

Clouds over Understanding of Vedas

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The Myth of the Holy Cow by D.N.Jha published by Verso, London, 2002 is the most damaging book in its contents since the sole intention of the author has been to prove that all ancient Hindu scriptures particularly the Vedas and *Śatpatha Brāhmaṇa* etc. uphold beef-eating and this has been the way of life of the Aryans who were our ancestors, since the term Hindu came to be introduced much later. The author has cited references from the *Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, Upaniṣads* etc. to prove his thesis which perhaps he chose to be the sole mission of his life even though he comes from a Brahmin family and he has dedicated his so called prestigious book to his kin in Rajrani (a symbol of motherhood). Aryans revered cow as a mother and it is really an irony that a son of Bharat has taken immense pains to prove something which is far from truth and also it injures the sentiments of millions of Hindus and in order to demolish his thesis an effort is being hereby made to trace each and every reference cited by him in the book and reveal the truth and nothing but the truth. To commence with, citations quoted from the *Rgveda* are being dealt with beginning from the very first *Maṇḍala* of *Rgveda*.

It is beyond any doubt that the conclusions drawn by Mr. Jha are based on wrong interpretations and the misleading commentaries by the western scholars and also the works of Indian scholars who got patronage of the British rulers. Role of such scholars and their mission to erase our heritage was under a well planned scheme to mould the Indian mind into the western thought and culture and create conditions to cast off our past. Their mission was to spread Christianity and the major players were Macauley and Max Müller and their correspondence and writings* will substantiate this submission. Hereby it will also be revealed that these western scholars could not derive the right and intended spirit of our ancient *Riṣis* and have erred immensely. In the realm of the Vedic interpretation, we owe debt to Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1825-1883), the founder of Aryasamaj who took us back to the Vedas. His commentaries were based on the *Nighaṇṭu* and Yāska's *Nirukta* and he thought deep and delved deep to arrive at the rightful *adhyātmika* and yogic spirit of the *mantras*. The opinion of a great saint-philosopher Sri Aurobindo Ghosh will be the most pertinent to quote in this regard.

'In the matter of Vedic interpretation, 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 had found the keys of the doors that time had closed and rent asunder the seals of the imprisoned fountains'.

AT THIS STAGE IT IS DESIRABLE THAT WE APPROACH THIS IMPORTANT ASPECT TO ENDORSE AND ACCEPT THE RIGHTFUL INTERPRETATIONS INSTEAD OF CLINGING TO DEFECTIVE LITERAL TRANSLATIONS OF THE VEDAS WHICH ARE REVELATIONS BY THE SEERS IN SAMĀDHI. ALMIGHTY GOD BLESSED THEM WITH THIS DIVINE KNOWLEDGE TO GUIDE OUR PATH SINCE THE VEDIC REVELATION WAS SYNCHRONOUS WITH MAN'S FIRST APPEARANCE ON EARTH.

How can our creator prescribe offerings of his own creatures? After independence, this aspect should have received due attention but it is sad that this remained untapped and even the Sanskrit language came under cloud when a Rajya Sabha nominated Christian member Frank Anthony introduced a bill to drop this sacred language from the eighth schedule of languages enshrined in the Indian constitution in 1977. There is no doubt that some Western scholars did an appreciable job to introduce the Vedas to the outside world which inspired the scholars to learn Sanskrit to benefit from the treasure of wisdom of Vedic *Ṛṣis* but unfortunately, it followed a wrong path without application of their inner mind or intellect as was done by the devoted disciple of Swami Virajanand who was actually blind of eyes but he imparted such vision and deep knowledge to Dayanand that he clung to the soul and spirit of the Vedas and it is our bounden duty to follow this path to understand the sacred words of God which can never be wrong and are ever infallible.

In the context of the commentary/translation of the Vedas by Max Muller, it will be relevant to point out the opinion of Mr. Boulanger, the editor of Russian edition of The Sacred Books of the East Series as follows:

'What struck me in Max Müller's translation was a lot of absurdities, obscene passages and a lot of what is not lucid'.

As far as I can grab the teaching of the Vedas, it is so sublime that I would look upon it as a crime on my part, if the Russian public becomes acquainted with it through the medium of a confused and

distorted translation, thus not deriving for its soul that benefit which this teaching should give to the people'.

In his book 'Vedic Hymns', Max Muller himself says :

'My translation of the Vedas is conjectural'.

Hereunder, the glaring difference in substance and the spirit of the cited *Sūktas* 162 and 163 of the first *Maṇḍala* of *Ṛgveda* is illustrated to establish that misinterpretation is at the root of this problem. Each *Sūkta* has its *Ṛṣi* and *devatā*; *Ṛṣi* depicts 'draṣṭā' whereas *devatā* depicts the subject matter which facilitates the understanding of the *mantras* under respective *Sūkta*.

Sukta 162-

Name of *Ṛṣi* : Dīrghatamā

Name of devata : *Mitradyo Liṅgokta* (As per Sw. Dayanand)

: Dīrghatamā

: *Aśva-stuti* (As per translation of HH Wilson) Sukta

163-

Name of risi : Dīrghatamā

Name of devata : *Aśvo-agnirdevtā* (As per Sw. Dayanand)

: Deerghatama : *Ṛbhugaṇaḥ* (As per translation of
H H Wilson)

The above implies that both the *Sūktas* are in glorification of the horse but our Western enthusiasts and Mr.Jha along with his Indian ideals have even ignored the very basic lead and gone for crucifixion of the spirit of mantras which is left to your esteemed judgement.

Sūkta 162 has 22 mantras while *Sūkta* 163 has 13 mantras. Mr. Jha states that in the *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice), the most important of the Vedic public sacrifices, first referred to in the *Ṛgveda* in the afore-stated *Sūktas* (p.31 of his book).

Sūkta 162 in fact deals with the science of applying horse power (automation) of the fire pervading in the form of energy.

No *mantra* supports sacrifice of horses. Of course the first *mantra* has been translated by Max Müller in a wrong manner as follows:

'May *Mitra*, *Varuṇa*, *Aryaman*, *Ayuṣa*, *Indra*, the Lord of *Ṛbhus* and the *Maruta* not rebuke us because we shall proclaim at the sacrifice virtues of the swift horse sprung from the god'.

(from History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature).

Similarly H.H.Wilson in his translation based on the commentary of *Sāyaṇācārya* states as follows:

'Let neither *Mitra* nor *Varuṇa*, *Aryaman*, *Āyu*, *Indra*, *Ṛbhukṣin*, nor the *Maruts*, censure us; when was proclaim in the sacrifice the virtues of the swift horse sprung from the gods'.

Transliterated version of this mantra is given below:

mā no mitro varuṇo arymayurindro ṛbhukṣa marutaḥ parikhyan yadvājino devajātasya sapteḥ pravakṣyāmo vidathe vīryani.

Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati in his Hindi commentary has rendered the translation as follows:

We the performers of *yajña* in all seasons (*vidathe*) in the battle field (*vat*) whose (*vājinaḥ*) stormy (*devajātasya*) learned men and borne out of the divine virtues (*sapte*) of the horse (*vīryāni*) unique performances (*pravakṣyāmaḥ*) we shall describe (*naḥ*) the daring performances of our horses (*mitraḥ*) friend (*varunaḥ*) sublime (*aryamā*) the deliverer of justice (*āyuh*) the knower (*indraḥ*) the all-elivated or *aiśvarya* (*vān*) (*ṛbhukṣa*) intelligent and (*marutaḥ*) priests (*mā, parikhyan*) should never disregard these properties.

To easily grasp the spirit of mantra the following translation will be helpful.

We shall describe here the energy generating virtues of the powerful horses (stars), added with brilliant properties of the vigorous force of heat. The learned never dispute these properties. There is vast difference in the above quoted translations. Obviously the wrong seeds were sown by Sāyaṇa and Mahidhar who were the ideals adopted by the western scholars, namely Max Muller, Griffith, Wilson etc. Sw. Dayanand Saraswati in his book 'An Introduction to the Vedas' has adversely criticised on the commentaries of Sāyaṇa and Mahidhar in context of some of their interpretations of the Vedic hymns. They could be held responsible for the horrible and horrid interpretations which suggest as if the Vedas were the texts to lay down the modes of sacrifices. Is it not a tragedy for the *Dharamācāryas*/Sanskrit scholars of this country that they also could not pursue the path shown by Dayanand and got bogged down only in the rituals of worship in the temples and no attention was paid to the sources of knowledge which were the guiding principles of Aryans, our worthy ancestors and sons of the mother India (*Āryavrat*) as the Vedas proclaimed man as 'amritasya putras' and we need to follow this path if we want to be proud of our heritage and hold our head high or otherwise we are going to be labelled with the legacy of butchers and animal killers who desired to please different gods by various sacrifices performed in the *yajñas*. Eighth mantra of this *Sūkta* is translated as follows :

The fleet of horses is controlled by holding of bridles and saddles placed thereon. To make them strong, the grass and cereals are fed to them. Likewise, the learned people control and regulate their power of senses and taking nourishing diet.

Wilson's translation is as follows:

May the halter and the heel-ropes of the fleet courser, and the head-ropes, the girths, and any other (part of the harness); and the grass that has been put into his mouth; may all these be with you, (horse), amongst the gods.

(THIS IS NOTHING BUT LITERAL AND MECHANICAL TRANSLATION BEREFT OF THE SUBSTANCE AND SPIRIT OF THE MANTRA)

Ninth *mantra* again was again wrongly interpreted by Max Müller, Wilson and Griffith to translate the word '*kraviṣah*' as the flesh. It is an adjective of '*aśvasya*' and derived from *kramu-pādavikṣepe*. Hence it means 'the pacing horse' and not of the flesh. '*śamituḥ*' has been translated by Max Müller and Wilson as of the immolator. Griffith has translated it as 'of a slayer'. But etymologically '*sam-ālocne*' means 'to look at' (with love and peace) and should mean 'a person who looks at the living beings with love and peace and not slayer'.

Twelfth *mantra* emphasizes on the qualities of the warrior and its translation is as follows:

They who crave for the meat of a horse and declare the horse fit to be killed should be exterminated. Those who keep the fast horse well trained and disciplined deserve to be praised by us for the strength of their character and perseverance. (IT CLEARLY DEMOLISHES THE THESIS OF JHA AND PROVES THAT HE HAS MERELY QUOTED CITATIONS AND HARDLY CARED TO LOOK AT THE ACTUAL TEXT BUT INSPIRED BY THE FOLLOWING TRANSLATION OF WILSON):

'Let their exertions be for our good who watch the cooking of the horse; who say; it is fragrant; therefore give us some: who solicit the flesh of the horse as alms'. (WHAT AN IMMENSE DAMAGE TO THE SPIRIT OF THE MANTRA).

Mantras 13 to 19 deal with the theme of horse or automation power while 20 to 22 are devoted to the benefits of *Yoga* exercises and an ideal life.

Sūkta 163

This *Sūkta* deals with various attributes of learned person, *agni*, science & technology. There are references to the horse to illustrate its unique qualities of its immense energy likened to *agni* (fire).

intelligence, bravery and inbuilt attributes which are at par with those of the men of wisdom. Perusal of some mantras will bring home this point. First mantra includes or rather ends with 'arvan' and this word denotes as per Yv 29.12 *viññānvān athvā aśva iv vegavān vidvān*=O learned person active like the horse.

Second *mantra* includes the term '*sarat aśvam*' which means the fast moving *agni* i.e the fire which enables a speedy locomotion.

Third *mantra* includes the term '*ādityaḥ arvan*' and here it means the sun which is all pervading. '*arvan*' means *sarvatraprāptaḥ* = pervading all. This term was wrongly translated by Prof. Wilson, Griffith and others, while both admit in the notes that *Yama* means *Agni*, *Āditya*-Sun and *Trita*-Vayu. How can horse be identified with *Agni* (fire) sun and the air etc. none has cared to justify. To take '*arva*' for *agni*, there is the clear authority of the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*.(I.36,4).

Fourth *mantra* includes the word '*arvan*' where it is used to mean the learned and wise people.

Eighth *mantra* includes the word '*arvan*' through which the mighty and active person has been likened to the horse who bears such characteristics.

Ninth *mantra* includes the word '*arvantam*' which means *vegavantam agnim aśvam*=the rapid horse in the form of *Agni* (fire, electricity etc.)

Tenth *mantra* includes the word '*aśva*' where it means the bright swift horses in the form of fire, air, water etc.

Eleventh *mantra* includes the word '*arvan*' and the following translation of this mantra will endorse our stand that the unique qualities of the horse are emphasized in *Sūkta*-163:

'O brave person! You are active like a horse, your body is like a swift vehicle, your mind is like the wind in motion. Your sublime actions are initiated from the proper use of fire and electricity. These are spread in all directions like the hoary creatures in the forests'.

One can see that this *mantra* is in praise of highly skilled technicians. Wilson's translation reads as follows:

'Your body, horse, is made for motion, your mind is rapid (in intention) as the wind: the hairs (of your mane) are tossed in manifold directions; and spread beautiful in the forests'. (ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF MECHANICAL TRANSLATION)

Twelfth *mantra* includes the term '*vājyarva*' which means *agni* swift (*vegavān*) like a horse and here in this *mantra* use of *agni* is highlighted.

Thirteenth and the last *mantra* of this *Sūkta* contains the word

'arvan' where it means *agnyādyasvan*= horses in the form of fire, electricity etc.

AŚVAMEDHA has been translated as horse sacrifice as referred above by Jha and the conclusions drawn accordingly and this has been the root cause of varied wrong interpretations and in order to illustrate its scope and meaning the following is stated:

At the sight of words '*aśvamedha, gomedha, puruṣamedha, ajāmedha*' there is general tendency to interpret it to denote as *hinsā/sacrifice/killing*. '*medha*' word's verbal root or *dhātu* is '*medhṛ*'. '*medhṛ saṅgame hinsāyām ca*' i. e. to enhance pure intellect, to inculcate love and integration among the people and also *hinsā* i.e. killing (this *dhātu* conveys these three meanings). But it does not always mean killing or sacrifice and in Sanskrit no literal translation will do where a particular word carries varied meanings and it has to be applied judiciously and thoughtfully keeping in view the context of the text. The words '*puruṣamedha*' and '*nṛyajña*' are synonyms. In *Manusmṛti* the word '*nṛyajña*' has been defined as '*nṛyajño atithipūjanam*' (*Manusmṛti* - 3.70) it means the *pūjā* or honour of the guests. If we take the meaning of the root '*medhṛ*' as *saṅgamanārtha*, it will come to be interpreted as to organize the people for virtuous deeds or to enhance the love and equanimity among them i.e. it would be '*nṛyajña*' or '*puruṣamedh*'. It may be pertinent to mention here that '*nṛmedha*' is a *Ṛṣi* of some Vedic hymns of *Sāmaveda*. It can never mean the one who kills or sacrifices the human beings. Consequently, the terms followed by *medha* always do not signify killing/sacrifice and therefore the interpretations made by the Western scholars are utterly wrong and unacceptable.

In *Śatpatha Brāhmaṇa* (13.1.6) it is stated '*rāṣṭram vā aśvamedhaḥ?*' i.e. *Aśvamedha* means to manage or run the affairs of the *rāṣṭra* (country) in a befitting manner.

In the *Śāntiparva* of *Mahābhārata* (3.336) there is mention of *aśvamedha* of the king *Vasu* in which numerous *Ṛṣis* and learned men participated. In this context it is clearly mentioned '*n tatra paśughāto-abhūt*' i.e. there was no killing of any animal. Further in this *Parva* at 3.327, the following is stated in context with '*ajāmedha*':

ajairyajñeṣu yaṣṭavyamiti vai vaidiki śruti.

ajasañjñāni bijāni chagānno hantumarhatha

naiṣaḥ dharmah satam devaḥ yatra vadhyeta vai paśuḥ

It means that whenever it is stated to use *ajā* for performance of *yajña*, it means the seeds called '*ajā*' have to be used. Here it does not mean a goat. It is not proper to kill goats and it does not behove the

virtuous people to indulge in killing of the animals.

Sw. Dayanand Saraswati in his book '*An introduction to the Vedas*' at p. 448-449 states that God is Jamadagni i.e. *Aśvamedha*. An empire is like a horse and the subjects like other inferior animals. As other animals, the strength, so the subjects are weaker than the state assembly. The glory and splendour of an empire consists in wealth, gold etc. and in administration of justice'. (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*: XIII.2.2.14-17)

It is further stated that God's name is *Aśva* also, because, He pervades the whole universe (*Aśva* comes from the root '*As*' which means to pervade).

The above derivations call for our cautious approach and take upon ourselves the task of removing the mist caused by misinterpretations to see the truth which can be one and only one and feel proud of our heritage.



(To be continued)

2. Bharat Bhushan Vidyalkar. *Vedom ke sambandha mein bhrānta dhārṇāyām*. Delhi, 2002. 11 pp. *Ṛgveda Samhitā* with English translation by Swami Satya Prakash Sarasvati and Satyakam Vidyalkar. Delhi, Veda Pratishthana, 1977.
3. The *Ṛgveda* with Maharishi Dayanda Saraswati's Commentary. Translated into English by Acharya Dharam Dev Vidya Martanda. Delhi, Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, 1974.
4. *Ṛgveda : Hindi Bhāṣya—Pratham Maṇḍala* by Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati. Delhi, Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, 1972.
5. *Ṛgveda Samhitā* : Sanskrit text, English translation and notes according to translation of H.H. Wilson and Bhasya of Sayanacarya edited and revised with exhaustive introduction and notes by Ravi Prakash Arya, Delhi, Parimal Publications, 1997, 4 vols.
6. Vidyanand Saraswati. *Āryom kā ādi deśa aur unkī sabhyatā*. Delhi, Arya Prakashan, 2002

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ANNEXURE

The synopsis on the jacket of the book entitled '*The myth of the holy cow*' by D.N. Jha reads as follows:

'The growth of religious fundamentalism in India is symbolized by the existence of a BJP government committed to the Hindutva. There is growing pressure to declare the cow a sacred, national animal and to ban its slaughter. The Myth of the Holy Cow is an illuminating response to this crazed confessionalism. It challenges obscurantist views on the sanctity of the cow in Hindu tradition and Culture. Dwijendra Narayan Jha, a leading Indian historian, argues that beef eating played an important part in the cuisine of ancient India, long before the birth of Islam. It was very much a feature of the approved Brahmanical and Buddhist diet. The evidence he produces from a variety of religious and secular texts is compelling. His opponents, including the current government of India and the fundamentalist groups backing it, have demanded that the book should be ritually burned in public. It has already been banned by the Hyderabad Civil Court and the author's life has been threatened'.