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The Vedantic Idea of Personality Development

Dr. Nibedita Kar

Assistant Professor
Shikshashastri-B.Ed.
SJSU, Puri

The study of human beings is one of the many fascinating studies within religion, philosophy and the physical sciences for hundred years. In general when we observe a person over a long period of time, what we find is a certain pattern in his or her behaviour, feelings and even thinking. This pattern is said to be one's personality. The personality constitutes not only what others think about one but also one's estimation of oneself. It not only refers to the behaviour but also to dispositions and the mental impressions behind the behaviour. In all, what makes a person distinct from another is his or her personality.

Personality development is the emergence of the thought and behavioral patterns of a human being over time. It is these traits that make one's personality. How do these patterns evolve and what are the conditions of such an evolutions? Whether the traits which manifest in a person already exist in a potential form or does the external ambience contribute to the acquisition of such traits? These are some of fundamental factors to be considered while assessing what personality development is. It is a multidisciplinary subject involving several branches of knowledge including philosophy. Religions, psychology and the like.

Swami Vivekananda brings in the idea of **involution** which presupposes the **evolution**. He says: Every evolution is preceded by an involution. The whole of the tree is present in the seed, its cause. The whole of the human being is present in that one protoplasm. The whole of this universe is present in the cosmic fine universe.

The above idea resonates with the teachings of Upanishads. Taittiriya Upanishad states that every living being comes out from , resides in, and merges into Reality (Brahman). Chandogya Upanishad speaks of Sat, Pure existence , which modifies into the universe with name and form, what remains is Sat.

The cosmic idea of evolution and involution equally applies to individuals also. Swamiji explains : If a man is an evolution of the mollusk, then the perfect man – the Buddha-man, the Christ-man was involved in the mollusk. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad validates this through repeated assertion: Brahman that is immediate and direct – the self that is within all - is one's own (Individual) self.

In contrast to the prevalent idea, Vedanta proposes that the discovery of one's real nature as Atman or Brahman is the goal of personality development. The systematic enquiry into the nature of Atman and raising oneself to the higher realms of self-awareness is the process involved in personality development. Kena Upanishad elucidates the culmination of this progression.

प्रतिबोधविदितं मतममृतत्वं हि विन्दते।

आत्मना विन्दते वीर्यं विद्यया विन्दते अमृतम्॥

It is really known when it is known with (as the self of) each state of consciousness, because thereby one gets immortality. (since) through one's own self is acquired strength, (therefore) through knowledge is attained immortality.

Sri Shankaracharya explains in this context that the strength got from wealth, friends, and the like cannot conquer death, for it is produced by temporary things. But the strength, consequent on the knowledge of the self, is acquired through the self alone and not through anything else. The Acharya further states that strength resulting from the knowledge of the Self is independent of any means of acquisition and that strength alone is able to conquer death.

This idea is in contrast with the western idea of personality development that mainly focuses on the acquisition of excellent qualities, capabilities, skills, education, health, wealth, and the like from external means to shape oneself into a perfect human. The Vedantic idea of personality development is acquiring strength through the knowledge of self, the perpetual fountain of infinite existence, infinite knowledge and infinite bliss, and becoming immortal.

Dimension of Personality:

The process of raising oneself to higher realms of awareness has been graphically described in the Taittiriya Upanishad in the form of five kinds of selves: **Annamaya kosha, Pranamaya Kosha, Manomaya Kosha, Vigyanamaya Kosha, Anandamaya kosha**. The grossest is the body, which an ordinary person considers as one's self. The Upanishad says that it is a wrong identification. Hence, one is instructed to proceed further inwards. Then one finds that the gross body is but a covering (Kosha) to a still higher idea of the self, that is, vital energy (Pranamaya kosha) is also not a correct concept of the Atman. It is but a covering to Vigyanamaya Kosha, intellect. Even a subtle idea such as that of intellect cannot be the true self as it is also covering to Anandamaya Kosha, the blissful causal body experienced in the deep sleep. Ultimately, Anandamaya Kosha is also a covering and hence, it is also a false idea of the Self. Then the Upanishad proceeds to give its greatest teaching: Ananda Kosh ; pure bliss is the Self. All the five selves mentioned earlier are but apparent manifestations. The real of the nature of Ananda, the pure bliss.

One who has attained this knowledge, transcends one by one, sheaths (Kosha) of food, prana, mind, intellect, and bliss and becomes one with Brahman, which is described as satyam - reality, jnanam – Knowledge, Anantam – Infinite. Through this, He or she realizes oneness with all.

The real personality is that which realizes oneness with all. It is of the nature of Brahman, the Reality. When one transcends the inferior ideas of one's [personality, one ascends to such a state in which one finds oneself in Union with Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, and realizes oneness with all. This is the culmination of personality development according to Vedanta.

Integrated Personality:

The pursuit of this ultimate spiritual goal requires harmony of the faculties of body, mind and intellect. Swami Vivekananda emphasizes that what we want to see the man who is harmoniously developed : great in heart, great in mind. He says that it is the personality that matters in an individual. Shankaracharya compares human personality to a glass globe, in which there is pure white light - an emission of the Devine Being – in the centre. However, the glass – that is, a conglomeration of body, mind and the like –being of different colours and thickness in each individual, the rays of the divine light assume diverse aspects in the transmission. AS we rise higher and higher in the scale of being, the medium becomes more and more translucent.

Conclusion :

Personality development is a buzzword used now-a-days in academic and business circles to train young people into successful persons. However, it has got a deep meaning and dimension than the commonly accepted notion of developing qualities necessary for a specific enterprise. The general notion of personality development is limited to the development of different faculties that make up the human personality. However, Vedanta presents a grand idea of personality development to be the discovery of one's divine nature hidden under the grab of human personality. So, to develop yourself, teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

