

THE (DARK) SECRETS OF THE VEDAS



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Abstract:

The Vedas are generally heralded as the ancient essence of Indian Religion & Philosophy. Vedas have always been regarded as the beacon of knowledge in the Hindu religious and Indian philosophical arena. They are looked upon with utmost reverence and holiness. But there are many dark sides of the Vedas too.

Many inhuman practices are disguised as philosophies in Vedic texts. Almost none of the Vedic Gods exist in modern day Hinduism. Vedic gods were given up to embrace and exert authority on the local cultures. Vegetarianism was not considered holy in those days. The real meaning of many Vedic words have changed over the course of time and there are even some obscene passages in the so-called holy texts of the Vedas. More than all, the inhuman practice of the Caste System traces its roots to the four Vedas.

There were many other ancient schools of philosophy like Lokayata, Ajivika, Jainism & Buddhism that dissented with the Vedas and offered a different school of thought against Vedic supremacy, superstitions and injustices of the Vedic schools.

This paper walks through the basics of the Vedic school as well as the philosophies of the non-Vedic schools, and compares both philosophies in a rational context and a social construct. It also shares some historical notes in the conflict between the two schools of religion and philosophy. It requires a full re-reading to understand the dark secrets of the much acclaimed holy Vedas.

Keywords:

Vedas, Sruti, Smriti, Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva, Upanishad, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Caste System, Vedic Gods, Lokayata, Carvaka

Introduction:

Lead me

from untruth to truth from darkness to light and from death to immortality.

(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28)

This mantra is called pavamāna abhyāroha mantra. It is said and believed that the reciter of this mantra is raised from a lower level to a higher level. It is the desire of human beings to know the truth. What is truth? It has been defined differently by different people on different occasions. Still it remains a question to be answered satisfactorily. In addition to the above question there are other questions as well.

Srutis and Smritis:

The word Veda is derived from the root 'Vid' which means 'to know'. 'Sruti' means that which is heard, and 'Smriti' means that which is remembered. The Vedas are called Srutis, meaning they are orally communicated and heard but not composed or written down. Vedas

are also considered as 'apaurusheya' which means that their authorship cannot be assigned to any human agency, and they are breathed out by God and visioned by seers.

Swami Vivekananda opined that there is a considerable difference of opinion among the scholars and thinkers as what portion constitutes the Veda proper. One school believes that whole of the Vedic literature comprising of the four sections: 1) Samhitas, 2) Brahmanas, 3) Aranyakas and 4) Upanishads has emanated from Brahman. On the other hand, there are others who have a firm conviction that the Samhitas, which are the invocatory texts of Vedas and the collection of metric texts, are alone the Veda proper and the rest are appendices. Swami Dayananda Sarasvati regarded that Samhita texts alone constitutes original Vedas. The Brahmanas are texts that explain about the rituals that occur in the Vedas. The Aranyakas are treatises composed in the forests that discuss and interpret the various ceremonies. The last & final section – the Upanishads are texts that dwell on philosophy and are termed 'Vedanta' meaning the

ending portion of the Vedas.

The whole of Vedic literature marks progression and expansion, but not departure or diversion. The great German thinker and Sanskrit scholar Max Müller emphatically says, “I maintain that for a study of man, there is nothing in the world equal in importance with the Veda, I maintain that to everybody who cares for himself, for his ancestors, for his history or for his intellectual development, a study of Vedic literature is indispensable”.

Vedas – Four or Three?

The Vedas are four – Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. But traditionally they are spoken of as ‘Trayi’ - the Triple Vidya (threefold knowledge). Atharva is relatively of quite a late origin. Sections of the Yajur and Sama Veda repeat the Rig Veda to a great extent, but Atharva Veda is a collection of original hymns and borrows very little from the Rig Veda. These four together form the foundations of Indian religious & philosophical systems and observances.

In Swami Vivekananda’s individual view, all that is true, is Veda. “By the Vedas”, he says, “no looks are meant”. He considers that the agnosticism of the Buddhists, the atheism of Jains,

each and all have a place in the Hindu Religion. In his sheer enthusiasm, Vivekananda calls Buddha a great Vedantist, but it should not be forgotten that Buddha fought against Vedic Yagnas and Sacrifices.

Henotheism:

In contrast with the Vedas, Prof. Max Müller creates a new name for the worship of personal god of Hindus and calls it ‘Henotheism’. Henotheism is a bit different from monotheism and polytheism. The sacred literature of India declares that “Ekam Sat, Vipra Bahudha Vadanti”. It literally means “That which is one, and sages call it by various names”. Manickavasagar, the Saivite Tamil saint says “The god has no single shape and no single name, but we call him in thousand names”. This trend exists even in the Vaishnavite tradition.

Schools of Indian Philosophy:

Marxist commentator K. Varadarajan gives a list of nine most important Indian Philosophical schools of thought. The list is as follows:

1. Lokayata
2. Jainism
3. Buddhism

4. Vedanta
5. Mimāmsā
6. Sāmkhya
7. Nyaya
8. Vaiśeṣika
9. Yoga

Adi Sankara's 'Advaita', Madhwa's 'Dvaita' and Ramanujacharya's 'Vishistadvaita' are later schools stemming from Vedanta. They interpret the Vedas according to their own philosophical points of view, and hence their interpretations differ on various counts. Even Swami Vivekananda was no exception to this general view.

Dissenting Notes:

The Vedas stand strikingly different from other religious texts of those ancient times, which provided a space for dissenters to raise their suspicion on the very existence of a super-power (god). In their approach, Indian philosophers proceed like ancient Greek philosophers. Agnostic, atheistic, materialistic, and even iconoclastic traces could be found in their dissenting notes. Lokayata is one such school which is immense in dissenting with the Vedas.

Lokayata:

Lokayata is one of the first, if not the first of all initial materialistic philosophies. This is attributed to one Sarvaka (or Cārvāka) Maharishi. The word 'Loka' means 'people' and ayata means 'among the people'. There was also one siddha named 'Lokayatar' in the Tamil Siddha tradition. One can understand the popularity of Lokayata philosophy from the antagonist sources. The original sources have been destroyed by vested interests. In the 3rd century BCE, Kautilya (Chanakya) listed three important things that a king should learn for good governance. Lokayata philosophy is one among them he says, in his monumental book 'Artha Sastra'. Famous historian Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya in his famous treatise on Lokayata, lamented over the destruction of the original sources. It is an irony that scholars have to depend on the sarcastic commentaries made by antagonists in their books against Lokayata to know about Lokayata.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India justifiably gave Lokayata its due place in developing the socio-polity in Indian history. Nehru

says that the Lokayata revolted against all superstitions and injustices of the Vedic schools and challenged that status quo. They uncompromisingly fought against the dictatorial attitude of the ruling class who remained the guardians of the age-old Vedic beliefs. Lokayata criticized the authority of the Vedas, the priests, and their superstitions of all kinds. Above all, they negated the very existence of god. They advocated that it is unnecessary to bow and pray to some imaginary statues. In short they were the Ingersolls, Bradleys and Periyar of their age.

It is believed that Brihaspati was the Originator of Lokayata. According to Puranic myths, Brihaspati was the son of Brahma, the creator of all beings. He was also the guru (teacher) of the thirty-three crore devas.

The morning star of Indian Renaissance, Raja Ram Mohan Roy took some clues from Brihaspati and others. "English Ever; Hindi Never" may seem to be a modern slogan. But it is a slightly modified version of "English Ever; Sanskrit Never" which was coined by the reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He was well-versed in

many languages including English, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian etc. It was he who was instrumental in abolishing the cruel and inhuman Hindu practice of Sati, wherein the widowed wives were thrown into the funeral pyre of their husbands. He parleyed with Lord William Bentinck and Lord T.B. Macaulay over the issue of the medium of instruction and was instrumental in establishing secular English Education over the much hyped religious Sanskrit education.

Against all Lokayats:

The tirade against Lokayats continued even after they were dead and gone after many centuries. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the second president of the Indian Republic was an esteemed philosopher. But, in one of his famous books "The history of Indian Philosophy" he chided the Lokayats. He based his biased commentary against Lokayata based on a drama called 'Prabhodha Chandrodhayam' written by Krishna Mishra. The drama hit below the belt of all Lokayats including Buddhists, Jains and others who were against Vedic supremacy. They were dubbed as liars, womanizers, perverted sexists through

the falsely portrayed characters in the drama. Without any concrete argument Dr. Radhakrishnan simply admired those fictitious characters and wanted others to emulate the essence of the drama. But, later this was countered by Osho (Acharya Rajneesh) in one of his articles.

The religious gurus of Hindu Sanatana Dharma degraded Lokayatas in every possible manner. If they had enough powers, they would have even thrown the Lokayata Teacher - Cārvāka into Dante's Inferno (Divine Comedy). Dante, the Italian Poet allotted a space for saints and seers in the seventh hell. But the great Veda Vyasa, the codifier of the four Vedas, accomplished this in his epic Maha Bharata. Originally known as Jaya, and later Bharata & Mahabharata, the epic was extended by many selfish fundamentalists, and one such episode is featured in the following paragraph.

Lokayata in the Mahabharata:

The Mahabharata consists of eighteen Parvas (divisions) as a whole. The Shanti Parva is placed as the 12th division. The Kurukshetra war in the story of the Mahabharata ended on a sad note. Both sides lost their near and dear. No

one was satisfied - neither the winner nor the loser. Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandava Princes returned to the town. A host of Brahmins were waiting at the entrance of the town, to receive him. He was shocked to hear the sharp words of Lokayata guru Cārvāka from among the crowds. Cārvāka said, "You are a great sinner who have murdered your kith and kin. You can never escape from these sins". Yudhishtira dropped his head down. He was unable to bear the truth in those words. He wanted to end his life there itself. But the Brahmins convinced him against giving up his life, and instead Cārvāka was burnt down as a heretic. This incident is a horrible sample from the so called tolerant religion of Sanatana Dharma. This happened thousands of years before Giordano Bruno was burnt down for his unconventional views against the religion in Italy.

Lokayata in the Ramayana:

Rama, the eldest son of Dasharatha was performing the ceremonial brahminical rites to his late father with the assistance of many Brahmins and his guru Vasishtha. But a Lokayata scholar

by the name Jabali was reasoning out and advising Rama to avoid such superstitious ceremonies. Jabali said, "Oh Rama, as a king you should know the validity of these rituals. They are un-necessary. The wealth and food you offer to your dead father would not go to him. They would not satisfy his soul in any way. They would only fill the coffers of these selfish Brahmins who perform the rituals. This superstitious system was created and preserved by cunning Brahmins to earn their livelihood without doing any meaningful work. The homa materials you offer here cannot even reach a nearby village. If so, how could they reach the heavens? Think twice before you start this". Rama was taken aback. He became angry and confused. But Vasishtha pacified Rama and the ceremonies continued.

Other Lokayats:

A great Lokayat by the name Ajita Kesakambali lived during the times of Buddha (5th century BCE) and he was even more vociferous in attacking the myth of god, heaven, hell and yagna. Lokayats represented the common man's voice and stood up against Vedic supremacy and the supremacy of the

Brahmin priests. They argued against the class and caste oppression instituted by the Brahmins in the name of Vedic religion.

Selfishness in Life or Philosophy of Life?

Yajnavalkya was a philosopher-guide to the King of Mithila, Janaka - the father of Sita in the Ramayana epic. In his autobiography, the great Tamil poet Subramania Bharathiyar mentions an episode wherein when the city of Mithila was burning, Janaka was busy involving himself in the introspection of the Vedas. Instead of safeguarding his citizens, he was behaving like the Emperor Nero of Rome, who is stated to have been playing the fiddle when Rome was burning. On closer reading, one can infer that Vedic supremacy was at the forefront and even regular duties to the society took a backseat.

Swami Vivekananda quotes the discussion between the Vedic sage Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi and this throws light on what true love is according to the Vedic school. (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.5)

Yajnavalkya said to his wife Maitreyi, "It is not for the sake of the husband, that the wife loves the husband, but for the sake of her own self (Atman) that

she loves her husband, she actually loves her self. None loves his wife for the sake of his wife, but because one loves his own self, that one loves his wife. None loves the children for the sake of children, but to gratify their own selves”.

Such was the deplorable position of the Vedas on true love, disguised in the form of philosophy and inquiry. The leader of the Dravidar Kazhagam, Aasiriyar K. Veeramani has exposed such philosophical disguise of the Sanatanic texts in his thought provoking book ‘Geethaiyin Marupakkam’ (The other side of the Gita).

Why a religion needs Scriptures and to whom?

It is said that scriptures don’t make a religion, and on the contrary the religion makes the scriptures. Swami Chitbhananda, in his introduction to Bhagavad Gita stresses the importance and inevitability of scriptures. He says, “Scriptures are indispensable to all religions. They save religions from mutation and from extinction. All religions of the world that have endured the savages of time and of transformation have their own scriptures for anchorage”.

The Rig Veda was the first well attested text that evolved in Sanskrit language. Rigs are mantras used in prayers to express needs and requirements at the time of rituals. Until the 14th century CE, when Sāyana who wrote his commentary on the Vedas, they were confined exclusively with the Brahmins and out of reach to the other sections of the society. Sudras and Panchamas were denied access to the Vedas. Women too were prohibited, even if they were Brahmin women. All women were placed on par with the Sudras, the lowest order of the caste system. Panchamas were so much ill-treated, that they were not even worthy of placing inside the lowest strata of the caste system. Sudras & Panchamas were not even allowed to hear the Vedas. Even if they happen to hear accidentally, there were cruel punishments meted out to them.

Only in the 11th century CE, the great Vaishnavite saint Ramanuja deviated from this cruel tradition and tried to reveal the essence of Vedas to the common people - Sudhras & Panchamas. He compassionately

addressed the lowest strata of people in the Indian society – the Panchamas as Thirukkulathar (People of the God Clan).

Later Scholars like Cole Brooke (1847), Max Müller (1875), Roshan (1838), Wilson (1850), and R.T.H Griffith (1889) studied the commentaries of Sāyana and translated the Vedas into German, Latin and English. Some scholars have tried to interpret the Vedas from a common man's point of view. These include Rahul Sankrityayan, DD Kosambi, SA Dange, Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya and Prof S. Vaiyapuri (Pillai).

Vedic Gods and Conversion:

The most prominent Rig Vedic gods were:

- Indra
- Agni
- Soma
- Aśvins
- Maruts
- Varuna
- Mitra
- Ushas
- Vayu
- Savitr

- Rbhus
- Pushan
- Parjanya

None of these gods exist in the Hindu pantheon today and they are not offered prime respect and worship even by the Brahmins. Instead Dvaadasa Adityas and Ekadasa Rudras who were the lowest of gods in the Vedic strata, were converted and merged with the popular gods of the tribal and local population and are being worshipped today as Vishnu & Shiva. In order to gain the acceptance and authority of the local land, the Brahmins even forsake their own Vedic gods and switched to the locals.

Many current-day gods and goddesses came into the Hindu fold, only after the Vedas evolved into Puranas. It is also interesting to note that Ganapati or Vinayaka who is worshipped in every nook and corner of the Hindu world today, was considered in the ancient texts as a demon and a negative force who hinders good actions and causes confusion. The great Rishi Yajnavalkya says that, “only chandalas (low castes) live under the influence of Ganapati”.

The real meanings of some Vedic Texts:

Today, the meanings of many Vedic words have been altered and changed to suit vested interests. Many are unaware, even of the difference between the Sanskrit words 'Brahma' (God of Creation) and 'Brahman' (One Almighty). The word 'Gotram' used to denote a cow-shed (go-tra) is now used to denote a sub section of the Brahmin castes & some upper castes. The word 'Isvara' meant only a great leader. Even Vishnu was addressed as Isvara, but today it solely represents Shiva. Strictly speaking, there are no slokas or words relating to the modern day Hindu gods and their stories, in the oldest Vedas.

The Vedic god Agni is invoked as the bride's clandestine lover during marriage (89:3). Many of the mantras uttered during today's marriage ceremony may amount to immorality and cause a feeling of disgust if the true meanings are known. The much celebrated vegetarianism of today's Brahmins does not find a place in the Vedas. Instead Brahmins are noted in the Vedas as a variety of meat eaters

who sacrifice a variety of animals in their Yagnas (fire sacrifices). Those who seek horse's flesh and divide it among purohitas during the Aswamedha Yaga (162:12). This horse sacrifice is described in detail both in the later day Ramayana and Mahabharata as well. Even human sacrifice is discussed as 'Purusha Medha Yagna' in the Vedas (66:30). This section gives a long list of those who deserve to be sacrificed in the fire.

Obscenity in some Vedic Texts:

Translator R.T.H Griffith considered that some of the Rig Vedic verses (23:20-31 and 39:6) were too obscene to translate. For example: "Mahishisvaya Meva Aswasya Sisnam Akirushya Swayonow Sthapayati". It means roughly that the "Queen took the genital organ of the horse and inserted it into her genital organ". On the following morning the officiating priests awakened the Queen from the place where she has spent the night, and recite the text taken from the Rig Veda to purify their mouths for uttering such obscenities. But Swami

Dayananda Sarasvati had refuted such verses.

The Roots of the Caste System in the Vedas:

The Caste System and the Varnashrama (graded inequality of people) codified in the Manu Smriti were of later times. But the root of the Caste System lies in the Vedas themselves. The earliest reference to the Caste System appears in the Rig Veda - Purusha Sukta (10.90.11 & 12)

10.90.11 - When they divided Purusha how many portions did they make? What do they call his mouth? His arms? What do they call their thighs and feet?

10.90.12 - The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya made. His thighs became the Vaishya; from his feet the Shudra was produced.

Even the Sama Veda talks about the Caste System. Chāndōgya Upanishad which is the Uttara Bhaga (final part) of the Sama Veda indicates that varna is allocated on the basis of one's previous birth. "Those who did good

work in this world (in their past lives) attain a good birth accordingly. They are born as a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, or a Vaishya. But those who did bad work in their past lives attain a low birth accordingly, being born as a dog, a pig, or as a casteless person" (5.10.7). It was from this Vedic influence, the later-day Caste System & Varna was codified in Dharma Shastra, Manu Smriti, Mahabharata and Puranas. Manu Smriti goes to an extensive extent of instituting this Vedic seed of graded inequality into laws of the land, by prescribing social stratification of the Varnas, quality of life (high to low) assigned to each varna including food, clothing and shelter, and even cruel punishments to those who disobey this stratification of inequality.

Conclusion:

Vedas have always been regarded as the beacon of knowledge in the Hindu religious and Indian philosophical arena. They are looked upon with utmost reverence and holiness. But there are many dark sides of the Vedas too. The philosophical war that is

being unleashed by Vedanta against other philosophical schools, esp. the Lokayata warrants a deep reading. The intolerance towards other philosophies occurring in some Vedic texts will throw light on the falsely acclaimed tolerance of the Hindu religion in the modern day context. Many inhuman practices are disguised as philosophies in Vedic texts. Almost none of the Vedic Gods exist in modern day Hinduism, and all gods were given up to embrace and exert authority on the local cultures. Vegetarianism was not the order of the Vedic day and it was only followed in the later days. The real meaning of many Vedic words have changed over the course of time and there are even some obscene passages in the so-called holy texts of the Vedas. More than all, the inhuman practice of the Caste System traces its roots to the Vedas.

It requires a full re-reading to understand the dark secrets of the much acclaimed Holy Vedas: Asato Maa Sat Gamaya (Lead me from falsehood to truth), as quoted from the Veda itself.

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Sage Kundrakkudi Adigalar conferred upon him the title 'Thamizh Murasu'. He also holds other titles namely 'Ilakkiya Gnaayiru' conferred by Thirukkural Kazhagam & 'Chenthamizh Chollarasu' conferred by Federation of Tamil Sangams of North America (FeTNA).