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Principle hymns of Brahmatattva in the Atharvanigam

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Abstract

The derivation of the word veda can be ascribed to the root vid meaning 'knowledge' 'mantrabrāhmaṇayor vedanāmadheyam' Nigam Sastra means vedic system—The Guide for vedic Upasana (nigam) is Karmakānda; which Concentates mainly on Tapa. Jāga and Yajñya (fire Sacrifice). The Final Reality is summed up as the self, made up of intelligence, with a body of spirit, a form of light. The word *Atharvanigam* means the veda of the *tharvan*-The firepriest. The *Śruti* says-*Satyam Jñānam anantam brahma*. One of the Cardinal beliefs of Hinduism lies in the expression 'I am Brahman' and 'Thou art that.' The Vena Sūkta, The Sāmmanasya hymn, The Virāt hymns, The Skambha hymns, The Bhūmisūkta are the principle hymns of the Atharvanigam. In this Hymns or Sūktas are important matter is Brahmatattva. The article finds that the *Devī* in the hymn is described as the supreme and ultimate reality. The Sāmmanasya hymns have linked this happiness with the unanimity of thought and action in the different members of the family and the various sections of the society. *virāt* is the father of *Brahman*. *Atharvaveda* is no doubt a storehouse of the vedic Indian philosophy. *Brahman* is the cause of creation, protection and destruction of everything in the universe.

Keywords: Nigam, Atharvaveda, Brahmatattva

Introduction

The derivation of the word veda can be ascribed to the root vid meaning 'knowledge' [1] In sanskrit language the word, derived from this root is also used to mean feeling *anubhva* or *anubhūti*. Veda became the Collective name of the Mantras and the Brāhmaṇas 'mantrabrāhmaṇayor vedanāmadheyam' [2].

The term 'veda' as representing a particular form of literature, Signifies four literary texts known popularly as the R̥gveda Sam̐hitā, the Yajurveda Sam̐hitā, the Sāmaveda Sam̐hitā and the Atharvaveda Sam̐hitā. From this we draw that in all the four texts twowords have been commonly used. The Veda and the Sam̐hitā on the basis of this fact we the Indians call this literature more commonly and more popularly as the *vaidika* literature and less eloquently as the Sam̐hitā literature. Nigam = Veda, Atharvanigam = Atharvaveda.

नितरां गच्छन्ति अस्मिन्निति भावः अथवा नितरां गम्यते बोध्यते अत्र अनेन वा अतः निगमः । नि उपसर्गपूर्वकगमधातुः पुंलिङ्गे सज्ञायाम विषये ध प्रत्ययन्तः निगमशब्दः करणे अधिकरणे कारके निपात्यते । नि + गम् + ध ।

Nigam Sastra means vedic system-The Guide for vedic Upasana (nigam) is Karmakānda; which Concentates mainly on Tapa. Jāga and Yajñya (fire Sacrifice). Nigam is the pure vedic system. So, Atharvānigam is the pure Atharbanic vedic System.

Methods/Basic Concept of Brahmatattva

A word about *Brahman*, as used in the Atharvaveda, is necessary. It is used both in the masculine and neuter genders. There has been a lot of speculation and controversy about the real significance of *Brahman* means magic with indeed is the principle subject of the Atharvaveda. As magic is all powerfull in bringing about god and evil it has been identified with *Brahman*, the supreme force. Our position therefore is, that on the ground of Scripture and of reasoning subordinate to Scripture, the interlligent *Brahman* is to be considered the cause and substance of the world [3].

¹ □ Vid jñāne.

² Āpastamba Śrautasūtra 24.1.31, Bodhāyan Gṛhyasūtra 2.6.3.

³ From the translation of Śaṅkara's commentary of the Vedānta Sūtras. Prt-I. pp. 316-17.

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The supreme aim of man is to find rest in the *Ātman* or self—

*Tadātmānagm Svayamakuruta
Tasmāttat Sukrtamucyate* ^[4].
*Ānandaṁ Brahmaṇo Vidvān
Na bibheti kutaścana* ^[5].

Brahman exists by itself. It has no need for anything else to support it. It is the one without a second. It is the non-dual (*ekameva-advitīyam.*) and by knowing *Brahman*, everything else is known.

The scriptures tell us clearly that *Ātman* is *Brahman* and that true knowledge of *Ātman* is knowledge of *Brahman*. And this knowledge of the self is something positive. It cannot arise from mere performance of acts or avoidance of acts. To gain the knowledge of *Ātman* requires a special effort and this effort brings us *mokṣa* or release which is eternal.

The realized soul (*Brahma-Jñānins*) are hopes of the human race. They have been distinguished for *vairāgya* or Detachment. The mind runs out words to object of sense; and it has to be brought back to introspection. The supreme spirit pervades not only the objective world but also the subjective world including man and his soul.

The tradition in India owes to the *nigam* the twin contents and purpose of the *Karmakāṇḍa*, the sacrificial the basis of the twin-purpose of the *vedas*, it has been thought that the *Brāhmaṇa* works elaborate the *karmakāṇḍa* aspect of the *vedas*, whereas the 'spiritual' contents of the *vedas*, the aspect of the *jñānakāṇḍa*.

Result

The Final Reality is summed up as the self, made up of intelligence, with a body of spirit, a form of light, and of an ethereal nature which pervades the regions and upholds the universe though itself devoid of speech and mental effects.

Discussion/Analysis

The word *Atharvanigam* means the veda of the *tharvan*-The firepriest. In the *Āvestā*, the also word Signifies a priest. very improtent name of *Atharvanigam* is '*Brahmaveda*' ^[6] which occurs in the *Śāṅkhāyan Gṛhya Sūtra*. The word *Brahmaveda* is also found variously in the *Atharvaveda pariśiṣṭa* as *Bramavedāya* ^[7] '*Brahmanvede*' ^[8] *Brahmavedajña* ^[9] *Brahmavedataḥ* ^[10]. *Brahmavedavid* ^[11].

According to Śaṅkara, the truth is indeterminate. *Brahman* is existence undifferented, attributeless and non dual. It is of the nature of pure consciousness and bliss. It has been variously described by the *upaniṣads* as *brahman* as *Ātman* or *puruṣa*. These words have different connotations of their own, but they denote one and the same entity. Each of them throws light on some particular aspect of that entity. To explain it, the word *Brahman* is derived from the root *bṛh* 'to exceed' ^[12] and indicates that the entity denoted by it is pure and eternal. The word *ātman* is derived from the root *āp* or *at* 'to pervade, to eat to enjoy or to move continuously and it indicates the principle which is the highest, omniscient, omnipotent and transcendental to all wordly attributes and is by nature eternal,

prue, conscious, free, birthless, undecaying, immortal, fearless and without a second. The word *puruṣa* indicates that the entity denoted by it lies in the body and it is perfect. The term *Brahman* is used to denote the Reality with reference to the universe.

The *Śruti* says-*Satyam Jñānam anantaṁ brahma*. Śaṅkara explain it as a definition of *Brahman*. He says that the worlds *Satyam* etc are used as adjectives and Seek to define *Brahman*. As adjectives they Differentiate *Brahman* from other things. Thus *Satyam* 'truth' differentiate *Brahman* from what is *Satyam* 'non truth'. The *Upaniṣad* tells that only *Sat* 'being' is 'truth' ^[13].

*Yathā-Saumyaikena mṛtṭiṇḍena Sarvaṁ mṛṇmayam
Vijñātaṁ Syat mṛtṭiketyeva Satyam* ^[14].

The *veda*, on the other hand, which is eternal and source of Knowledge, may be allowed to have for its object firmly established things, and hence the perfection of that knowledge which is founded on the *veda* cannot be denied by any of the logicians of the past, present or future, we have thus established the perfection of this our knowledge which reposes on the *Upaniṣads*, and as apart from it perfect knowledge is impossible, its disregard would lead to absence of final release of the transmigrating souls. Our position there for is, that on the ground of *Scripture* and of reasoning subordinate to *Scripture*, the intelligent *Brahman* is to be considered the cause and substance of the world. *Brahman* is the fulcream of the whole world ^[15].

One of the Cardinal beliefs of Hinduism lies in the expression '*I am Brahman*' and '*Thou art that.*' These are known as '*Mahāvākya*' here in a nutshell is the magnificent assertion, that the indwelling soul (*ātman*) in all beings is none other than *Brahman*. The word *Brahman* thus Passes through the four Stages of its significance.

Ātman is *Brahman* it leads to the disappearance of *avidyā* (ignorance) and *Kāma* (desire). Indeed, no knowledge of *ātman* can arise in the presence of *avidyā*. Therefore a Correct and Comprehensive knowledge or realization of the identity of *Ātman* and *Brahman* is called *Brahmatattva*.

The *Vena Sūkta*, The *Sāmmanasya* hymn, The *Virāt* hymns, The *Skambha* hymns, The *Bhūmisūkta* are the principle hymns of the *Atharvanigam*. In this Hymns or *Sūktas* are important matter is *Brahmatattva*.

Vena Hymn, Atharvaveda II.I.I.

The *Vena Sūkta* ^[16] is one Such flash. In this *Sūkta*, *Vena* is said to have seen the great secret. The *mantra* runs:—

“*Vena* saw that which is the highest secret,
where everything becomes of one form;

This the spotted one (Pṛṣni) milked (when) born the heaven knowing troops (vra) have shouted at it.” ^[17]

‘Where everything becomes of one form’ is a significant excerpt in the *mantra*. Most probably, the seer wants to express through these words the idea that the Universe of diversity before its multifarious and varied manifestation was all one and the same throughout in its mother Source, the

⁴ Tattirīya Upaniṣad—2-7-1.

⁵ Tattirīya Upaniṣad 2-9-1.

⁶ Śāṅkhāyan Gṛhya Sūtra.

⁷ Atharvaveda Pariśiṣṭa II.I.I, 33.1.1.

⁸ *Ibid* 23.1.2.

⁹ *Ibid* 2.2.3.

¹⁰ *Ibid* 2.2.1.

¹¹ *Ibid* 2.3.7.

¹² *Paniṇi Asthādhyāye*.

¹³ Chulicā Upaniṣad.

¹⁴ Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6-1-4.

¹⁵ From the translation of Śaṅkara’s Commentary of the Vedānta Sūtras. Prt-I. pp. 316-17.

¹⁶ Atharvaved-II.I.

¹⁷ Atharvaved-II.I.I.

greatest secret (the Ultimate Reality), there was, then no classification caused by name and form. The ultimate Reality which in the first half of the mantra is designated as *Vena* is designated in the second half as *pṛṣṇi*, the spotted one or the variegated one. This designation is perhaps, applied to it in the sense that the world of variably diverse names and forms springs out of it. 'It milked when born', perhaps, implies that it manifested in various forms when it desired.

The *Paramam Guhā*, the greatest secret, the final source of everything does not manifest itself fully but only one quarter of it is manifested in the form of the universe and the remaining three ^[18] are the extremely secret quarters as described in the *Rigveda Puruṣa Sūkta*. The knower of these secret quarters, is described by the seer as the father of the father and this expression implies that the knower of the secret quarters was considered as the best and most respected individual. And to express all this in such a manner was perhaps in conformity with that period.

Vāk sūkta

An important hymn in the *Kāṇḍa IV* of the *Atharvaveda*. is known as *Vāk Sūkta* (*Atharvaveda*. IV. 30) which is also available in the *Rgveda* 10.125. The *Sūkta* is variously interpreted as a hymn to speech as also a hymn to *Devī*. The present article has adopted the second interpretation. The article finds that the *Devī* in the hymn is described as the supreme and ultimate reality.

Sāmmanasya Hymn, Atharvaveda II.I.III

The *Sāmmanasya hymns* of the *Atharvaveda*, are many and spread over several *Kāṇḍas*. Truly representing the mundane approach of the *Atharvaveda* the *Sāmmanasya hymns* put an exclusive stress on the worldly happiness of the individual, the family and the society as a whole. The hymns have linked this happiness with the unanimity of thought and action in the different members of the family and the various sections of the society.

These *Sūktas* are the most idealistic expression of the, great vedic poet who, as we have repeatedly reiterated, composes verses in an utterly de-individualised state of mind. He never dreams of the personal advantages and benefits. Rather he is worried about the harmony, unanimity, like mindedness and the existence of mutual affection amongst all the people in society. He wishes that the people should concur together, combine together; the minds of all the people should think alike (*Atharvaveda* 6.41.1). In a highly alliterative Expression and powerful exclamation, the poet *Atharvā* of the *Sāmmanasya Sūkta* (*Atharvaveda* 6.64) wishes of all the people that—

“their course (*mantra*) be same their gathering the same, their course (*Vrata*) the same, their intent (*citta*) alike (*saha*); I offer for you with the same oblation; do ye enter together into the same thought”^[19]

Samāno mantrāḥ Samitiḥ Samānī
Samanam vratam Saha cittameṣām |
Samanena Vo havisā Juhomi
Samānam ceto abhisamviśadhvam.^[20]

Now why the poet passionately searching for the element of *Samāna* in everything and in all the people? It should not be difficult to answer this Question. The poet himself, as if, replies the Question in the last stanza of the hymn that the longing for *samāna* is there in the poet's mind in order that the people may do well in the whole of their life.

“*Yathā naḥ Susahāsati.*”^[21] Sāyaṇa thinks that the prayer for the unity of thought, feeling and action has been made by the sage so that the army with such a mental make up is able to achieve victory in the battlefield.

Regarding poetry and mythology of the *Atharvaveda* it has often been decidedly declared by westerners that there is some basic and fundamental difference between the contents of *Rigveda* Vis-āVis *Atharvaveda*. It is often cited as an evidence that the deities of the *Rigveda* undergo a great characteristic change in the *Atharvaveda*. Though it is not to be disputed that the contents of the *Atharvaveda* are qualitatively different from the contents of the *Rigveda*; naturally so; yet it is to be said that the shape and form of the deities is never the same even in the same *Samhitā*. Each of the four *Samhitās* have got compiled in themselves the mantras which were composed in different periods of time: this has resulted in the fact that even in the same *Samhitā* a particular deity is differently treated in the *mantras* composed in different periods of time.

Virāt Hymns Atharvaveda 8.9

Of the various philosophical hymns of the *Atharvaveda*, the *virāt* hymn has a significance of its own. (*Atharvaveda*. 8.9). The hymn is mystic in nature and many of its ideas are not easily comprehensible. The opening Question of the hymns as to where from the two young ones were born. The *virāt* has been mystically explained in twenty six *mantras* of this hymn. Certain attributes have been accorded on *virāt*. He is father of *Brahman*.

‘विराजमाहुर्ब्रह्मणः पितरं तां नो वि धोहि यतिथा सद्भिभ्यः’^[22]

His abode is in the highest heaven—*Sā Viradr̥ṣayaḥ paramē vyoman* in a very mystic figurative description, part *Atharvā* of the hymn narrates the traits of *virāt* as that—

“Breathless *Virat* goes by the breather of breathing ones,—*virāt* that touches that is adapted to everybody ; some see her, some see her not.”^[23]

The poet says that—*Mātālī* the name of a divine being associated with *Yama* and the Fathers. But the meaning here is uncertain, the name being, perhaps, introduced with punning reference to the *mā* in *mātrāyaḥ*, measure, *mātur*, measurer in the preceding and *māyā māyāyāḥ* magic power in the same line and intended as *luwig* suggests to signify *mātar*, a measurer. Here *kāśyapa* the celebrated *Rishi* of the *Rgveda*. *Virāj* or *Virāt*. appears sometimes as a male being identified with *puruṣha*, *Prajāpati* and *Agni*, Sometimes as a female, the daughter of one of these deities.

Savrāj or *savrāt* is the supreme being. Morning and her sister night. Dawn, Sunlight and night *Brīhadarkī* containing or forming the great hymns of praise. Forteen meter of the text names in the second half verse are all in the accusative possibly as coordinate with ‘wings’ but comparison with

¹⁸ *Atharvaveda*-II.I.I.

¹⁹ *Atharvaveda*. 2.1.3. Tr. By D whitney.

²⁰ *Atharvaveda*. 7.64.2.

²¹ *Atharvaveda* 6.64.3.

²² *Atharvaveda*. 8.9.7

²³ *Atharvaveda*. Tr. Whitney 8.9.9.

other texts indicated that the verse is very corrupt. The translation implies emendation of *adadhū* to *adadhāt* in 'a; it would not be absolutely impossible to take the seers as subject in a and her that was fourth as joint object with *agni* and *Soma*.

In this hymn the single *Rishi* meaning the first or chief sage. Single spirit *yakṣaśm*, here rendered by spirit, means a living super-natural being deserving worship. *Uṣas* day and night all the planets and gods, all the metres and powers, all the directions and seasons are what this *virāt* is made up of.

“*Yo akrandayat Salilam mahitvā,
yonim kṛtvā tribhujam Śayānah |
Vatsaḥ Kāmadugho Virājaḥ |
Sa guhā cakre tamvaḥ parācaih.*”^[24]

In a mystic's manner the poet *Atharvā* puts certain questions before us and himself answers those questions respectively. Yet the answer's given by him leave much to be explained by way of interpretation ; for example, the last two *mantras* besides others can be placed in this category—what now is the ox (go), who the sole seer what the abode what the blessings ? The monster (*yakṣa*) on the earth is simple (*ekavṛt*) the sole season—which now is that?

“One is the ox, one the sole seer; one the abode, singly the blessings: the monster on the earth is single; the sole season is not in excess.”^[25]

Ātma Hymn, Atharvaveda 9.9.1.

The most important pointer to the approach of the compilers of the *Atharvaveda Samhitā* is to be found in the fact that they have reproduced the major part of a philosophic hymn of *Rgveda* 1. 164. Twenty two mantras of the said hymn have been produced in *Atharvaveda* 9.9 with *Ātma* as deity and *Brahmā* as its sage poet. *Atharvaveda* is no doubt a storehouse of the vedic Indian philosophy.

Skambha Hymn, Atharvaveda 9.9.1.

A large number of *Sūktas* express the metaphysical contemplations of the vedic poets. The *Skambha Sūkta* which has also been named as *sarvādhārvarnanā Sūkta* is one such hymn. Sāyaṇa, in his prologue to this large hymn containing as many as forty four *mantras*, says that

“*Skambha* is the eternal element which existed even before the creation of *Brahmā*. He is therefore, called *Jyēṣṭhabrahma*. The entire universe exists in it; even *virāt* resides in *Skambha*.”^[26]

Skambha in modern Sanskrit stands for pillar on which a structure stands erect. It is, therefore, naturally called *Sarvādhāra*, a basis for everything. In other words, *skambha* is what *Brahman* is and *Brahman* is the cause of creation, protection and destruction of everything in the universe.

This entire idea has been sufficiently explained in this *Sūkta* in different styles. The whole hymn containing forty-four *mantras* can aptly be divided into two parts: The first part, containing twenty-two mantras poses before us various Questions pertaining to the definition of *Skambha* in the context of the description of the different phenomenon of the universe. The second part containing another twenty-two

mantras described in detail the different attributes of *Skambha*, supreme *Brahman*. It should not be out of place to quote here two *mantras*, one from each part in order to have glimpse of the style of expression and the Quality of contents of the hymn in Question—

*Kasminnange tiṣṭhati bhūmīrasya,
Kasminnange tiṣṭhatyantari kṣam |
Kasminnange tiṣṭhatyāhitā dyauḥ
Kasminnange tiṣṭhatyuttaramdivaḥ.*^[27]

The *Brahman* is described as the support of all (*Sarvādhara*) and is called *Skambha*. In him the penance, now, ṛta and truth are established. (AV.10.7.1.). The Earth, the heaven and atmosphere from his members. (10.7.3.). He enters in all forms created by *prajāpati* (10.7.8). This all permeating principal is the same that is in man. He, who knows the *Brahman* in man, knows most exalted one, the great *Brahman*. All gods know this *Brahman* (10.7.24.) The *Brahman* is the mouth of *Skambha*, the great god who supports all. His mouth is also described to be the *Atharvaṅgīrasas*, the *Atharvanigam*. The *Atharvaveda* or the attainment of the magical power taught there in, which is nothing but the brahman, is the mouth *Skambha* (10.7.19-20) This is the higher *Brahman*. The highest *Brahman* has the atmosphere as the belly. The sun and moon are its eyes. *Agni* is its mouth. wind is its breath and expiration (*Prāna and apāna*). The *Angīrasas* are also described to be his eyes. He is the wonderful spirit in the midst of the creations. The spirit or power residing man becomes wide and extensive. It occupies and supports everything. The *Angīrasas* or the *Atharvaṅgīrasas* form its mouth or eyes. It thus can see and maintain itself on the *Atharvaveda*, or the power secured by the *Atharvanic* magical practices. This is great *Brahman*. *Angīrasas* are eyes and the *yātus* are the limbs. The *yajus* were fashioned from him. The *Sāmnas* form his hair and *Atharvaṅgīras* his mouth. He produced the golden embryo, *Hiraṇyagarbha*. This great *Brahman*, *Skambha* is the creator of the universe and has permeated himself like a string in all creatures. He is the *tman*, the soul of all creatures, described as *yakṣa*.

“In what member of him is situated the earth? In what member is situated the atmosphere? In what member is the sky set? In what member is situated what is beyond the sky?”^[28]

Here the word *aṅga*, member or part refers to the *aṅga* of *Skambha* the supreme *Brahman*.

“*Skambhe Lokāh. Skambhetapaḥ
Skambhedhyrtamāhitam.*”
“*Skambha tvā veda pratyakṣam indre Sarvam
Samāhitam.*”^[29]

“In the *Skambha* the words, in the *Skambha* penance, in the *Skambha* right is set: the O *Skambha* I know plainly as set all together in Indra.”^[30]

²⁷ *Atharvaveda* 10.7.3.

²⁸ Whitney Tr. *Atharvaveda* 10.7.3.

²⁹ *Atharvaveda* 10.7.29.

³⁰ Whitney Tr. *Atharvaveda* 10.7.29.

²⁴ *Atharvaveda* 8.9.2

²⁵ *Atharvaveda* Tr. By Whitney 8.9.25-26. p. 511.

²⁶ *Atharvaveda* 10.7.

Bhūmisūkta, Atharvaveda 12.1.

The *Bhūmisūkta* is one of the most important hymns of the *Atharvaveda*. It is more known for its poetic beauty and grandness than for its ritualistic applications. The poet of this *Sūkta* bewitched by the Vastness of the earth which is the abode of all the living beings. A very large portion of the hymn describes the poet's greatfulness to the mother earth who is the source of livelihood and prosperity of all the people. The earth is, therefore, called *Vasundharā*. The poet also offers some beautiful pieces of highly subline poetry in quite a good number of stanzas. In a few stanzas of the poet tries to give some philosophic colouring to the essence in it. The whole hymn is composed in a simple-precise language.

In the eight stanza of the hymn he says that the earth is beginning was like waters on the ocean; the *manīsīs* moved on its surface with their *māyā*.

The *bhūmisūkta* of the *Atharvaveda* not only conveys beautiful ideas and sentiments; but also presents them in a really beautiful language. The whole hymn is composed in a simple precious language. It will not be out of place to quote a few of them. The expressions like *bhūmībhūmīdhāra* remind of the *Rgvedic* expressions have certainly added to beauty and charm of this one of the most important hymn of the *Nigamamātharvaveda*.

Conclusion

The *Brahman* (Vedas) The holy sciences, the threefold Vedas with which He enters the waters as a creative principle. Hitherto, the not-being (Asat) is considered the Ultimate Reality but there is a more advanced view available in this direction that identifies the mind (intelligence) with the First Principle which, in its turn, is defined as neither being nor ont-being. Skambha is Supreme Brahman.

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It is a spiritualistic transcendental entity which is the basic cause of the universe.

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