

SOME SPECIAL FEATURES OF VEDIC INTERPRETATION BY SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI

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"The Vedas are probably the earliest documents of the human mind and it is indeed difficult to say when the earliest portions of the Vedas came into existence. As the ancient Hindus seldom kept any historical record of their religious, literary and political realizations, it is difficult to determine the period of the Vedas with precision. Historians provide us many guesses but none of them is free from ambiguity."¹

The word "Veda" means wisdom, sacred knowledge or knowledge par excellence and 'it manifests the language of the Gods in human speech. The laws of the Vedas regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs of the Hindus to the present day. All the obligatory duties of the Hindus at birth, marriage, death etc. owe their allegiance to the Vedic ritual². The Vedas are apauruṣeya. They are supposed to have been directly revealed, and thus are called *śruti*.

The Vedas are not only the preacher; they are also the glory of Indian heritage. What is to be done or not at that time the *śruti* or Vedas are accepted as evidence (*pramāna*). Manu, told in his book, titled *Manusmṛti* "dharmam jijñāsamānebhyaḥ pramāṇam paramam śru- tih".³ Later on Acārya Patañjali told the study of the Veda is essential, he quoted- "brāhmaṇena niṣkāraṇo dharmah ṣaṅgo vedah adhyeyo jñeyaśca."

The whole Sanskrit literature has been influenced by the Vedas. Various discussions about the mantras, yāga-yajña, viniyoga, upāsanā are included in the brāhmaṇa and aranyaka. Sr̥ṣṭitattva, ātmā, jīvatmā, brahma, mokṣa etc. are described in the upaniṣad. The grhyasūtras are maintaining the social conditions and the conflicting aspects of the society. Linguistically śikṣā, vyākaraṇa and nirukta taken together constitute the first lexicon of the Vedas. It is a matter of great wonder that at times interpretations about the Vedic mantras are myriad and very often they are contradictory in nature. Ācārya Yāska also came across such conflicts, so he referred to the various schools of Vedic interpretations in his niruktam. Such as nairuktāḥ, aitiḥāsikāḥ, parivrājakāḥ, naidānāḥ, adhidaivatam, adhyātmam, ārṣam, yājñikāḥ, vaiyākaraṇāḥ, ācāryāḥ, ātmavādinah, ātmpravādāḥ etc.⁴ Thus it can be

¹Internet, Hinduism.about.com.

²Ibid.

³Manusmṛti.2/13

⁴TraditionalVedic Interpretations. PP43-44.

said that in ancient India - even in the days of Yāskācārya various schools of Vedic interpretations were in vogue. Yāska's interpretation is really praiseworthy. Some Vedic scholars have ignored the etymological perfections of the Vedas. They specified that the Vedas are full of mutual contradictions, and do not have any clear meaning. Kautsa was one of them, he said "anarthakā hi mantrah" and later on Acārya Yaska (6th Century B.C. Approx) elaborately discussed on the view of Kautsa and said "naiṣa sthāṇoraparādhaḥ yadenamandho na paśyati. Puruṣāparādhaḥ sa bhavati"⁵. Mantras are effective if they are under-standable and most of the time it is a laborious task to understand the meaning of the Vedas. In nineteenth century Dayananda Saraswati, followed the interpretative methods of Yāska. He interpreted Vedas on the basis of rationalism and considered Vedas as great repositories of knowledge or wisdom admired by the modern interpreters.

According to Swami Dayananda Saraswati the samhita portions of the Vedas are apauruṣeya and everything contained in the Vedas is the perfect truth but he was not ready to accept brahmana, aranyaka, upaniṣad as the apauruṣeya part of the Vedas. He cited that the brahmana, aranyaka and upaniṣad are the later parts of the Vedas and are narrated by the Rsis. He said: "kiñca 'mantrabrāhmanayorvedana- madheyam iti kātyāyanokterbrāhmanabhagasyāpi veda sañjñā kuto na svikriyate?"

According to Kātyāyana both mantras and brahmaṇas are the parts of the Vedas but Swamiji disagreed and told brahmaṇa cannot be a part of the Vedas because it has a historical and paurāṇik definition, the brahmaṇa is the explanatory book of the Vedas and it has been narrated by the Rsis. "caturvedavidbhir-brāhmanavidbhir-brāhmanair- maharṣibhiḥ proktāni yāni vedavyākhyānāni tāni brāhmanānīti"⁶

In the Vedas Swami Dayananda Saraswati never found killing of human beings (narmedha), killing of Cows (gomedha), having the flesh of animals, cruelty in the yajña but in the brahmana he found all those things, according to him just because of this cruelty paramāhimsaka (Non-violence) some persons were not following the Vedas, and Gautam Buddha was one of them.

According to Sayana there is a history of the Vedas but Swami Dayananda does not accept the historical aspects of the Vedas. Before the creation of this world how would there can be a history? We can find history only in those books which were narrated after the creation of this world. In the Vedas we can find the names of Kings, Cities, Rivers and Rsis but these names do not denote a person, but these words are compounds and adjectives. For example in the Atharvaveda we can find the name of Ayodhyā "aṣṭācakrā navadvārā devānām puray- odhyā, tasyām hiranyayah koṣaḥ svargo jyotiṣāvṛtaḥ"⁷. "The human body is an invincible city of the gods, God Supreme and the divinities of nature. It has

⁵Niruktam 1.

⁶Mahabhasya, 5.1.1

⁷Atharva Veda 10.2.31

eight chakras: Muladhara, Svadhishthana, Manipur, Anahat, Vishuddhi, Lalana, Ajna and Sahasrara. It has nine gates: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth and the organs of excretion. In the city, there is a golden cave, replete with the golden light of Divinity, which is the heavenly path to heaven. This City is Ayodhyā, the Invincible⁸." So here the name of Ayodhyā is not the kingdom of Raghu- vamsa. It means "na yodhhum śakyā", where war is not allowed, and the founder of Raghuvamsa has given his kingdom name Ayodhyā from the Vedas. In the Rgveda we can find the name of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna together but those names are not denoting a person's name but adjective "ahaśca kṛṣṇamaharjunam ca vi vartate rajasi vedyābhih"⁹. "The dark half of the earth's daily round, the night, and the bright half, the day, revolve alternately in the terrestrial atmosphere along with their cognizable characteristics"¹⁰

There is only one God in the Veda and Agni, Indra, Varuṇa, Rudra etc. are the symbol (Guna) of the God. So these Gods are the qualitative adjective (guṇavācī viśeṣaṇa) of the God. "indram mitram varuṇam- agnim-ahuratho divyaḥ sa suparno garutmān. ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadantyagnim yamam mātariśvānam-ahuh"¹¹. Reality is one, Truth is one, Īśvara is one and only One, not more than one. The learned and the wise speak of It in many ways. They say: It is Indra, glorious, Mitra, universal friend, Varuna, highest adorable, Agni, light of life, Divya, heavenly, Suparna, supreme beautiful, Garutman, supreme dynamic. They say: It is Agni, life and leader of existence, Yama, supreme controller, law and justice, and the judge, and Matarishva, supreme energy of the universe¹²

Ācārya Sayana, Ācārya Uvata, Ācārya Mahīdhara have interpreted the Vedas following the viniyoga but Svāmi Dayananda Saraswati did not accept this. He thinks according to the pada, padārtha and devatā of the mantras viniyoga should have been done. The God did not create mantras for the viniyoga.

"From his Vedic studies, Dayananda was convinced that there was no idol worship in the Vedas. The idol worship came after the Buddhism or the Purāṇic religion. Hence he has strongly criticized the idol worship on the Vedic background. In the same way, he was against untouchability as it was never found in the Vedic mantras or in the Vedic society. He traced the caste system to its Vedic origin. But the varnas mentioned in the Vedas were only the natural divisions of labour in the society on the basis of their merits and function- gunakarmavibhā- gaśah as said in the Gita."¹³

Another interpretation offered by Swami Dayananda Saraswati on the basis of the Vedas was the establishment of the women's right "to have a sacred thread and the study of the Veda which were denied in the middle age of Hinduism (i.e. the degenerated period of Hinduism). He quoted from

⁸Atharva Veda 10.2.31

⁹Rg Veda 06.09.01

¹⁰Rg Veda 06.09.01

¹¹Rg Veda 06.09.01

¹²Rg Veda Vol.1Dr Tulsi Das P. 742

¹³Traditional Vedic Interpretations. PP 85-86

śatapathabrāhmaṇa: 'atha ya icchet duhitā me panditā jāyate sarvamāyuriyāt '¹⁴ i.e. whosoever desires that his daughter be learned and attain full life etc. "¹⁵

Thus we can conclude that Swami Dayananda Saraswati has interpreted the Vedas on the basis of rationalism, spirituality and in a scientific way. A very well-known western professor Max Müller was impressed by the interpretation of Svāmi Dayananda Saraswati and he quoted in his Biographical Essays- "According to Swami Dayānanda, everything contained in the Vedas was only the perfect truth. He went one step further and by their interpretations succeeded in persuading others that everything worth-knowing-even the most recent inventions of modern science were alluded to in the Vedas. Steam-engines, electricity, telegraphy and wireless microgram were shown to have been known at least in germs to the poets of Vedas."

On the other hand Rṣi Aurobindo had also paid a great tribute to Swami Dayananda Saraswati. In his easy "Dayananda and the Veda" he quoted-"There is nothing fantastic in Dayananda's idea that Veda contains truth of science as well as truth of religion. I will even add my own conviction that Veda contains other truths of a science the modern world does not at all possess and in that case Dayananda has rather under re-lated than overstated the depth and range of the Vedic wisdom."¹⁶

In the same essay he further said-"In the matter of Vedic interpretations I am convinced that whatever may be the final complete interpretation, Dayananda will be honoured as the first discoverer of the right clues. Amidst the chaos and obscurity of old ignorance and age-long misunderstanding his was the eye of direct vision that pierced to the truth and fastened on that which was essential. He has found the keys of the doors that time had closed and sent as under the seals of the imprisoned fountains,"¹⁷

Thus it can be established that Swami Dayananda Saraswati was "the great path maker in the modern India who though bewildering tangles of creeds and practices-the dense under-growth of the degenerate days our country cleared a straight path that was meant to lead the Hindus to a simple and rational life of devotion to God and service for man. "¹⁸

¹⁴Satapathabrahmana, 14.2.4.16

¹⁵Traditional Vedic Interpretations. PP 85-86

¹⁶Bankim-Tilak -Dayananda.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Rabindranath Tagore

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