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Vedic interpretations through the ages: A study on interpretations

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Abstract

The Veda is the hub of Indian Knowledge System. It was developed from unknown sources and believed to lead the being to certain domain which is also unknown, to know about that unknown, several initiatives were taken. Out of those devices, a branch of literature named commentary has been developed. There are chronological developments of this literature. In the line of evolutionary developments, we can see development of many literatures. *Brahmana* was the first literature where sufficient experiments were undertaken to understand the Vedas. Gradually we come across the literatures like lexicology and word by word commentary.

Keyword: Brahmana, bhasya, knowledge system, Veda

Introduction

The Veda is the hub of Indian Knowledge System. It was developed from unknown sources and believed to lead the being to certain domain which is also unknown, to know about that unknown several initiatives were taken. Out of those devices, a branch of literature named commentary has been developed. There are chronological developments of this literature. In the line of evolutionary developments, we can see development of many literatures. *Brahmana* was the first literature where sufficient experiments were undertaken to understand the Vedas. Gradually we come across the literatures like lexicology and word by word commentary. There were two systems. One system believes on non-translatibility of the Vedas and another system believes, Vedic stanzas also have translatability like other literature. In course of time the second system suppressed the first system of thought. Now a day question of non-translatibility has no use. Even in old sources we can get several theories where from we can get sufficient arguments and logics in favor of translation of the Vedas. Translation here does not mean translation to other language. Here theory of commentary is considered as based on the translatability of the source material. After theories and arguments of *Mimamsa* it has been well established that one should know the meaning of the Vedas when he reads it. In this regard we can quote the famous verse from unidentified source-

स्थाणुरयं भारह्वरः किलभूदधीत्य वेदं न विजानाति यो अर्थम्
यो अर्थज्ञः इत्सकलं भद्रमश्नुते नाकमेति ज्ञानविधूतपाप्मा ॥

It is also supported by a verse quoted in Nirukta-

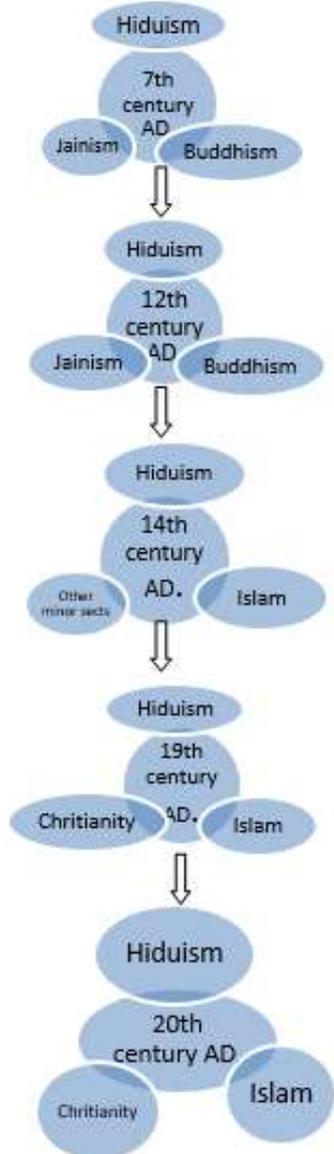
यत् गृहीतमविज्ञातं निगदेनैव शब्दते
अग्नवाविव शुस्कौधो न तत् ज्वलति कर्हिचित् ॥ (Nir.1.18.1)

These verses clearly established that one should not read the verse without understanding. Understanding becomes sure. Now question comes how it can be understood? Commentary literature is one of the understanding devices. Again it creates confusion that which commentary is the first device for understanding? This question may not get any satisfactory answer.

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In the trend of commentary literature we can observe assimilation of several devices. Interestingly whole *Vedanga* literature becomes instrumental for the development of commentary.

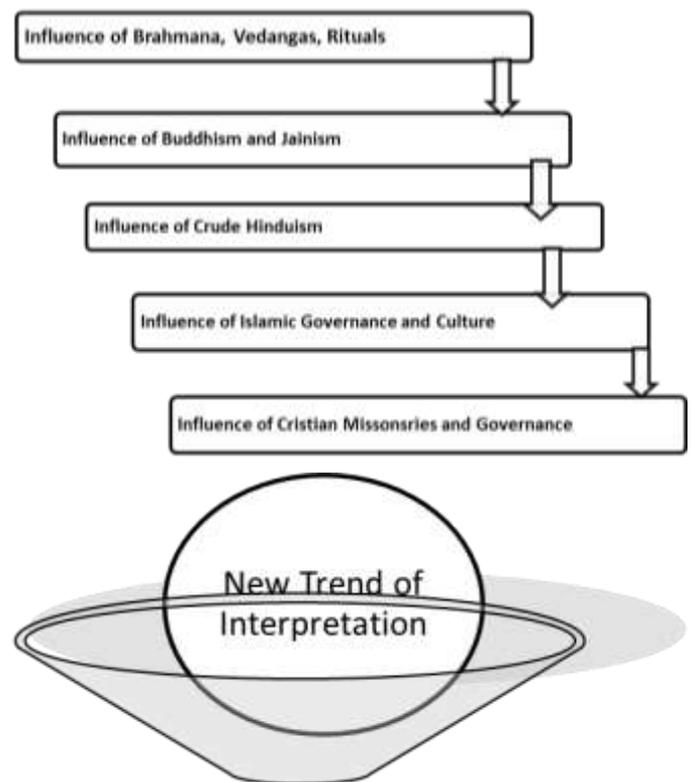
We have taken five commentaries by five commentators like Skanda of 6th or 7th century AD, Venkata Madhava of 12th century AD, Sayana of 14th century AD, Dayananda Sarasvati of 19th century AD and T.V Kapali Sastry of 20th century AD. Here we can imagine the societies as



During the production of these commentaries we can observe co-existence as well competitions of respective major religious sects of India. During Skanda the prime religious groups were Hinduism and side by side Buddhism & Jainism. Though number was less, there was tremendous cultural impact on the society. This was the challenge before Skanda. Similarly the period of Venkata Madhava, probably the fundamental challenge before him is to establish the Hindu Henotheism and to discard the non-sacrificial theories of those days. Subsequently we can see Sayana of 14th century AD. During his period Buddhism as well as Jainism were dimed, and new religious challenge come through Islamic invade. Non-promotion of sacrifices, non-belief to Hindu scriptures, Religious atrocity, and establishment of monotheistic concepts were the fundamental challenges before him. In the next stage Dayananda and T.V.Kapali

Sastry came. Both belong of 19th and 20th century AD. During this period major religious groups were Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Now the challenge before them becomes multiplied with presence of these two religious groups with political powers. During these 1300 years we can observe tremendous socio cultural change, mostly manipulated by the political powers and religious missionaries. Gravity of challenge has tremendous impact on the interpretation of the Vedas.

Initially if we go through the interpretation of Brahmana literature, We can see considerable purity in the interpretations. When we observe the period of etymological literature, we can see a continuation of Brahmanic tradition with some ultimate understandings. Then Vedanga literature developed to protect the knowledge system. Gradually new religious sects come up and quarrel started within atheistic system and non-atheistic system. With these odds Vedic tradition moved towards the modernity and on way meets many ups and downs. Each society has tremendous impact. Probably as a result the *Mantra-1.164.46* becomes the fundamental theory for interpreters like Dayananda. The path may be projected well by the following diagram.



From the comparative study of commentaries following points can be generalized -

- In course of time changes in interpretations were taken place.
- Skanda in his interpretation seems very much dependant on Ritualistic Literatures, Grammar and Lexicons, particularly on Nighantu.
- Venkata Madhava, the most economic interpreter goes with lexical meaning but not much associated with the Nirukta or Nighantu. But we can see the influence of the Brahmana Literature in his commentary.
- Sayana, depended upon, Nighantu, Nirukta, Ritual literatures as well as on Puranas.
- Dayananda is well dependant on Nighantu, Nirukta and Grammatik tradition.

- T.V.Kapali Sastry is depended on the commentaries available to him and he tried to think in different angel, that is philosophic in nature.
- Interpretations up to 14th century AD, are not much elastic in character. In these interpretations we can observe maximum importance given to ritualistic trend and available word meaning whichever is instantly available to the word.
- Post 14th century A.D. interpreters are elastic in nature. They have excellent efficiency regarding the extension and expansion of the fundamental word meaning.
- Skanda in maximum cases goes with *Avidha* (the instant meaning) whereas Dayananda goes with extended meaning and tried to establish his explanation through instances or references from Nighantu and Grammatik texts.
- In many cases it is observed that the derivation of compound words differ a lot between Sayana and Dayananda.
- It is interesting that Sayana, Skanda and Dayananda have very good faith on Nighantu, but in practice when Sayana and Skanda accepts one meaning on the basis of Nighantu, Dayananda accepts another meaning referred in Nighantu.
- Sayana, Skanda, Venkata, Dayananda are believers of sacrificial context but there is a great contradiction on identification of deity.
- Older tradition in maximum cases identifies the deities instantly and interpreted 'the deity of this name' but the younger generation is not doing so.
- Dayananda always gives importance on the postmortem of the word. He gives importance to finding of the characteristic feature of the deity and trying to equalize him with the supreme.
- The difference between the two segments of interpreters is to move around the establishment of Monotheism and Henotheism.
- Older generation is not argumentative, they are dependent on tradition.
- The younger generation is argumentative and believes on contextuality.
- Contextuality before Dayananda is to defend the western attacks on our religious thought system.
- T.V. Kapali Sastry from the Aurobindo trend has an impression that, Vedas are not literature like anything, they have philosophy and it is property of intellectuals.
- Dayananda is in favor of generalization of the messages of Vedas with logical reasoning.
- Other interpreters are not much influenced by the environmental constraints. These interpretations in most of the cases have influenced by the tradition, newness was unacceptable to them.
- Dayananda and Kapali Sastry are openers of newness in Vedic thoughts.

For instance we can observe various extended meaning made by Dayananda from the below mentioned explanations made by him in different places of his commentary on Rigveda. The statements of Dayananda here accepted are from the 1st chapter of (Astaka System) of Rigveda. Here we have taken the words (name of deities) like Agni, Vayu, Indravayu, Asvinau, Visvedeva and Indra.

अग्निम्

परमेश्वरं भौतिकं वा-Rv.१.१.१/परमेश्वरेण संसेवितेन भौतिकेन संयोजितेन वा-Rv.१.१.३/परमेश्वरम्-Rv. १.१.६,१.१.२.२/विद्युद्गुपम् - Rv.१.१.२.३/

ज्ञानस्वरूपम् Rv.- १.१.९/स्तोतुमर्हेश्च भौतिकोऽग्निर्वा -Rv. १.१.२.३/भौतिकः-Rv. १.१.२.५/व्यापकेन विद्युदाव्येन -Rv.१.१.२.६ /विज्ञानस्वरूप अग्निं वा-Rv. १.१.२.८/सर्वसुखप्रापकमीश्वरम् -Rv.१.१.२.९/सर्वप्रापक प्राप्तिहेतुर्वा-Rv.१.१.२.१०/ प्रकाशमयेश्वर भौतिको वा -Rv.१.१.२.१२ /विश्वेश्वर भौतिको वा -Rv.१.१.३.१ /भौतिकोऽग्निः -Rv. १.१.३.४ /सर्वत्र व्यापेश्वर भौतिको वा-Rv.१.१.४.१ /विज्ञानस्वरूप प्राप्तिहेतु भौतिकोऽग्निर्वा-Rv.१.१.४.२ /भौतिकम् - Rv.१.१.४.३,१.१.५ /जगदीश्वर भौतिको वा -Rv.१.१.४.७ / अग्निः प्रत्यक्षाप्रत्ययः-Rv. १.१.४.१० /पूजनीयम् Rv.१.१.४.११ /अग्नि भौतिको विद्युत्प्रसिद्धो वा -Rv. १.१.९.२ /विज्ञानस्वरूपेश्वर भौतिकस्य वाRv. १.१.९.२ /स्वयंप्रकाश सर्वलोकप्रकाशकोऽग्निर्वाविद्युत् प्रसिद्धो वाRv. १.१.९.४/अग्निः Rv.१.१.९.६

Within these 19 Suktas we can come across 25 uses of Agni with its grammatical variants. It is interesting to see Dayananda in his commentary has interpreted the Agni with different words in each case.

वायु-

अनन्तबल सर्वप्राणान्तर्यामिन्निश्चर तथा सर्वभूर्तद्रव्याधारो जीवन हेतु भौतिक वा Rv.१.२.१/ अनन्तबलेश्वरRv. १.२.२/वेदवाणीप्रकाशकेश्वर Rv.१.२.३/ज्ञानस्वरूपेश्वरRv. १.२.५ /सर्वान्तर्यामिन्निश्चर Rv.१.२.६

Within these 19 Suktas we can come across 5 uses of Vayu with its grammatical variants. It is interesting to see Dayananda in his commentary has interpreted the Vayu with different words in each case.

इन्द्रवायू

इमौ प्रत्यक्षौ सूर्य पवनौ Rv.१.२.४ /इन्द्रश्च वायुश्च तौ विद्युत्पवनौ Rv.१.१.४.३

Within these 19 Suktas we can come across 2 uses of Indravayu with its grammatical variants. It is interesting to see Dayananda in his commentary has interpreted the Indravayu with different words in each case.

इन्द्रवरुणौ

सूर्याचन्द्रमसौ:Rv. १.१.७.१ /अग्निजले Rv.१.१.७.३/ वायुजले सम्यक् प्रयुक्ते Rv.१.१.७.८

Within these 19 Suktas we can come across 3 uses of Indravaranau with its grammatical variants. It is interesting to see Dayananda in his commentary has interpreted the Indravaranau with different words in each case.

अश्विना

जलाग्नी Rv.१.३.१/ अग्निजले Rv.१.३.२/सूर्याचन्द्रमसौ Rv.१.१.४.११

Within these 19 Suktas we can come across 3 uses of Asvinou with its grammatical variants. It is interesting to see Dayananda in his commentary has interpreted the Asvina with different words in each case.

विश्वदेवासः

देवा दीव्यन्ति विश्वे सर्वे च ते देवा विव्दांसश्च ते Rv.१.३.७/समस्ताः विद्यावन्तः Rv.१.३.८/समस्ताः वेदपारगाः Rv.१.३.९/सर्वे देवांसः Rv.१.१.९.३

Within these 19 Suktas we can come across 4 uses of Vissvedeva with its grammatical variants. It is interesting to see Dayananda in his commentary has interpreted the Visvedeva with different words in each case.

इन्द्रः

परमेश्वर सूर्यो वा Rv.१.३.३/परमेश्वर Rv.१.३.४/वायुःRv. १.३.६/विद्यापरमेश्वर्ययुक्तम् मनुष्यम् Rv.१.४.४/परमेश्वर्यवन् Rv.१.४.९/ सकलैश्वर्यप्रदं परमेश्वरमात्मानः सर्वभोग हेतुं वायु वा Rv.१.५.२/जीव विव्दन् Rv.१.५.७ /सकलैश्वर्ययुक्तः परमात्मा Rv.१.५.९ /सर्वरक्षकेश्वर Rv.१.५.१० / सूर्यः Rv.१.६.५ /परमेश्वरेण सूर्येण सह वा-Rv. १.६.७/ सूर्यम् Rv.१.६.१० /परमेश्वरम् Rv.१.७.१/वायुः Rv.१.७.२ /सर्वजगत्स्रष्टेश्वरः Rv.१.७.३ /परमेश्वर्यप्रदेश्वरः Rv.१.७.४ /सर्वज्ञं सर्वशक्तिमन्तमीश्वरम् Rv.१.७.५/ सूर्यं वायुं वा Rv.१.७.५ /सर्वदुःखविनाशकस्य Rv.१.७.७/दुष्टानां शत्रुणां विनाशकः Rv.१.७.९/पृथिव्यां राज्यप्रदम् Rv.१.७.१०/ परमधनप्रदेश्वर Rv.१.८.१ /अनन्तबलेश्वर Rv.१.८.३/युधोत्साहप्रदेश्वर Rv.१.८.४/सर्वजगद्राजः Rv.१.८.५/सर्वतोरक्षितरीश्वर Rv.१.८.९/परमेश्वर्यवते परमात्मने Rv.१.८.१० /सर्वव्यापकेश्वर सूर्यलोको वा Rv.१.९.१ /ऐश्वर्यमिच्छवे जीवाय Rv.१.९.२/सर्वाथा स्तोतव्य -Rv.१.९.४/दयामयसर्वसुखसाधनप्रदेश्वर Rv.१.९.५/अन्तर्यामिनीश्वर Rv.१.९.६/ अनन्तविद्येश्वर Rv.१.९.७/ महाबलयुक्तेश्वर Rv.१.९.८ /धारकम् Rv.१.९.९ /परमेश्वराय Rv. १.९.१० /सर्वश्रोतोव्यापिनीश्वर प्रकाशमानः सूर्यलोको वा Rv.१.१०.३ /स्तोतुमर्हं दातः Rv.१.१०.४ /सर्वमित्रायैश्वर्यमिच्छुकाय जीवाय Rv.१.१०.५ /महायशःसर्वविभागकारकेश्वर सर्वविभरुपदर्शकः सूर्यलोको वा Rv.१.१०.६ /सर्वान्तर्यामिन्सर्वतः श्रोतः Rv.१.१०.९ /विजयप्रदमीश्वरम् Rv.१.११.१ /सर्वस्वामिनीश्वर Rv.१.११.२/ परमेश्वरस्य सभासेनाध्यक्षस्य वा Rv.१.११.३ /विव्दान्सूर्यो वा Rv.१.११.४ /परमैश्वर्यप्रापक शत्रुनिवारक सभासेनयोःपरमाध्यक्ष सकलैश्वर्ययुक्तम् Rv.१.११.८ /सकलैश्वर्ययुक्तम् Rv.१.११.८/परमैश्वर्यकरणाय Rv.१.१३.१२ /कालविभाकर्ता सूर्यलोकः Rv.१.१५.१ /ऐश्वर्यजीवनहेतुत्वाद्वायुः Rv.१.१५.५ /सूर्यलोकम् Rv.१.१६.२/ परमेश्वरम् Rv.१.१६.३ /परमैश्वर्यसाधकम् भौतिकमग्निम् Rv.१.१६.३ /बाह्यन्तरस्थं वायुम् Rv.१.१६.३ /वायु Rv.१.१६.४, १.१६.६, १.१६.८/अग्निर्विद्युत् सूर्यो वा Rv.१.१७.५ /वायुःRv. १.१८.४ /जीवस्य Rv.१.१८.६

Within these 19 Suktas we can come across 60 uses of Indra with its grammatical variants. It is interesting to see Dayananda in his commentary has interpreted the Indra with different words in each case except 4 cases. He has repeatedly substituted the word Indra with Vayu.

- In almost all cases we can see use of extended meaning rather the lexical meaning of the word. Sometimes their extension seems unwanted, confusing and sometimes it is also felt that without those extensions understanding the Veda shall not solve human purposes.

Last Lines

It is well established that Vedas are intellectual property. So, they should handle carefully and intellectually. Biasness of social, cultural, lingual impacts may lead us to darken side by which in course of time we may loss the real fragrance of the

Vedas. We should amalgamate the tradition and modernity in such a way by which neither the tradition, be deviated nor the modernity be discarded and the interpretation should careful by which the foundation should not be disfigured.

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