

Thoughts on the Vedas

Yet another wonderful *Durga Puja* is round the corner, the 19th such occasion in *Akhanda Mahapeeth*.



Like all others of our large family, I eagerly wait for the 10 day long *Navaratra* to escape from the desert of worldly drudgery into the divine oasis and invigorate myself

with a fresh shower of bliss. I had barely entered my teens when this *Durga Puja* first started in 1992, and ever since, I look forward to re-experiencing how the force behind this bliss permeated environment uplifts everyone around to become capable of working in harmony for performing such tasks to almost flawless perfection. People are delighted to be busy without scope for a breath all day long, making arrangements for the puja, playing the *Dhak*, performing yajnas, cooking, cleaning, taking part in cultural activities, listening to saints and savants while stealing moments for sadhana with a constant



Devotees playing dhak during Durga Puja

feeling of being so near God. Amidst all this external hustle and bustle, everybody senses an underlying divine current constantly flowing within and connecting them to a deep source of eternal joyful tranquility. As if, struck by the ever compassionate eternal mother's spear of consciousness, the great worldly Mahisasura within — the invader of the innermost recesses of every commoner's

being — is rendered completely overpowered by a joyous expression of inspired self-surrender. The *Durga Puja* festival of *Akhanda Mahapeeth* is to us, a celebration of the blossoming divine consciousness within and without.

I have a special attraction for the *yagna* ceremonies that take place on the days of *saptami*, *ashtami* and *navami*. The solemn, serene ambiance of the sacrificial enclosure, the brilliantly shooting flame, the vibrations emanating out of the synchronized Vedic chanting of the completely engrossed devotees encircling the sacrificial pit and the heavenly incense of the ghee-coated offerings spontaneously elevate the mind into newer and higher realms of spirituality. Our respected elder guru-brother Brahmachari Sri Yagnanarayan Devasharman, a pious and devoted kriya-sadhak and the head priest of this *Durga Puja* commences the *yagna* ceremony with the fire-invoking hymn, “*Om yahaivaha mitero jat-veda devebhyo habyang vahatu prajanana...*” and then igniting the holy pyre. After this, he continues the ceremony with Vedic hymns dedicated to Lords *Narayana*, *Mahadev*, *Maa Durga*, and other Divine Beings. Within a short while the *yagna-agni* lolls up into a huge majestic flame. As the ceremony progresses, devotees begin to feel the *nada-brahman* filled reverberations of the Vedic chanting charged with the *tejomay-agni* completely engulfing their extrovert, material consciousness and repeatedly entering within as waves — cleansing each and every cell of all stains of worldly mundanity. Steadily the consciousness internalizes to a point where the flow of outer respiration and the ability of speech impends to choke down to a standstill. At this stage, observing within, one beholds in the inner sky the shining glow of the *Atma-jyoti* (soul's

light) in all its grandeur, while the majestic sacrificial flame continues to glow outside. The feeling of these two flames, within and



Sri Yagnanarayan Devasharman performing yagna during durga puja

outside, being one and the same is experienced. Later on, I obtained support and confirmation to this intuition when I read about the principles of Vedic sacrifices in Rishi Aurobindo's book "*The Secret of the Veda*". It mentioned that the sacrificial flame actually represents the ever glowing illuminated soul. *Ghee* denotes the mind and the different offerings signify the body. The submission of ghee-coated offerings into the sacred fire is a symbolic act of the inner sacrificial process - the dissolution of the body and mind into the *Atma* (soul). Gaining this knowledge, my curiosity about the fundamental principles behind Vedic sacrifices grew further. I obtained a few illuminating explanations and commentaries on this subject in the book mentioned above and Rishi Anirvan's Bengali book "*Veda Mimamsa*". A very brief overview of these commentaries is presented next.

The roots of Indian culture and thought were seeded in the unknown depths of the ancient, mystic age of the *Vedas*. The shoots of spiritualism that originated in the Vedic Rishis' inner craving for illumination in that prehistoric age has grown uninterrupted into a massive tree fragmenting itself into numerous philosophical trunks of thought that have fragrantly flowered through India's entire spiritual history and have borne fruits of highly refined philosophies like '*Yoga*' and '*Tantra*' in the modern era. Hence, a sound study and meditation on the Vedic Litera-

tures is immensely important for understanding the roots and history of India's culture and spirituality. Although the Vedic age may be considered as the very dawn of the Indian spiritual awareness, its literature, though considered primitive by many is neither crude nor barbaric as sometimes made out to be. The fundamental conceptions of its foundation is firmly established on immortal, eternal realized Truth. The fundamental conception of the Vedic ideology:

The cause and source of existence of entire creation comprising both animate and inanimate substances is 'Brahman' or consciousness; in Upanishadic terms, "Sarvang Khalidang Brahma". Both these animate and inanimate entities merge within the human self. Upanishadic maxims state, "Ayamatma Brahma" and "Aitadatmamidang Sarvam"; the Atman or the purified soul itself is 'Brahman', and it is this Atman that reveals itself as everything that is existent within the universe. That is, the self, the world outside and Atman are all one and same.

This eternal foundation indicates to the natural cause why the Vedas have always been accepted as the highest authority towards all spiritual resolutions in the history of India. However, the primary impediment to its conceivability and analysis lies in the enormity of its volume, the ancientness of its language and the apparent obscurity of its meanings.

Vedic literature in general is divided into four sections. 1. *Samhita*: A compilation of the hymns. 2. *Brahmanas*: The Vedic hymns are closely associated with a set of corresponding ceremonies and sacrificial rituals. The Brahmanas attempt to secure and preserve the minutiae of these ceremonies and rituals. It also discusses their purpose and the material effect they result. 3. *Aranyak*: Aranyakas illustrate the subtle or inner sense

of the ceremonies and rituals presented in the Brahmanas. 4. *Upanishads*: An analysis of the principal philosophical ideas in the Vedas is enshrined in the Upanishads.

Therefore, we obtain analyses of the Vedic hymns from three different perspectives in the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and the Upanishads. However, none of them being a direct interpretation of the hymns, they help little to determine the accurate sense of the texts they are based on. The Brahmanas only seem to aim to formalize and fix the ceremonial procedures associated with the hymns and do not directly attempt to unveil the spiritual subtleties preserved in them. Similarly, although the Upanishads being primarily philosophical in its doctrines shed some light on the spiritual ideas of the Vedas, they are not in direct correspondence to the Samhita and hence do not assist us in the quest towards safely revealing the accurate sense of its hymns. The foundation of the Upanishads apparently seems to be largely independent from external ceremonies and ritualism. Only in the Aranyakas and a few ancient Upanishads do there exist indications of proximity between philosophical knowledge and associated ceremonies. The Upanishads are based on self experienced knowledge and being later in its origins than the Samhita its language is also more intelligible to the modern era. They therefore provide a comparatively easier means of obtaining a rough intuition of the Vedic Rishis' spiritual philosophies. Hence, the Upanishads seem at least superficially as the fountain-head of the highest Vedic thought and language. On the other hand, the Samhita and Brahmana being ancient, unintelligible and outwardly ceremonial, seems to be the compositions of a primitive and still barbarous race written around a set of confused half-formed spiritual ideas and superstitious fantasies; as if moral refinement,

spiritual realization or magnification of psychic consciousness was not the actual intent of the ceremonies and sacrificial rites, and they were only performed to achieve external material gains, power and enjoyments by propitiating personified powers of nature. Thus, the apparent obvious hypothesis stands as: *through progressive refinement and evolution of spiritual understanding, the superficial polytheism of the Samhita got transformed and internalized into monotheism through the acceptance and adoration of divine consciousness as the supreme spiritual entity.*

But a deeper reading reveals much more. Since the ancient ages, the Vedic hymns have been accepted as an outward expression of the primordial reverberations of divine realization within a perfected and enlightened self – its maxims being eternal and impersonal. The maxims may have been delivered by a saint or even attributed to God Himself, but in every case it is an expression of an eternal unalterable divine truth. The Vedic Rishis were seers (*drawshta*) of an eternal truth and propounded an impersonal knowledge and were not individual composers of hymns. If the foundation of the Vedic hymns is established on such a universal and eternal truth, the contradictory imaginary hypothesis that they are the fruits of immature spiritual understanding and superstition, must be discarded. But then the questions which must simultaneously be answered are: Firstly, what is the actual inner significance of the apparently material and ritualistic Vedic hymns? And secondly, why had the ancient Vedic scholars strived only to preserve the sanctity and accuracy of every text, their accents and associated rituals without attempting to unveil their inner secrets. An endeavor to arrive at a solution to these complex mysteries leads us to the very core of the profoundest spiritual realizations of the Vedic Rishis.

We have already discussed that the Vedic Rishis had realized the universal presence of the same divine vibrations of consciousness within every entity existent in the world. Its presence is identical and equal within both the animate and inanimate forms and hence, they did not recognize any existential conflict distinguishing them. Instead, they have given us indications of a deeper super-science originating from this eternal realization. As the animate and inanimate are but two distinct expressive forms of the same force of consciousness, when the internal psychic power gets aroused and established within an individual due to the progressive ascent of his consciousness towards divinity, an inanimate entity may be coerced or even dominated by attaining a state of consciousness equivalent to the subtle conscious state of the inanimate through his own psychic power. However, domination of the inanimate was not the sole purpose of the Vedic sacrificial rites and ceremonies. Its deeper and principal intent was the progressive ascent and magnification of individual consciousness. The rites and ceremonies in this case acts to stimulate and catalyze the activation of an individual's will-power and establish him on to the state of pure perfected consciousness. When the sacrificial object is an individual's own conscious subtle embodiment, it is classified as 'Yoga'; and when divine consciousness descends on to an entity external to the embodiment, it becomes 'Tantra'. An even blend of both these two sacrificial classifications may be observed within the Vedic hymns. While the aim of 'Yoga' is the ascent of individual consciousness and the ultimate existence as '*Purusha*' transcending the body, mind, intellect and ego (This is the philosophical approach of the Upanishads), 'Tantra' aims at the blossoming and radiation of psychic force from a perfectly conscious purified soul.

The above discussion provides us some clues into the mystery of the Vedic hymns. Now the second question remains – why didn't the ancient mystics ever attempt to discover the actual and exact interpretation of the hymns? A cue to the solution of this mystery may be obtained from the Vedic philosophy of '*Vak*'. '*Vak*' denotes the outward expression of the omnipotent 'Brahman' or Consciousness. Due to progressive expansion, the individual consciousness successively transcends beyond the body, mind and intellect. Ultimately, when this individual consciousness expands infinitely and completely merges into the universal consciousness, the perception of individual existence 'I' also dissolves into a perception of divine universal omnipresence; this is the true realization of the 'Brahman'. '*Vak*' or 'Para-vak' represents the primordial reverberations of this Brahmic realization within the stillness of the completely unwavering self. This explains the very cause and source of impersonality of the Vedic hymns. Then when '*Vak*' manifests in the form of light within the inner sky, it is referred to as 'Pashyanti-vak'. After this, '*Vak*' manifests as emotion or feeling; this is referred to as 'Madhyama-vak'. Ultimately, '*Vak*' or the hymn emanates as sound or speech. At this stage, it is called 'Baikhari-vak'. However, the power encapsulated in the primordial vibrations of 'Para-vak' remains undiminished even in 'Baikhari-vak'. Thus, 'Baikhari-vak' may be considered to be entirely impersonal like Para-vak'. So, not only is the sense or meaning of the Vedic hymns eternal, its text is also eternal. Therefore, keeping aside its meaning, even the natural expressive power in the vibrations of the Vedic hymns has the potency to emancipate an individual's consciousness into divinity. The Vedic mystics realized this equivalence in the potency of the Vedic maxims and their meanings. This

gives us one indication why the ancient Rishis have endeavored to accurately preserve the text and accents of the Vedic maxims without attempting to discover the mysteries of their meanings, assuming that such is naturally latent within the text and its vibrations.

The above discussion gives us an idea of the universal and eternal foundation of Vedic literature. A sound study and meditation on these literatures is absolutely essential as the

source of the Indian spiritual progress is encapsulated in them. However, a complete and cognitive understanding of the Vedas is impossible by intellect alone – it requires the light of realization, which may only be attempted through spiritual penance and finally received through divine grace.

Associated Texts:

1. *Ved Mimamsa by Rishi Anirvan*
2. *The Secret of the Veda by Sri Aurobindo*
–Sri Arnab Sarkar, Her Blessed Child

My Life with Anirvan

Part - V

I used to take longhand notes of the talks on the Upanishads by Sri Anirvan at the Dharma-Sabha. I used to take notes in my Gujarati script as I could not write the Bangla script, though I could read and speak Bangla quite fluently, I never practiced to write in Bangla - lack of diligence, patience! Will! I had to take the help of Bengali friends whomever I found nearby-sometimes Bina Das, or Narayani Basu or Debi Majumdar and later in the eighties and nineties Bratati Mukherjee! As Sandhya was present at the Ishopanishad talks, she had also taken notes and Anirvanji could use her notes for writing the Isha Upanishad for the Burdwan University. Later Anirvanji used my notes for writing Aitareya and Kena Upanishads. He had started writing Taittiriya Upanishad in 1970 when he was residing at 9/3, Central Park, Jadavpur, but the work was stopped after writing the introduction in a most elaborate way, writing in details about the sacrifices-yajnas as Taittiriya Upanishad belonged to Yajur-Veda - the Veda especially connected with Sacrifices - with Karma-Kanda - the works i.e. Sacrifices - Yajnas - Because of other works and soon after coming to 9/2, Fern Road, he fell sick in the end of July 1971 and had to stop all work - teaching and writing - except talking at interviews and writing letters - lying in the bed!

Thus we got only three Upanishads - Isha, Aitareya and Kena written by Anirvanji himself, which were published, before he passed away in May 1978. The rest Katha, Kaushitaki and Taittiriya Upanishads I got published from my notes, first in the 'Arya Darpana' monthly published by Assam Bangiya Saraswat Math, Halisahar, W.B. and then in book form by Burdwan University. Svetasvatara Upanishad is now being published in the 'Arya Darpana'. At the time of Mandukya and Prashna Upanishad I did not find anybody to help me in writing in Bangla script and so I had myself translated my notes in English. Mandukya Upanishad is now already published in the 'Ribhu' a biannual magazine published by 'Golden Horizon', a centre for Sri Aurobindo's Adventure of consciousness, Kolkata 700091, in the 2005-06 issues and Pras'nopanishad is being published from February 2007 issue. I hope to get them published soon in book form.

Regarding the Vedas, Anirvanji said, that though he started studying the Vedas while he was in the Calcutta University and wrote something in the Arya Darpana magazine, the true spirit of the Vedas was revealed to him only at Almora when he was living face to face with his Haimavati - the snow peaks of the Himalayas! It was during the period of