

Vedic Knowledge Applied in Modern World

Nicholas Kazanas – November 2022

1. It was in 1993 that Prof. Behari Chaubey¹ explained in detail the difficulties appearing in Vedic Studies in the modern conditions of India. There was a shrinking number of scholars having all-round knowledge or able to recite the full Saṃhitā of their Śākhā, and a deterioration of the quality of Vedic Studies. Vedic was hardly taught in the Universities and research was of very low quality.

Similar views have been expressed by others since.

The concern with the Sanskrit language in which the Vedas are enshrined is also diminishing². We live in an age of excessive information – in all spheres of knowledge. Vedic and Sanskrit studies are not as popular as they were 100 or even 20 years ago. It is more useful to learn Chinese or Spanish etc. The ancient texts are now available in English translations and in most modern Indian languages, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil etc. The need for Sanskrit is no longer so necessary.

Vedic studies do not seem to have much practical use. It is much more profitable to go for technology, science, law, finance, commerce, computers, and the like. State officials and politicians have no knowledge of Vedic. Four ambassadors that I knew well in Athens were not interested, nor some MPs I met here.

2. But let us now turn to our theme - the innovative application of Vedic Knowledge to modern society. What are Vedic Studies for WAVES? What is the Veda? How much of it and what forms do we mean to apply?

In his *Vedic Hermeneutics* Prof. K.S. Murti³ examined summarily the different notions regarding the Veda from ancient times. The grammarian Kātyāyana regards as Vedas the *Mantras and brāhmaṇas*, i.e. the 4 Vedic Saṃhitās and the Brāhmaṇa texts - and his notion was accepted by most classical scholars.

Much later, Sāyaṇācārya defined the concept differently: the Vedas are texts with ideas through which humans may know the metaphysical goal of life - which has the subcategories of jñāna- and upāsana- kāṇḍas. He is following the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* wherein the Vedas are defined as transcendental teachings through which one may obtain the desirable and avoid the undesirable. In other words, it is the knowledge of *dharma* and *adharmā*. As the saying goes – *vedo 'khila dharmamūlam* 'the entire Veda is the root of *dharma*'. And indeed, Sāyaṇa, who should be studied and known much better, adds that Vedas reveal the knowledge of *dharma* and the way to *brahman* (=Absolute): *iṣṭa-prapty-anista-hārayor alaukikam upāyaṃ yo grantho vedayati so vedaḥ*. He like most of us takes Veda to be books *grantha*, even though the word means simply "knowledge".

There are several other definitions by other eminent thinkers in the Native Tradition and in Western scholarship. All fall within the one or other category.

It follows that for empirical facts, for the knowledge of the material world, the Vedas are not needed. Some mantras and brāhmaṇa pieces are needed for pūjas, yājñas and other rituals. But

these, falling within the subcategory of Karma-kāṇḍa, were established many centuries ago by & for brāhmaṇas, hotṛs, udgātṛs etc.

This ritualistic aspect declined even in ancient times with the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, religions which produced their own sacred texts. We can make comparative studies but apart from specialists nobody else is interested.

3. I remember in my student days in London in the 1960's, there were publications enumerating various scientific "predictions" in some Buddhist texts. To me they seemed gratuitous and false. I do not believe the Islamist enthusiasts who also find scientific predictions in the *Quran*. Nor do I believe Hindus who discover scientific facts in Rigvedic hymns (e.g. nuclear fission and fusion etc).

Some sober researchers like prof. Subhash Kak and the late Narahari Achar have shown that Vedic texts had advanced knowledge of Astronomy, Biology, Geometry and Mathematics. These are valid. The rest are fantasies.

The ritualistic aspect of the Vedas declined further with the establishment of the Moghuls in Northern India in the 12th century and the subsequent oppression of the native cults. But meantime there appeared the Purāṇas, the Tantras and the Bhakti cults, displacing in large part the ancient Vedic texts. But even then, as today, they all declared adherence to the Vedas, the mantras and brāhmaṇas, which never lost entirely their authority. Modern scholarship continues to study all these texts and their import and the interaction with other cultures.

4. Let us now go to the spiritual aspect of dharma and brahman. The *Manusmṛti* (12.94) states –

pitrdevamanusyāṇām vedacakṣuḥ sanātanaḥ |
aśakyam aprameyaṃ ca vedaśāstram iti sthitiḥ ||

The Veda is the eternal eye of ancestors, gods and humans.... We can ignore here the ancestors and gods in their heavens. But in what way is the Veda the eternal eye for humans – that is, ourselves in this world?

It can only be the inherent intelligence or knowledge which is a form the absolute, all-knowing Brahman takes entering into every human to be the True Self. This is stated clearly in RV 1.164.21 (asya vāmasya... hymn): *inó viśvasya bhūvanasya gopā sa mā dhīraḥ pākam atra-āviveśa* "the mighty guardian of the whole world, he the Wise One, entered here into me, the simpleton." And RV 6.9.4-6 confirms this *jyotir amṛtaṃ martyeṣu... dhruvaṃ jyotir nihitaṃ dṛśaye* "an immortal light within mortals... a firm light is set for seeing" *hr̥daya āhitaṃ* "placed in the heart". RV 6.75.9 states *brahma varma mamāntaram* "Brahman is my inner armour"!

Two hymns of the *Atharva-Veda* 4.1.3 & 11.8.32 also tell us that [Brahman and] all gods are placed within man, like cows in their pen *sarvās hy asmin [puruṣe] devatās gavas goṣṭhe iva āsate* (omitted sandhi).

5. I cannot help wondering – Do we believe this aspect or is it myth?

The *Taittiriya Up.* also insists that the Supreme is *nihitam guhāyām parama vyoman* (2.1) – "is hidden in the cavity [in the heart] in highest heaven." It is explicit again in the *Kaṭha Up.* 1.2.20 *ātmā asya jantor nihito guhāyām* - "the Self of this creature is hidden in the cavity [of the heart]"⁴.

So, the seekers after heaven should turn inward to their heart!

In the Bṛḥguvallī of the *Taittirīya Up.* (3.1) Varuṇa tells his son Bṛḥgu -

yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante; yena jatāni jīvanti; yat prayanty abhi saṃviśanti; tad vijijñāsasva, tad brahma. Seek to know that from which these creatures manifest; by which the manifest ones live; to which they proceed and [finally] merge into: that is brahman!

Surely, then, those who seek to know brahman are also Vedic scholars. This is borne out by Ucathya Dīrghatamas, author of RV 1.164 (*yasya vāmasya*), who says st. 6 *acikitvān ciketuśāscid-atra kavīn pṛcchāmi vidmāne na vidvān*. He, not having realized, not knowing, asks wise sages who have realised to give him knowledge of the One who has established the 6 dimensions of the world (*śaḥ imā rajāṃsi*). In st. 21 he declared that the Wise Almighty *dhīra*, had entered into him.

6. Dharmic practices lead one to a state where one may realise the Self or Brahman. They are summarized in the 5 yamas - *ahiṃsā, satya, asteya, brahmacharya* and *aparigraha*. These are summed by Manu, 1.86, in one practice **generosity dāna**: *tapas in kṛtayuge, tretāyām jñāna, dvāpare yajna, dānam ekaṃ kalau yuge.*

This was already noted in hymn 117 of the 10th book of RV and in Bṛhadāranyaka Up, 5.2.2-3 – **Da Datta ‘Give’!** Prajapati’s advice (*dāna*) to humans!

The Vedic Ethics of *dharma* and the turn to Self-realisation or *brahmajijñāsā* seem to me most important and at the same time so simple that they could and should be taught to youngsters early on, as *Shrīmad Bhāgavatam* 7.6.1 puts it:

Kaumare ācāret prājño dharmān bhāgavatān iha | durlabhaṃ mānuṣaṃ janma... “Human birth is difficult to gain. [So] here the wise man teaches divine rules of behaviour [to those] in childhood”. For the younger they are, the more receptive.

Ādiśankara, who was a great Vedic Scholar said in *Vivekacūḍāmani* (3) that three are the great blessings: *manuṣyatva human form, mumukṣutva desire for liberation* and *mahāpuruṣasaṃśraya protective care of a good teacher.*

Billions have the *manuṣyatva* but very few the other two also. Bh. Gītā 7.3 says Perhaps one in thousands *sahasreṣu kaścit makes dharmic or spiritual effort* and of them one perhaps finds the Lord.

If some politicians knew the Veda or Kālidāsa’s words in *Abhijñāna Śakuntala* 5th Act: *aviśramo ‘yaṃ lokatantrādhikaraḥ* ‘there is no relaxation for an official serving the people’! This would be a very good start.

If we don’t turn to Self-realization but choose to remain with the usual academic work, at least we should let this be of the finest quality.

Notes:

1. In his address to the Vedic Section of the 36th Session of the All-India Oriental Conference in Pune.

2. When I visited India for the first time in 1970, I was told 250.000 had Sanskrit as their mother tongue. This was probably an exaggeration. In the 1991 official census the number was only 49.736 and in 2011 nearly 25.000.

3. 1993, N Delhi, Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha.

4. And we see in many ancient texts the cavity of the heart to be described as “highest heaven”.

END

Please Note –

This was the keynote address at the WAVES annual Conference in Delhi on 23-25th December 2022. A printed copy of the Address was sent as email and my recording of it before 10th December, as required.

During the Opening Session on 23rd Dec. the recording was played as agreed by me and the organizers.

However, when I attended through Zoom the proceedings and heard the recording, I noticed that the entire section §3 and part of section §6, both marked in yellow in the text above, were cut out of the original recording. Of this I was not informed earlier.

I can only suppose there was fear that, with regard to the first passage, some of the participants, who expatiate about the theories of flying machines and nuclear physics in the Rigveda, would have been offended by my direct rejection. But the organizers ignored the fact that we have such meetings and read such papers precisely to thrash out differing views. In the 15 minutes that I was given I could not possibly argue out that the evidences these theorists adduce from the RV hymns are wholly incorrect interpretations of the Vedic originals and are tailored to suit their pet theories. (And how is it that nobody thought of extracting such theories earlier, i.e. before the modern Physics actualities got their formulation and technological application?)

The omission of the second passage is a grave offence against the greatest philosopher of India, the very first Shankaracharya, Ādiśaṅkara himself! It also deprived my thesis of a very acute and significant point!

So be it!