

RIDDLE No. 5

WHY DID THE BRAHMINS GO FURTHER AND DECLARE THAT THE VEDAS ARE NEITHER MADE BY MAN NOR BY GOD?

The Vedic Brahmins were not content with investing the Vedas with Infallibility. They went further and asserted that the Vedas were Apaurusheya. By this they meant the Vedas were not made by man. This doctrine no doubt leads to the doctrine of Infallibility. For not being made by man they are free from the failings, faults and frailties of man and are therefore infallible. All the same it is necessary to examine the theory separately for it is an independent theory.

Is there really no human author of the Vedas? Are they really Apaurusheya ? The best evidence on the subject is the evidence of the *Anukramanis*— a special class of literature which forms part of the ancient Sanskrit literature. What are called Anukramanis are nothing but systematic indices to various portions of the ancient Vedic literature. Every Veda has an Anukramani, sometimes have more than one Anukramani. Seven Anukramanis for the Rig-Veda are known to be in existence, five by Shaunaka, one by Katyayana and one by an unknown author. For the Yajur-Veda there exist three Anukramanis, one for each of the three Shakhas, Atreyi, Charayaniyas and Madhyandina. For the Sama-Veda there are two Anukramanis, one is called Arsheya-Brahmana and the other is known by the name Parishistas. As to the Atharva-Veda one Anukramani is known to exist. It is known as Brihat-Sarvanukramani.

The most perfect Anukramani according to Prof. Max Muller is Katyayana's Sarvanukramani to the Rig-Veda. Its importance lies in the fact that it gives (1) the first words of each hymn, (2) the number of verses, (3) the name and the family of the Rishi who composed it, (4) the names of the deities and (5) the metres of every verse. What emerges from a reference to the Sarvanukramani is that the Rishis are the authors of the hymns which make up the Rig-Veda. The Rig-Veda therefore on the evidence of the Anukramani cannot but be regarded as a man-made work. The same must be the conclusion regarding the other Vedas.

That the Anukramanis are realistic is proved by many passages in the Rig-Veda in which the Rishis describe themselves as the composers of the hymns.

Below are given a few of such passages:

“The Kanvas make a prayer to you, hear well their invocation’. Thus, O, Indra, yoker of steeds, have the Gotamas made hymns for these efficaciously”

“This hymn has efficaciously been made to you, O opulent Asvins, by the Manas”

“These magnifying prayers, (this) hymn, O Asvins, the Gritsamadas have made for you”

“Aspiring to heaven, the sage Kusikas have made a hymn with praises to thee, O Indra.”

“Nodhas, descendant of Gotama, fashioned this new hymn for (thee), Indra, who are of old, and who yokest thy steeds”

“Thus O, hero, have the Gritsamadas, desiring succour, fashioned for thee a hymn as men make works.”

“The sages generated an efficacious production and a prayer for Indra.”

“These hymns, Agni, generated for thee, celebrate thy bounty in cows and horses.”

“Our father hath discovered (or invented) this great, sevenheaded hymn, born of sacred truth; Ayasya, friend of all men celebrating Indra, has generated the fourth song of praise.”

“We, the Raghuanas, have uttered to Agni honied speech; we incessantly laud him with eulogies.”

“Thus, all ye Adityas, Aditi, and ye ruling powers, has the wise son of Plati magnified you. The celestial race has been lauded by the immortal Gaya.”

“He it is whom they call a rishi, a priest, a pious sacrificer, a chanter of prayers, a reciter of hymns, he it is who knows the three bodies of the brilliant (Agni), the man who is most prominent in bestowing gifts.”

Apart from the evidence of the Anukramanis there is another sort of evidence which militates against the theory of the Vedas being Apaurusheya. The Rishis themselves have treated the Vedas as a human and as a historical product. The hymns of Rig-Veda distinguish between ancient and modern Rishis. Here are a few of them:

“Agni, who is worthy to be celebrated by former as well as modern rishis, will bring the gods hither.”

“The former rishis who invoked thee for succour.

“Hear the hymn of me this modern sage, of this modern (sage).”

“Indra, as thou hast been like a joy to former worshippers who praised thee, like waters to the thirsty, I invoke thee again and again with this hymn.”

“The ancient rishis, resplendent and sage, have placed in front of them (Brihaspati) with gladdening tongue.”

“Neither the ancients nor later men, nor any modern man, has attained to (conceived) thy prowess, O, Madhavan.”

“As (Indra’s) former worshippers were, (may we be) blameless, irreproachable, and unharmed.”

“For, now, O energetic god, men are thy worshippers as the ancients born of old and the men of the middle and later ages have been thy friends, And O, much-invoked think of the most recent of all.

“To Him (Indra) our ancient fathers, the seven Navagava sages desiring food, (resorted) with their hymns.”

“Glorified by our newest hymn, do thou bring to us wealth and food with progeny.”

A closer study of the Rig-Veda will show that the Rig-Veda itself makes a distinction between old hymns and new hymns. Some of them are given below:

“Glorified by our newest hymn, do thou bring to us wealth and food and progeny.”

“Agni thou hast announced (or do thou announcest) among the gods this our offering, our newest hymn.”

“Through our new hymns, do thou, vigorous in action, destroyer of cities, sustain us with invigorating blessings.”

“I bring to Agni, the son of strength, a new and energetic hymn, a production of thought uttered by the voice (vachah).”

“I present to the mighty protector a mental production, a new utterance (now) springing up”

“May the new prayer impel thee, the heroic well-accounted, the loud-thundering to succour us.”

“I seek like the ancients, to stimulate thee, the ancient, with a new hymn.”

“May the new hymns made to praise you, may these prayers gratify you.”

“Sing O, Sobhari, with a new hymn to these youthful, vigorous, and brilliant (gods)

“Indra, slayer of Vritra, thunderer, invoked of many, we (thy) numerous (worshippers) bring to thee, as thy hire, hymns which never before existed.”

“I will address to this ancient (deity) my new praises which he desires;
May he listen to us”

“Desiring horses, cattle, and wealth we invoke thee to approach us.”

Given this abundance of evidence to prove the human origin of the Vedas it is a riddle to find that the Brahmins should so strenuously propagate this extravagant view that the Vedas are not man made. What made the Brahmins propagate such a view?

Notwithstanding this there were eminent philosophers who were prepared to accept the authority of the Vedas although they were not prepared to admit that the Vedas were *Sanatan* or *Apaurush*.

The Gautama the founder of what is called the Nyaya system of Philosophy said:

“The authority of the Veda, like that of the formulas, and the Ayur-Veda (treatise on medicine) follows from the authority of the competent persons from whom they proceeded. Since the competent maker of the Veda possesses authority, inculcates truth, it results from the force of the terms that the Veda was uttered by a person of this character; and by this reasoning the authority of the Veda is to be inferred. He illustrates this by the case of the formulas and the Ayur-Veda. By formulas (*mantra*) are meant the sentences which neutralize poison etc., and the section containing the Ayur-Veda forms part of the Veda. Now as the authority of these two classes of writings is admitted by general consent, the authority of everything which possess the characteristics of the Veda must be inferred from this example. Some, however, explain the aphorism thus; a Veda is that in which authority is found or recognized. From such Vedicity (or Possession of the character of a Veda) the authority of any work is to be inferred.”

The Vaishashika system admits that the Vedas are authoritative. But the grounds on which it rests its conclusion are:

- (1) That the Vedas are the product of an intelligent mind and
- (2) That they have been uttered by God. Therefore they are authoritative.

The Sankhya system founded by Kapila held the view that eternity cannot be predicated of the Vedas, since various texts in the Vedas themselves declare them to have been produced. It expressly denies that the Vedas originated from the conscious effort of any divine being. According to the Sankhya, the Vedas like the Sun shine by their own light, and evince an inherent power both of revealing their own perfection and of elucidating all other things, past and future, great and small, near and remote. The system of Philosophy known as the

Vedanta seems to support two distant views. It ascribes the origin of the Vedas to Brahma as its source or cause of source using the term Brahma as neuter denoting the supreme spirit and not as masculine designating the personal creator. It also speaks of the eternity of the Vedas and makes mention of a self-dependent author.

The Brahmins did not remain content with the argument that the Vedas were not made by man. They went much further and contended that the Vedas were not made even by God. This theory is propounded by Jaimini the author of the *Purva Mimamsa*. Jaimini's arguments in favour of the thesis are so strange that one has to know them in order to realize their strangeness.

It is in the *Purva Mimamsa*— a book of Brahmanic philosophy—that this doctrine of the Vedas being *Apaurusheya* is propounded. The following extracts from the book will reveal the nature of the argument.

Jaimini the author of the *Purva Mimamsa* first deals with the argument of the *Naiyayikas* who assert that the Vedas are made by *Parameshwara* and states the case made out by the *Naiyayikas*.

The argument of the *Mimansakas* is:

“The Veda could not have been uttered by the incorporeal *Paramesvara* (God), who has no palate or other organs of speech, and therefore cannot be conceived to have pronounced the letters (of which it is composed.). This objection (answers the *Naiyayika*) is not happy, because, though *Paramesvara* is by nature incorporeal, he can yet, by way of sport assume a body, in order to show kindness to his devoted worshippers. Consequently, the arguments in favour of the doctrine that the Veda had no personal author are inconclusive.”

He then proceeds to state his arguments in favour of the Doctrine of the *Mimansakas*—

“I shall now clear up all these difficulties. What is meant by this *paurusheyatva* (‘derivation from a personal author’) which it is sought to prove? Is it (1) mere procession (*utpannatva*) from a person (*purusha*) like the procession of the Veda from persons such as ourselves, when we daily utter it? or (2) is it the arrangement— with a view to its manifestation—of knowledge acquired by other modes of proof, in the sense in which persons like ourselves compose a treatise? If the first meaning be intended, there will be no dispute.

If the second sense be meant, I ask whether the Veda is proved (to be authoritative) in virtue (a) of its being founded on inference, or (b) of its being founded on supernatural information (*agama-balat*)?

The former alternative (a) i.e., that the Veda derives its authority from being founded on inference cannot be correct, since this theory breaks down, if it be applied to the sentence of the Malati Madhava or any other secular poem (which may contain inferences destitute of authority). If, on the other hand, you say (b) that the contents of the Veda are distinguished from those of other books of having authority, this explanation also will fail to satisfy a philosopher. For the word of the Veda is (defined to be) a word which proves things that are not provable by any other evidence.

Now if it could be established that this Vedic word did nothing more than prove things that are provable by other evidence, we should be involved in the same sort of contradiction as if a man were to say that his mother was a barren woman.

And even if we conceded that Parameswara might in sport assume a body, it would not be conceivable that in that case he should perceive things beyond the reach of the senses, from the want of any means of apprehending objects removed from him in place, in time, and in nature. Nor is it to be thought that his eyes and other sense alone would have the power of producing such knowledge, since men can only attain to conceptions corresponding with what they have perceived.

This is what has been said by the Guru (Prabhakara) when he refutes this supposition of an omniscient author; 'Wherever any object is perceived (by the organ of sight) in its most perfect exercise, such perception can only have reference to the vision of something very distant or very minute, since no organ can go beyond its own proper objects, as e.g., the ear can never become cognizant of form'.

Hence the authority of the Veda does not arise in virtue of any supernatural information acquired by the Deity in a corporeal shape."

These are arguments urged by Jaimini to destroy the case of the Naiyayikas. Jaimini then proceeds to give his positive arguments to show why the Vedas are not the word of God but something superior to that. This is what he says:

"In the preceding aphorism it was declared that the connection of words and their meanings is eternal. Desiring now to prove that this (eternity of connection) is dependent on the eternity of words (or sound), he begins by setting forth the first side of the question, viz., the doctrine of those who maintain that sound is not eternal."

"Some, i.e., the followers of the Nyaya philosophy, say that sound is a product, because we see that it is the result of effort, which it would not be if it were eternal."

“That it is not eternal, on account of its transitoriness, i.e., because after a moment it ceases to be perceived.”

“Because, we employ in reference to it the expression ‘making’ i.e., we speak of ‘making’ a sound.”

“Because it is perceived by different persons at once, and is consequently in immediate contact with the organs of sense of those, both far and near, which it could not be if it were one and eternal.”

“Because sounds have both an original and a modified form; as e.g., in the case of *dadhi atra*, which is changed into *dadhy atra*, the original letter ‘i’ being altered into ‘y’ by the rules of permutation. Now, no substance which undergoes a change is eternal.”

“Because sound is augmented by the number of those who make it. Consequently the opinion of the Mimansaka, who say that sound is merely manifested, and not created, by human effort, is wrong; since even a thousand manifesters do not increase the object which they manifest, as a jar is not made larger by a thousand lamps.”

These objections against the Mimansaka theory that sound is manifested, and not created, by those who utter it, are now answered by Jaimini. Says Jaimini:

“But, according to both schools, viz., that which holds sound to be created, and that which regards it as merely manifested, the perception of it is alike momentary. But of these two views, the theory of manifestation is shown in the next aphorism to be the correct one.”

“The non-perception at any particular time, of sound, which, in reality, perpetually exists, arises from the fact that the utterer of sound has not come into contact with his object i.e., sound. Sound is eternal, because we recognize the letter ‘k’, for instance, to be the same sound which we have always heard, and because it is the simplest method of accounting for the phenomenon to suppose that it is the same. The still atmosphere which interferes with the perception of sound, is removed by the conjunctions and disjunctions of air issuing from a speaker’s mouth, and thus sound (which always exists, though unperceived) becomes perceptible. This is the reply to the objection of its ‘transitoriness’.

“The word, ‘making’ sounds; merely means employing or uttering them.”

“One sound is simultaneously heard by different persons, just as one Sun is seen by them at one and the same time, Sound like the Sun is a vast, and not a minute object, and thus may be perceptible by different persons, though remote from one another.”

“The letter ‘y’, which is substituted for ‘i’ in the instance referred to under Sutra 10, is not a modification of ‘i’, but a distinct letter. Consequently, sound is not modified.”

“It is an increase of ‘noise’, not of sound, that is occasioned by a multitude of speakers. The word ‘noise’ refers to the ‘conjunctions’ and ‘disjunctions’ of the air which enter simultaneously into the hearer’s ear from different quarters; and it is of these that an increase takes place.”

“Sound must be eternal, because its utterance is fitted to convey a meaning to other persons. If it were not eternal (or abiding), it would not continue till the hearer had learned its sense, and thus he would not learn the sense, because the cause had ceased to exist.”

“Sound is eternal, because it is in every case correctly and uniformly recognised by many persons simultaneously; and it is inconceivable that they should all at once fall into a mistake.”

“When the word ‘go’ (cow) has been repeated ten times, the hearers will say that the word ‘go’ has been ten times pronounced, not that ten words having the sound of ‘go’ have been uttered ; and this fact also is adduced as a proof of the eternity of sound.

“Sound is eternal, because we have no ground for anticipating its destruction.

“But it may be urged that sound is a modification of air, since it arises from its conjunctions, and because the Siksha (or Vedanga treating of pronunciation) says that ‘air arrives at the condition of sound’ and as it is thus produced from air, it cannot be eternal.”

A reply to this difficulty is given in Sutra 22.

“Sound is not a modification of air, because if it were, the organ of hearing would have no appropriate object which it could perceive. No modification of air (help by the Naiyayikas to be tangible) could be perceived by the organ of hearing, which deals only with intangible sound.”

“And the eternity of sound is established by the argument discoverable in the Vedic text, ‘with an eternal voice, O Virupa’. Now, though this sentence had another object in view, it, nevertheless, declares the eternity of language, and hence sound is eternal.”

Such is the argument by Jaimini in favour of his thesis that the Vedas are eternal and not made by man, not even by God.

The bases on which his thesis rests are simple.

Firstly God has no body and no palate and therefore he could not utter the Vedas.

Secondly, Assuming God had a body, God could not perceive things which are beyond the reach of the senses while the Vedas contain things beyond the reach of human senses.

Thirdly, The connection between a word and its meaning is eternal.

Fourthly, Sound is eternal.

Fifthly, Because sound is eternal words which are made up of sounds are also eternal.

Sixthly Because words are eternal therefore the Vedas are eternal and because the Vedas are eternal they are not made by man nor by God.

What can one say of these premises? Can there be anything more absurd? Who can accept that the Vedas contain something not comprehensible by human senses ? Who can accept that there is an eternal connection between a word and its meaning ? Who can accept that sound is not created nor manifested but is eternal ?

Having regard to these absurd premises one is led to ask why did the Brahmins make such a desperate attempt for establishing a desperate conclusion? What did they want to gain thereby? Was it because the Vedas had been made the exponent of the Chaturvarna with the Brahmins as the Lord of all?

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