

RIG VEDA AND ITS IMPORTANCE

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TRANSACTION No. 77

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF WORLD CULTURE

Bangalore 560 004

TRANSACTIONS

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He was invited in 1987 to deliver three lectures on the Rig Veda. It was under the auspices of Shri B. P. Wadia Memorial Endowment This was the first paper he read. The other two papers will also follow publication.

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Printed by W Q Judge Press, 52 (old 97) Residency Road, Bangalore 560 025 and published by the Indian Institute of World Culture, 6 Shri B P Wadia Road, Basavangudi, Bangalore 560 004. Printed in India.

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What is Veda? This is the first question we have to answer. The word Veda has come into being with the root "Vid" which means to know. In Sanskrit Language the usage of the word Jnana is only to Vedantajnana. For this Vedantajnana, Veda is the basis. It is only from Veda that many schools of Vedanta have emerged later. The question what is this mass of knowledge and what is its definition become inevitable at this stage.

From the Samhitas and Brahmanas we can know the definitions of the word Veda. Kathaka, Maitrayaniya and Taittiriya Samhitas put forth the following definition of Veda: *Vedena vai deva asuranam vittam vedyamavindanta*. It means that the gods came to know about the condition of the demons and hence it is Veda.

In Taittiriya Brahmana also the same opinion is echoed. The words such as *Anvavindan*, *Avindan*, *Avindanta*, *Vividuh*, words in the Paninian tradition have come from the root *Vidalru*. For this word *Vidalru* carries the meaning of obtaining. *Bhattabhaskara* also while writing in Taittiriya Samhita expresses a similar opinion. *Vidyate — Labhyate aneneti. karane ghai, uchhaditvat antodattam*. From this we get the meaning acquiring or obtaining. Even in Taittiriya' Brahmana we hear the same. *Vividuh — Labhdhavantah* acquired. *Anandatirtha* in his *Visnutattva Vinirnaya* puts forth the following definition of Veda, "Nendriyani nanumanam Vedahaivenam Vedayanti tasmadhur veda iti pippalada srutih.

The senses cannot perceive Him. Even through inference one cannot make him out. But only Vedas can know him and hence they came to be known as Veda, This is the statement of Pippalada.

According to the statement of the commentator of *Susrta* namely *Dalhana*, the word *Vid* has got the conation of "existence", "to know", "to discuss", and the root *Vidalru* means to acquire it. He opines that only with these roots the *Susrutakara* enumerated the *Veda-sabda*. *Abhinavaguptacharya* in his *Natyaveda* says, *Natyasya vedanam satta labhah vicarasca yatra tan-natyaveda sabdena ucyate* exists, to acquire *Natya*, to discuss *Natya*. Hence even according to *Abinavagupta* the word *Veda* has come from the root *Vid* only.

The commentator of *Amarakosa* *Kshirasvami* says, "Vidanti anena dharmam vedah, from this Dharma is to be known. Even *Sarvananda* subscribes to the above mentioned view • when he says," *Vidanti dharmadikam anena iti vedah* means Dharma and such other things could be known only from Veda.

The Jaina teacher *Hemachandra* in his work *Abhidana cintamani* says that "Vidantya-nena dharmam vedah. If we could know Dharma from it, it becomes Veda. From these statements we can gather the information that some of the scholars have interpreted *Jnanartha* for *Vid dhatu* and enumerated the definition of Veda.

Medhatiti the commentator of *Manava dharma sastra* explains the word Veda as follows, *Vyutpadyate ca Vedasabdah, Vidanti ananya pramana vedyam dharma laksanam artham asmaditi vedah. Tat ca vedanam ekaikasmad vakyat bhavati*" It means that the definition of Dharma which could be known from other *Pramanas* is known only from the Veda. Hence, it came to be known as Veda. *Kapardisvami* in his *Apastambha poribhasa bhasya* is of the opinion that it came to be known as Veda because it preached those *Karmas* by following which one can attain *Moksha*. *Nisreyaskarani karmani avedayantiti. Vedah*, another commentator *Haradatta* substantiates in the sameway when he says "Vedayatiti vedah". *Dayananda Saraswati* in his *Rigveda bhasya bhumika* opines, *Vidanti- jananti, vidyante-bhavanti, vindanti athava, vindanti labhante, vindanti vicarayanti sarve manusavah*

sarvaha satya vidyayai yesam va tatha vidvamsasca bhavanti te vedah.

They know it or come to know about it, acquire it, discuss it; all the humanity by whom the different Vidyas came to know about it, or in which they come to know about it is called Veda.

Hiranyakesi in his Srautasutras says that Sabdartham arambhananam tu karmanam samamnaya samaptau veda sabdah. When some of the Karmas could not be realised through Pratyaksha and other means of knowledge, they will have to know it by Sabda. To declare this only Veda sabda has come into being. This definition paves the way for Sayanacharya's definition, mantra brahmanayoh Veda namadheyam" which means Veda is nothing but Mantras and Brahmanas put together.

The Vaijayantikara, Mahadeva subscribes to the above view when he says that Mantra, Brahmana, Kalpa could be called as Vedas.

In toto, one can say that it is difficult to give one comprehensive definition of Veda. Even, the great Sayana himself admits that it is difficult to define Veda.

After knowing something about the definitions of Veda, we may aim at knowing the importance of Veda. This could be dealt with under two heads —

- i) From the universal point of view.
- ii) From the Indian point of view.

FROM THE UNIVERSAL POINT OF VIEW

- (i) For the education of the history of the world, as it is the earliest record of the world civilisation. In the history of the world the Rigveda fills a gap which no literary work in any other language could fill, it carries us back to those times for which we have no records elsewhere opines Max Mueller.
- (ii) Study of Rigveda is responsible for the development of two modern disciplines such as Comparative Philology and (2) Comparative Mythology.

INDIAN POINT TO VIEW

- (1) **History of Early Aryans:** As the soul means of early religion, we must study Rigveda as it is the oldest record of Aryan Civilisation.
- (2) It provides background for all that is India:— Religion, Philosophy, Origin of the world, etc. The first marriage practice is found here in Suryasukta where marriage of Soma and Surya is discussed at length. The death or the funeral practice is first found here. Whether it is burial or cremation it is the basis for all later disciplines.
- (3) Beautiful poetry developed only from Rigveda and this could be discussed at length:—

POETRY OF RIGVEDA

The poetry of Rigveda could be dealt with at various levels starting from the description of the Dawn, where we find the personification of the physical phenomenon which has always caught the attention of the poet, Usas is the most graceful creation of Vedic Poetry and there is no more charming figure in the descriptive religious lyrics of any other literature¹.

1. Vedic Mythology. Arthur A. Macdonell p. 46.

Usas is decked in gay attire like a dancer, clothed in light she appears in the East and unveils her charm. Rising resplendant as from a bath, she comes with light, driving away the darkness and removing the night. She is young and shining. She illumines the ends of the sky when she awakes and opens the gates of heaven. She drives away the evil dreams, evil spirits and the darkness. With the dawn of Usas, the repercussions are many. When it shines forth, the birds fly up from their nests and men seek nourishment. She is borne on a shining car, drawn by ruddy steeds which is a symbolic representation of the red rays of the morning.²

The brilliant dawns standing in the East are compared to the posts set up at the sacrifices “Asthuru citra Usasah purastat mita iva svaravo adhvaesu³. Again the goddess waking from the seat of order is compared to the herds of cattle let loose. Rutasya devih sadaso Budhanah gavam na sargah usaso jarante⁴.

Now to continue with the same personification of physical phenomenon and from the point of view of the literary merit, comprehensive vision and haunting refrain we may consider the Apas Sukta.

- (i) Samudrajyestah salilasya madhyat Punana yanti anivisamanah, Indro ya vajri vrisabho rarada ta apo deviriha mam avantu.
 - (ii) Ya apo divya uta va sravanti khanitrima uta va yah svayanjah Samudratha yauh sucayah pavakas ta apo deviriha mam avantu.
 - (iii) Yasam raja varuno yati madhye Satyanrte avapasyam jananam madhuscutah sucayo yah pavakas ta apo deviriha mam avantu.
 - (iv) Yasu raja varuno yasu somo visve devah yasurjam madanti vaisvanaro yasvsguih pravistas ta apo deviriha mam avantu.
- (i) Having the ocean as their chief, from the midst of the sea, purifying, they flow unresting; let those waters the goddesses, for whom Indra, the bearer of the bolt, the mighty one, opened a path, help me here,
 - (ii) The waters that came from heaven or that flow in channels or that arise spontaneously, that clear and purifying have the ocean as their goal; let those waters, the goddesses, help me here.
 - (iii) In the midst of whom King Varuna goes looking down upon the truth and untruth of men, who distil sweetness, clear and purifying; let those waters, the goddesses help me here,
 - (iv) In whom King Varuna, in whom Soma, in whom all gods drink exhilarating strength, into whom Agni, Vaishvanara has entered, let those waters, the goddesses help me here.⁵

To pass on from this personification and constant refrain of waters, the frog hymn Mandukasukta would be most relevant. This hymn is intended as a spell to produce rain, which is a panegyric of frogs, who are compared during the drought to heated kettles, and are described as raising their voices together at the commencement of the rains like pupils repeating the lessons of their teacher.

Samvatsaram sasayana brahmana Vratarinah

Vacam parjanya jinvatam pra manduka avadisuh.

The frogs having lain for a year, like Brahmins practising a vow, have uttered forth

² *Vedic Reader* A. A. Macdonell p, 92.

³ *Ibid.* p. 95.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 95.

⁵ *Ibid* p.p.116-11p

their voice roused by Parjanya. Here the comparison has been worked out beautifully.

Divya apo abhiyadenamayan drutim na suskam sarasi sayanam. Gavamaha na mayur vatsininam Mandukanam vagnvratra sameti.

When the heavenly waters came upon him lying like dry leather -bag in a lake, then the sound of the frogs unites like the lowing of the Cows accompanied by calves.

Yadimenam usato abhyavarsit trishyavatah pravrsyagatayam akhalikritya pitaram putro anyo anyam upavadantameti.

When he has raised upon them, the eager, the thirsty, the rainy season having come, one with a croak of joy approaches the other, while he speaks, as a son approaching a father.

Anyo anyamanu gribhnatyeno apam prasarage yadamandisatam kaniskan mandukn yadabhivistah kaniskan prusnih samprukte haritena vacam.

One of the two greets the other when they have revelled in the discharge of the waters, when the frog, rained upon, leaps about; the speckled one mingles his voice with that of the yellow one.

Yadesam anyo anyasya vacam
Saktasyeva vadati siksamanah
Sarvam tadesam samrudheya
parva yat suvato vadathanadyapsu.

When one of them repeats the speech of the other, as the learner that of his teacher, all of them are in unison.

Gomayureko ajamayureko
Prsnireko harita eka esam
Samanam nama bibhrato virupah
Purutra vacam pipusur vadantah.

One lows like a cow, one bleats like a goat; one is speckled, one of them is yellow. Bearing a common name they have different colors. In many ways they adorn their voice in speaking.

Brahmanaso atiratre na some saro na pumamabhito vadantah

Samvatsarasya tadahah paristah yan mandukah pravrushinam babhuva.

Like the brahmins at the Soma sacrifice speaking around as it were a full lake they celebrate that day of the year when frogs begun the rains.

Brahmanaso somino vacamakrata brahma krnavantah parivatsarinam
Adhvaryavo dharminah sisvidanah avirbhavant guhya na kecit.

Soma pressing Brahmins they have raised their voice, offering their early prayer. Adhvaryu priests, heated, sweating, appear, none of them are hidden.

Devahitam jugupur dvadasasya
Rutum naro na praminantye
Samvatsare pravrsya gatayam
Tapta dharma asnuvate visargam.

They have guarded the divine order of the twelvemonth; these men infringe not the season. In a year, the rain time having come, the heated milk-offerings obtain release.

Gomayuradat ajamayuradat prsniradat harito no vasuni
Gavam manduka dadatah satani sahasrasave pratiranta ayuh.

He that lows like a Cow has given us riches, he that bleats like a goat has given them, the speckled one has given them and the yellow one. The frogs giving us hundreds of cows prolong our life in a thousandfold soma pressing⁶.

In the first stanza, the frogs waiting for full one year period is compared to the oath taken by the brahmins.

In the Second stanza, the sound of the frogs is compared to that of lowing of the cows.

In the third stanza, the one frog approaching the other with croaking noise is compared to the son approaching the father.

In the fourth stanza, when the speckled frog and the yellow frog croak in unison, it is interpreted as though they are greeting each other.

In the fifth stanza, the repetitions of the croaking noise is compared to the students repeating the lesson to the teacher.

In the sixth stanza, we can note even the philosophical content that though they have got different colors and different noises still they bear the common characteristic of frog which draws our attention to the famous Rigvedic statement of “ekam sadviprah bahudha vadanti” Though there is only one permanent being the different people interpret it differently.

In the Seventh Stanza, the beginning of the soma sacrifice is compared to the lashing of the rains and the priests talking to each other is compared to the croaking of the frogs.

In the Eighth Stanza, the frogs are compared to the divine order of the twelve months, just as the brahmins wait for the occasion of pressing of soma.

In the last stanza the frog has been eulogised to the state of a God. Just as god is capable of bestowing gifts on the people similarly the frogs have been giving the gifts.

Next we *cm* pass on from the picturesque description of panegyrics to that of the dramatic monologue in the hymn to a gambler which is known as “Kitava sukta” or “aksa sukta”. In this didactic hymn we can see the lamentation of a gambler, who unable to resist the fascination of the dice, deplors the ruin he has brought on himself and his family.

In this hymn, there is a reference to the background and the origin of dice.

The dangling ones, born in a windy place of the lofty tree gladden me as they roll on the dice-board. Like the drought of the Soma from Mujavant, the enlivening Vibhidaka has pleased me.

Na ma mimetha na jihila esa siva sakhibyah uta mahyamasit
Aksasyahamekaparasya hetoh anuvratamapa jaya marodham.

Here, he describes his pitiable condition on account of fascination for dice.

She does not scold me, she is not angry; she was kind to friends and to me. For the sake of a die too high by one, I have driven away a devoted wife.

Dvesti svasrura jayam runaddi na nataito vindate marditaram
Asvasyeva jarato vasnyasya naham vindami kitavasya bhogam.

6. *Ibid.* p. p. 141-147.

Here the gambler pitifully says that no one will pity the man in distress.

My mother in law hates me; my wife drives me away ;the man in distress finds none to pity him. I find no more use in a gambler than in an aged horse that is for sale.

Here, the comparison between the gambler and the aged horse has been worked out beautifully. Just as everyone drives away the aged horse, in a similar manner gambler is also driven away wherever he turns.

Anye jayam parimrsamtyasya yasyagradadvedane vaya aksah

Pita mata bhratarā enamahuh na janimo nayata baddametam.

Others embrace the wife of him, for whose possessions the victorious die has been eager. Father, Mother, Brothers say of him, we know him not, lead him away bound.

Here we come to see the pitiable condition of the gambler and how his own kith and kin want to de-recognise him.

Yadadidye na davisanyebhīh parayadyova hiye sakhibhyah

Vyuptasca babhravo vacamakrata emidesam niskrtam jariniva

Here we can see the irresistible attraction of the dice.

When I think to myself, I will not go with them ; I shall be left behind by my friends as they depart to play and the brown ones, thrown down, have raised their voices, I go straight like a courtesan to their place of assignation.

Here, the gambler is compared to a courtesan and she going to the assigned place is compared to a gangling den.

Sabhameti kitavah priccamano jesyamiti tanva susujanah.

Aksaso asya vitaranti kamam pratidivne dadata akrtani.

Here, the psychology of the gambler is beautifully described.

The gambler goes to the assembly hall asking himself, “shall I conquer” trembling with his body. The dice run counter to his desire, bestowing on his adversary at play the lucky throws.

Nica vartante uparipuranti ahastaso hastavantam sahante.

Divya angara irine nyuptah sitah santo hrdayam nirdahanti.

They roll down, they spring upward. Though without hands, they overcome him that has hands. Divine coals throw down upon him the gambling board, being cold they burn up the heart.

In the sentence cold board and burning of the heart, the paradox, is beautifully brought out.

Jaya tapyate kitavasya hina mata putrasya caratah kvasvit

Rinava bibhyan dhanamiccamano anyesam astamupanaktameti.

Forsaken, the wife of the gambler is grieved; the mother too wanders who knows where. Indebted, fearing, desiring money he approaches at night the house of others.

The misery involved in addiction to gambling has been beautifully portrayed here.

Striyam drstvaya kitava tatapanyesam jayam sukrtam ca yonim

Purvanhe asvanyuyuje hi babhran so agnerante vrshalah papada.

It pains the gambler when he sees a woman, the wife of others, and their well ordered home. Since he yokes the brown horses in the morning, he falls down in the evening like a beggar.

Here, the pitible condition of gambler is effectively portrayed.

Aksairma divyah krsimitkrsasva vitte ramasva bahu manyamanah
Tatra gavah kitava tatra jaya tanme vicaste savitayamaryah.

The gambler in this hymn is giving an universal advice that no one should take to gambling.

Play not with the dice; ply thy tillage; rejoice in thy property, thinking much of it; there are thy cattle, O gambler, there thy wife; this Savitr here, the noble, reveals to me.

In this stanza we can note the moralistic tone and the didacticism.

With this hymn we come to know that the evil of dice was as old as that of Rigveda. Even in later literatures we find a reference to this dice concept. In Mahabharata Yudhishthira plays dice and in the bargain loses everything and suffers the terrible insult inflicted on Draupadi. In the drama, Mrccakatika written by Sudraka also we can note how the gambler's scene is brought out effectively and how ultimately Samvahaka the original gambler turns himself into a budahist mendicant.

Rigveda is also the *origin* for the poetic drama which could be noticed from some of the following earliest dialogues; the Yama - Yami samvada, Pururanas-Vrvasi samvada, sarama - phani samvada, Visvamisra - nadi samvada and so on. For the present purposes we will restrict ourselves only to Yama - Yamisamvada which is as follows: Ko asyaveda prathamasyannah ka im dadarsa ka iha pravocat. Brahman mitrasya varunasya dhama kadubrava ahano vinya nrvn yamasya ma yamyam. Kama agan samane yowou sahaseyyaya. Jayena patye tanvam ririyam vicid braheva ratneya chakra na tishtani na nimisantyete devanam spasha iha ye charanti. Anyena madig hano yahi stiyam tena vi vraha rathyeva chakra ratribhiraama ahabhirdasasyet suryasya chaksur muhvmimiyat. Diva prithimya mithuna sambandhu yamiryamasya bibryadajami aghata gaccamutta yugami yatra jamayah. krnavannajami. Upa barbuhi vrstabhasya bahu manya miccasva subhage patraim yat kim brata sadhyadanatha bhavanti kimusvasa yannirritihi nigachat. Kamabhuta bahve tadrupan tanva me tanva. Sam pipragdhi na va ute tanva tanvam. Sam papricyam papamayurah svasaram nigachat. Anyena mat pramadah kalpayasva na te bhrata subhage vastyeta bato batasl yama naina te mano hrdayam cavidama. Anya kilatvam kaksyeva yuktam parishvajate libhujeva vrksham. Tavaha tasya va tvam man iccha sa a krishva samvidham subhadram⁷.

Macdonell has beautifully summed up the Yama - Yami samvada in the following words;

“The spies sent by the gods here ever wander. They stand not still, nor close their eyes in slumber. Another man thine arms shall clasp. O, Yami, Tightly as twines around the tree the creeper⁸”.

The creeper twining round the tree comparison could also be noted in two other contexts. Acharya Sankara in his Sivanandalahari uses the same comparison in the stanza, “Ankolam nijabija santatih” and says Lata kshitiruham and Bana in his kadambari while describing the coronation ceremony of Chandrapida discusses how royal glory transformed

7 Satv&Iekar, Sripad Damodar, Rigveda Samhita, Svadhyamandal, Paradi. p. 633.

8 Macdonnel, Arthur. A. History of Sanskrit Literature, London, William Hinemann. p. 118.

from Tarapida to Chandrapida without neglecting Tarapida. “Lateva padapantaram nija-padapam amuncatyapi.

We find even enigmatic statements and riddles in Rigveda. For example we have a reference in Savitrusukta “iha brvituyautaecriketat”⁹. Let him who may understand it, tell it here.

The poetic epitaets bestowed on the Gods are also very striking. Indra stands supreme in this regard, Vajrabahu bearing the thunderbolt in his arms, Somapa - the Soma Drinker, Marutvan - accompanice by Maruts. Sachipati:— the lord of Sachi, Satakratu - having performed hundred sacrifices, susiprah - fair lipped one and others. Apamnapat is personified as Gold.

Hiranyarupah Hiranya sandrg, sa hiranya varnah, hiranyayat pari yonim nisadya hiranyada dadati annamasyai¹⁰. He is of the golden form, of golden aspect; he is of golden nue, coming from a golden womb.

Even from the point of view of the figures of speech we have a wealth of information in Rigveda. Just to quote some of the very striking ones, in the Agni Sukta we have: — Sanah piteva sunavegne supayanobhava¹¹. Be easily accessible to us as a father to his son. In the Indra Sukta we have Svagniva jigivan¹². like a hunter capturing a deer Indra has conquered the army. Prathamam purohitam¹³. This means the first domestic priest Rathiva kasayasvam abhiksipan avirdutan krnute var’syat¹⁴. Like a charioteer lashing his horses with a whip he makes manifest his messenger or rains. Bhisaktamam tvam bhisajam srnmi -the best physician among the physicians.

To conclude, one may say that the poetry of Rigveda is one of the most beautiful and enjoyable. It is a harmonious blend of haunting refrain, pangyrics, didacticism, personification of physical and empirical phenomenon.

9. Ibid. p. 15. Macdonoel, A Vedic Reader.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.74

¹¹ Ibid. p.47

¹² Ibid. p.47

¹³ Ibid. p.100.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.105.