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Vāk sūktam as the root of the āgamic traditions

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Abstract

Among the philosophical hymns of the Ṛgveda Vāk Sūkta is a very popular one. On the other hand, for the Āgamic traditions Vāk Sūktam plays a major role in shaping their very root theories. Starting from the Bhairava Āgama to the comparatively later creations such as Devī Atharvaśirṣa, the significance of the Vāk Sūkta can be seen everywhere. This paper focuses on the means of how this one collection of hymns inspired to give rise to a vast tradition including a vast range of an independent philosophical corpus.

Keyword: Sāṅkhyaphilosophy, three kinds of sorrow, cessation of grief, liberation of sorrow

Introduction

Various traditions that we experience and follow today are none but got their root ideas from the Vedas. On the basis of the acknowledgement of the adaptations from the Vedas in the vast philosophical grounds Indian schools of thoughts are divided into two major divisions, viz. Nāstikya (who did not acknowledge the teachings of the Vedas) and Āstikya (who acknowledged the teachings of the Vedas) [1]. Analysing chronologically we get the rise of the Āgamic traditions with the expansion of the Buddhist doctrines across the continent. This contemporary occurrence of the events sometimes lead to a conclusion that marks the Āgamic traditions as the mere by-product of the Buddhist doctrines [2]. The Nāstikya perspective of the Buddhist doctrines is unquestionable, and this firm root of the Buddhism inevitably affects the Āgamic teachings. Though the connection of the Buddhists with certain Āgamic practices cannot be denied, excluding some specific traditions of the Pāñcarātra school of thoughts most of the Āgamic schools face the accusation of their Buddhist roots. The reason of exclusion of the Pāñcarātra Āgamas can be seen as the impact of the Puranic age. The deities presented majorly in the Puranas mostly appear in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas without facing any distortion [3]. On the other hand other schools of the Āgamic traditions present the deities in a different manner than the Puranic means. For this reason no matter how close these depictions are to the root Vedic Samhita depictions, a mass of people detected distortion there.

The root of the Āgamic tradition is not Buddhist, to prove this statement it is needed to establish the derivation of the Āgamic philosophical conclusions from the Vedas only and this is how the Nāstikya link of the Āgamas can be disproved. In the following sections we shall discuss about the philosophical hymns of the Ṛgveda and the position of the Vāk Sūktam among them, the root of the Āgamic school of thoughts and the influence of the Vāk Sūktam on it, the inclusion of Vāk Sūkta in the Devī Māhātmya and the conclusion.

Vāk Sūktam as a Philosophical hymn

The Sūktas that we find in the Ṛgveda, on the basis of their objectives can be divided in five major divisions, such as

- i. Devastutiparaka Sūkta (praise to the Gods)
- ii. Dārśanika Sūkta (based on the Philosophical ideas)
- iii. Laukika Sūkta (teachings to the society)
- iv. Saṃvada Sūkta (dialogue between two characters)
- v. Ākhyāna Sūkta (a saga) etc [4].

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Among these divisions, the Dārśanika Sūktas represent a vast area of thoughts and explanations. Somehow these Sūktas can be seen as a way to answer one of the most primary queries arisen in the human psyche, like the origin and nature of the universe etc. Mostly we find these pieces in the 10th Mandala of the Ṛgveda. Vāk Sūktaṃ is no exception. But as a Dārśanika Sūkta this specific one is quite unique in its style of representation. When all the other Dārśanika Sūktas are explained as a series of statements made by someone who is as a mere audience experiencing the celestial occurring, Vāk Sūkta is explaining the action of the universe in first person [5]. This uniqueness is the key that allowed the Vāk Sūkta to act as a ground to give birth to a number of independent traditions. The idea of Self as as represented in the Vāk Sūktaṃ can be seen as an elaborated script of the Vedantic statement, this self is supreme (Brahman) (“अयमात्मा ब्रह्म”, मा. उ. १.२) [6]. The Upanishads have vastly explained the theory of Brahman. In the Kathopanishad it is specifically said that the one who experiences that Brahman within the self their prosperity becomes beyond time (“तमात्मस्थं ये अनुपश्यन्ति धीराः तेषां सुखं शाश्वतं नेतरेषाम् ॥ क. उ. २.२.१२”) [7]. Similar idea can be found in most of the Upanishads.

After the rise of the Buddhist doctrines the contribution of the Vedantic philosophers in order to maintain and protect the Vedic culture was greater than the other five schools of the Āstikya Darśana. The Vāk Sūkta was the only Dārśanika Sūkta that was considered to be the most apt scriptural proof (Śabda Pramāṇ) to establish the statements and ideas of the Vedanta [1]. Moreover the Godless philosophy among the six Āstikya Darśanas, the Sāṃkhya also draws the Śabda Pramāṇ from this Sūkta only for its unique representation of the idea of self [8]. The narrative of the Vāk Sūkta is not only unique but also bold at the same time. Where the other Dārśanika Sūktas merely describe a series of event, Vāk Sūkta has its own narrative full of bold, determined flawless undoubted statements [5]. So the position of Vāk Sūkta among the other Dārśanika Sūktas of the Ṛgveda is well established and is considered to be one of its kind for its unique narrative.

Vāk Sūkta shaping the Āgamic Philosophy

The traditional Āgamic philosophy we find in the ideas of the Kāśmīr Śaiva Darśana. Though a number of Āgamic schools of thoughts propose various perspectives to explain the origin and nature of the universe, Kāśmīr Śaiva Darśana serves as a compilation to all the root ideas [9]. There we find the concept of the Āmnāya Upāsana or the Directive Path oriented Practices and the introduction to the Paśchim Āmnāya or the West Directive Path. Two of the base scriptures made the foundation of this sect (if we can call them as sect at all) and eventually provided the base for all the later born Post Vedic schools of thought, like Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Kaumāra etc. those two scriptures were, the Manthāna Bhairava Tantra and the Brihat Baḍabānala Tantra. Later Acharya Adī Shankara Bhagavatpada mentioned Paścima Āmnāya as the greatest of all (“श्रेष्ठः अतः पश्चिमास्त्रयस्तत्रत्यः शाम्भवः असित यः”, यतिदण्डैश्वर्यविधानम् ४.२७).

The Paścima Āmnāya with the introduction of Goddess Mālinī and Goddess Kubjikā has established the breeding ground for the practical philosophy in the later Vedic era [10]. Previously what the Pūrba Mimāṃsā of Jaimini provided for the practical Vedas, Paścima Āmnāya did the same thing to the post Vedic cultural background of the continent. The need to introduce the Paścima Āmnāya was inevitable as with time

the applied Vedas were decaying with the loss of efficient and devoted practitioners. Both Manthāna Bhairava Tantra and the Brihat Baḍabānala Tantra modified the root Vedic teachings with respect to the changing times and a strong philosophical framework was established which we today call as the Bhairava Āgama [9]. The Bhairava Āgama further manifested as the Śaiva Krama, the Pāñcarātra corpus, the Śākta Krama with Kālī Kula and Śrī Kula being two prominent distinct practice grounds.

Now we shall present the concluding principles of the Bhairava Āgama which were none but the mere reflections of the Vāk Sūkta.

- i. **The initiation of the clan of Gods with Rudra:** The Sūkta starts with the name of the Rudras followed by other Gods. The Āgamic traditions indicates the initiation of the clan of the Gods from Rudra, more specifically the form named Sadyojāta Mahākāla (not to be confused with the west-face of the five headed Śiva) [10]. The idea of Sadyojāta Mahākāla, the new born can be derived from the first mantra of Vāk Sūkta only, where the word Rudra should not be explained as the one who makes the universe cry, but the one who was born crying (रुदतीति, शिवपुराणम्), the new born. Moreover the Vedas indicates the initiation of the clan of the Gods with Agni (ऐतरेयब्राह्मणम्) and the correlation of Rudra and Agni is quiet established (अयमग्निमूर्तिः यथा रुद्रायाम्निमूर्तये नमः, शब्दकल्पद्रुमः:1).
- ii. **The Nectar of Yoga:** The Āgamic traditions were vastly inclined to the third and fourth step mentioned in the eight-stepped practices mentioned in the Patanjali Yoga Darśana, the Āsana and Prāṇāyāma. With the help of this the application of spirits’ offering in Vedic fire sacrifices was smoothly explained to be the nectar from the brain cells produced by the strict practice of Yoga [11]. The second mantra of the Vāk Sūkta indicates the origin of the fire sacrifice within the self to give rise to such Āgamic doctrines.
- iii. **The science of consumption:** The balance between penance and consumption of matters is maintained in a very elegant way in the Āgamic traditions, which others have failed to maintain (bhogasch mokshasch). The unnecessary abandonment of consumption in is established with the conclusion derived in the third mantra of the Vāk Sūkta, where the principle of consumption and the consumed is equated.
- iv. **Multiple possibilities in the path of realisation:** When the other doctrines taught salvation or just preached the union of the Self and Brahman, the Āgamas explored all the possibilities on the path. While teaching the path of realisation Āgamas put equal importance to knowledge and action on the basis of the idea generated in the fifth mantra of the Vāk Sūkta. The mantra mentioned the creation of Lord Brahmā, the action, the knowledge of Lord Brhaspati, the knowledge and the union of the Self with Brahman.
- v. **Birth from the crown:** The Āgamas teach the origin of the universe from Goddess Mālinī and Ādinātha residing on the crown chakra, the intellectual consciousness of the humans, influenced by the seventh mantra of the Vāk Sūkta [10].
- vi. **The Supremacy of the Divine Feminine:** The complete Vāk Sūkta is composed in the feminine form of the self, which the Āgamas represent as the ultimate supremacy of

the Devīne feminine, Goddess Kubjikā. Though the doctrines of Goddess Kubjikā are vast themselves, for now the original equity can be drawn from the principles established in the Vāk Sūkta.

Moreover while studying the root corpus of the Āgamic philosophy we can find none other than mere commentaries of the Vāk Sūkta only in every single idea proposed, like the four stages of speech, the manifestation of God as Tree, the subsections of the traditions like the Kaumāra Krama, Śaiva Krama, the Pāñcarātra Krama etc.

The Vāk Sūkta and Devī Māhātmya

A highly regarded excerpt of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, a later-Vedic Paurāṇik text, popularly known as the Devī Māhātmya included the Vāk Sūkta as it is while stating the supremacy of the divine feminine. The similarity of the principles of the Devī Māhātmya with the Āgamic Doctrines is remarkable, which often allows the Āgamic practitioners to include it despite of its Puranic roots into the Āgamic practices and as a Śabda Pramāṇ to prove some of its principles. The chants-like practices of the excerpt is prescribed primarily on various Āgamic scriptures only. From that perspective it seems the inclusion of the Vāk Sūkta into the script is an Āgamic teaching. But even if we completely neglect the practical dialect and application of the Devī Māhātmya, in the root text we can see the inclusion of the Vāk Sūkta in a fraction but in a very prominent manner. The Sūkta itself is mentioned in the script's 13th chapter as a prime tool towards self-realisation in the context of the prescription of the ritualistic approaches of the previous chapters.

Today when we start studying the Devī Māhātmya we can see the complete script established on the firm grounds of the Vāk Sūkta only. In the later periods each and every script that discussed over the Devī Māhātmya has established the Vāk Sūkta with prime attention ^[12].

Conclusion

The rise of later Vedic sub-sects of the Vedic school of thoughts included Śāktas, Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, Gāṇapatyas, Kaumāras and many more. The contribution of the Bhairava Āgamas in this context is beyond question and as we have seen the Bhairava Āgamas established their principles mostly from a single Dārśanika Sūkta of Ṛgveda, the Vāk Sūkta. As a future work on this context the major traditions as the Gāṇapatya, Pāñcarātra etc can be individually studied to explore broader aspects of the Vāk Sūkta.

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