in understanding one's Kartatvya. Self-study helps in understanding how other persons have done justice with their duty, analyzing the justification of their deeds, quality of deeds and the like. Self-study helps in understanding of general duties as observed by most of the humans, and specific duties as unique to one's own context.

Duties could basically be divided in to duty towards self and duties by the self. Further duties towards self could be easily conceptualized from eight limbs of AshtangYog (Yamas, Niyamas, Asanas, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharna, Dhyan, and Samadhi) designed by Sage Patanjali, whereas duties towards other could be identified as- social, political, cultural and the like. Duty is nothing but a mechanism by which we get similar returns which maintains our life and relation. When a person does justice with one's duty in return he gets monetary benefit and respect as well. In fact, even if a sweeper keeps building neat and clean it will ensure continuing his job as sweeper, if not anything else. In this way if we do our duty towards ourselves (as suggested by Patanjali), it will help maintaining our body and mind fit



and fine. And if we do our duty towards others, we are ensuring continuity of a just social order and stable community and country as well.

## **ADVANTAGES OF SVĀDHYĀYA**

Svādhyāya is beneficial for everyone who practices it. It helps in following ways:

- Svādhyāya makes person aware about external and internal resources available to him/her.
- Through Svādhyāya not only one takes knowledge in rather also learns one's own abilities and aptitudes.
- Svādhyāya makes linkage between what is known and what is knowable and thus motivates for further goals in the life.
- It raises the level of thinking and widens the horizon of intellect of the Svādhyāyaee.
- It prepares the Svādhyāyaee for challenging and crisis situations, as Svādhyāya equips the Svādhyāyaee with necessary knowledge and skills.
- It helps the person to establish one's authority on the knowledge that really matters in life.
- Svādhyāya helps in developing ability to distinguish between truth and untruth, valuable and invaluable, facts and myths, mortal and immortal and the like.
- Svādhyāya is one of the best instruments of catharsis.
- It helps in motivation and hence able to make decision in situations of indecisiveness.
- Svādhyāya helps in maturing Svādhyāyaee to help discovering metaphysical and metacognitive realities of life.
- Svādhyāya is creative and generative in nature which result in production of new knowledge hence helps in building knowledge based economy. Knowledge based economy is the biggest hope for India in this era of competition in the environment of globalization.

## **HOW WE ARE PAYING PRICE BY DISCONNECT FROM PRACTICE OF SVĀDHYĀYA**

Svādhyāya had been an integral part of Indian life, a gift of Vedas. But with the passage of time and under the influence of western forces like Macaulay's Minute, we discarded our oriental knowledge. We became prey to the conspiracy of Britishers to destroy the wisdom earned by our ancestors through experience of thousands years. What western knowledge



has given us, the facts devoid of functional value, value devoid of human touch and humans devoid of humanistic orientation? This disconnect with Svādhyāya has affected us in following ways.

- Materialism has proved disastrous for Indians, as we were not used to assess every value in material sense.
- In absence of self-analysis, speaking untruth, corruption, dishonesty and other devilish characteristics have become routine of Indian life.
- Relations have become materialistic as now we think everything in terms of material.
- Svādhyāya is source of inculcating metacognitive skills, which we have lost due to disconnect with Svādhyāya.
- Svādhyāya makes man morally sound and pious at thinking, in absence of it we have become morally corrupt and self-centered at thinking.
- Materialism has become order of the day for Indians; it should be attributed to lack of self-consciousness, which is focus of practice of Svādhyāya.
- Altruism comes when we study about it and when we understand that this body is only a mean to undertake Karmas and is not end in itself. This knowledge can only be attained through Svādhyāya and nothing else.
- Loss of practice of Svādhyāya has turned us in disciplined, uncontrolled, and consumer of five fatal evils-Kam (Sex), Krodh (Anger), Moh (Facination), Lobh (Greed) and Ahankar (ego). This has surely made us crude animals rather than social animals.
- We have lost identity and originality for which we were known to other civilizations on this planet, rather now we look to copy others.
- Svādhyāya calls for change and also make us capable of changing ourselves and initiating a change. This is why (in absence of Svādhyāya) we have become tolerant to worst happenings in the society and don't dare to oppose or change these.
- All the illusions and consummation of illusion causing substances (drugs) are result of ignorance about our purpose and priorities of coming on this planet. In absence of practice of Svādhyāya Indians are being attracted at alarmingly towards this evil of drug abuse, thus resulting in self-annihilation.
- Values have changed over the time for Indians. Now we prefer monetary values over sacrifice, utilitarian values over spiritual values and self-growth over altruistic efforts,



this upside down has been taken place due to disconnect from practice of Svādhyāya. A Svādhyāyaee can never be materialistic and selfish when there is even an iota of possibility for good deeds.

## **GLORY CAN BE BROUGHT BACK THROUGH EDUCATION**

Although the loss seems to be beyond repair but still we need to try for bringing back the glory of our motherland and countrymen. Svādhyāya is the only route we should follow to regain our dignity and identity. But how Svādhyāya can again be made integral part of Indian life? There are some suggestions which can be tried to reverse the degeneration of Indian culture of Svādhyāya.

- Inculcate the practice of self-learning among young learners at school and home.
- To start with children must be trained in auto instructional methods of learning. The best method is reading aloud while studying.
- Reflective methods must be encouraged at school and college.
- Introspection must be used as tool for correcting the mistakes forever.
- Self-analysis must be practiced in situation of decision making. Learners should be put in the situations of moral dilemmas and conflicts for training in decision making and choosing the right ones.
- Journal writing can be one of the approaches for initiation of practice of Svādhyāya.
- Brain storming and discussions at educational institution should be encouraged to exhibit knowledge and power of self-study.
- Slowly and slowly learners should be made aware of other levels of Svādhyāya both in the form of 'self-study' and 'study of self'.
- The self-study will expose the learner to refined knowledge of material and study of self will lead to refining of behaviour.
- There need to be some activities in schools and society in general for making conscious of inner world with in us and its relation with the outer world. These activities may include meditation, self-criticism, self-submission for criticism by others, sharing the inabilities and guilt one experiences and the like.
- There could be counseling service available for improving study habits, selecting and finding learning resources, self-analysis, self-improvement, self-control, self-expression, empathy skills and the like.





- Practices of giving respect and recognition to the knowledgeable persons and accepting their suggestions in important policies and strategies can highlight the importance of Svādhyāya.
- Evaluation and examination system in educational institutions must be Svādhyāya-oriented. Practices like open book exam, flexible exams, creative tests, value planning for teaching etc. help in reviving practice of Svādhyāya.

## **SVĀDHYĀYA AND INDIA**

If we go through the history of India, we had been intellectual class who had been the leader in intellectual entrepreneur. Besides Vedic education, the source for whole civilization, we had one of the oldest universities and institutions of higher learning like Takshshila, Nalanda, Valabhi, Ujjain, Vikramshila, Jagdala, kanchi as representatives of Buddhist education, Delhi, Agra, Jaunpur and Bidaras representatives of Muslim education. Although non Vedic institutions differ significantly in their religious philosophy, but all these institutions gave huge importance to Svādhyāya both in terms of self-study and study of self. It is the second part (study of self) which is hugely missing in case of English education for which we are so attracted for material gains and glamor of the west. Every civilization survive on its own experience and knowledge amassed through its experience. What we wear, what we eat and what are our customs and traditions are outcome of our thousand years of experience. Svādhyāya is also our own invention, much before the western people adopted its half of the part i.e. self-study. They can never realize the other half i.e. study of self, reason being they have given so much importance to material world and luxuries and comforts generated out of it. The whole gamut of problems like pollution, greenhouse effect (carbon emission), drug abuse, violence, sex abuse and others is product of English education which advocates unlimited, uncontrolled freedom and pleasure is attached to material things. Svādhyāya as practiced in India, values self-control for both personal and social good. We value life and respect for life which can only be protected by character building one of the important foci of Svādhyāya. Indians can't survive without Svādhyāya thus should embrace the spirit of Swami Dayanand "Go back to Vedas", the source of Svādhyāya. Indians are not born for materialism rather they are here to lead the world using heritage of spiritual and moral knowledge. Only India can help the world to attain enduring peace through ideas like- VasudhevKutumbkum, Serve Bhavantusukhina....., and KrinvantoVishvamAryam and so and



so on. All these can materialize through Svādhyāya the ultimate weapon for Indians.

## CONCLUSION

Indians need to revive practice of Svādhyāya in practice as well as spirit. We are facing huge problems in present times which were never there even in our recent past. Besides other changes we have discontinued the practice of Svādhyāya. The biggest reason for this disconnect is our overturned education system and accepted value system. One can say that we need to change value system and education system to integrate Svādhyāya in our lives. It is a difficult proposition, which is difficult to materialize. Rather, we should do it other way round, i.e. accept Svādhyāya in our life it will cause definite change in our value system and education system as well. However in present time people don't have patience to practice first and wait for the result. We need to devise some ideas and incentives so that people should embrace it. This can be done by some provisions like appreciation of character building, value preference, refined behaviour and altruistic actions. At the same time we need to withdraw from materialism and redefine parameters of growth and development. Gross National Happiness devised by Prime Minister JigmeThinley of Bhutan and Human Development Index (HDI) developed by Pakistani economist MahbubulHaq, and Indian Nobel laureate AmartyaSen can serve as alternative paradigm for development which definitely puts Svādhyāya at its center. We can follow the example of small countries like Norway, Switzerland, and Netherland which have very high Human Development Index value and very high Gross National Happiness and consequently not low even in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Author finally suggests that we should base our development on our strengths rather than weaknesses or other's strengths so that we need not pay the price in terms of evils already mentioned frequently in this paper.

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