

APPENDIX I

THE RIDDLE OF THE VEDAS

The Vedas are the sacred Books of the Hindus. There are several questions that arise in connection with them. What is their origin, who is their author, what is their authority, these are some of them (questions).

To begin with the first. According to the Hindus they are *Sanatana* which means that they are “eternally pre-existing”. There is no justification for this view unless it be based upon a statement which occurs in the Atharva-Veda. It says¹:

“From Time the Rig verses sprang; the Yajus sprang from Time”. But there are other views quite opposed to this.

Starting from the Atharva-Veda it must be noted that besides this view there are two other views propounded in that Veda. The first of these is not very intelligent and may be given in its own language which runs as follows²:

“Declare who that Skambha (supporting principle) is in whom the primeval rishis, the rich, saman, and yajush, the earth, and the one rishi, are sustained 20. Declare who is that Skambha from whom they cut off the rich verses, from whom they scraped off the yajush, of whom the saman verses are the hairs and the verses of Atharvan and Angiras the mouth”.

The second explanation given in the Atharva-Veda is that the Vedas sprang from Indra³.

Explanation of the Rig-Veda is to be found in the Purusha-Sukta. According to it there was a universal sacrifice in which the victim was the mystical being called Purusha and it is out of the sacrifice of this

¹ Atharva-Veda XIX 54, 3.

² Quoted in Muir's Sanskrit Texts vol. III, p. 3.

³ Quoted in Muir Sanskrit Texts, p.

This is a consolidated chapter on the Riddle of the Vedas dealing with most of the subjects discussed by the author in the earlier chapter Nos. 2 to 6 of this book. In all there are 61 typed pages bearing no corrections at all. This copy is a typed carbon copy.—Ed.

Purusha that the three Vedas namely Rig, Saman and Yajur came into being.

The Sam-Veda and the Yajur-Veda make no reference to the origin of the Vedas.

Proceeding to the writings called Brahmanas we find attempts to explain the origin of the Vedas in the Satapatha Brahmana, the Taittiriya Brahmana, Aitareya Brahmana and Kaushitaki Brahmana.

The Satapatha Brahmana has a variety of explanations. It attributes the origin of the Vedas to Prajapati. According to it Prajapati by his austerity created three worlds—Earth, Air and Sky. He infused warmth into these three worlds. From them, thus heated, three lights were produced,— Agni (fire), Vayu (wind) and Surya (the sun). From them so heated the three Vedas were produced,— the Rig-Veda from Agni, the Yajur-Veda from Vayu and Sam-Veda from the Sun.

This is also the explanation given by the Aitareya and the Kaushitaki Brahmana.

The Satapatha Brahmana gives another variant¹ of this explanation of the origin of the Veda from Prajapati. The explanation is that Prajapati created the Vedas from waters. Says the Satapatha Brahmana—

“This Male Prajapati, desired, ‘May I multiply, may I be propagated’. He toiled in devotion he practised austere-fervour. Having done so he first of all created sacred knowledge, the triple Vedic science. This became a basis for him. Wherefore men say, ‘sacred knowledge is the basis of this universe.’ Hence after studying the Veda a man has a standing ground: for sacred knowledge is his foundation. Resting on this basis he (Prajapati) practised austere fervour. 9. He created the waters from Vach (speech), as their world. Vach was his; she was created. She pervaded all this whatever exists. As she pervaded (apnot), waters were called ‘apah’. As she covered (avrinot) all, water was called ‘var’. 10. He desired, ‘May I be propagated from these waters.’ Along with this triple Vedic science he entered the waters. Thence sprang an egg. He gave it an impulse; and said, ‘let there be, let there be, let there be again’. Thence was first created sacred knowledge, the triple Vedic science. Wherefore men say, ‘Sacred knowledge is the first-born thing in this universe. Moreover, it was sacred knowledge which was created from that Male in front, wherefore it was created as his mouth. Hence they say of a man learned in the Veda, He is like Agni; for the sacred knowledge is Agni’s mouth?’”.

¹ Muir Sanskrit Texts. III p. 8.

“As from a fire made of moist wood various modifications of smoke proceed, so is the breathing of this great being; the Rig-Veda, the Yajurveda, the Sama-veda, the Atharv-angirases, the Itihasas, Puranas, science, the Upanishads, verses (slokas), aphorisms, comments of different kings—all these are his breathings”.

There is a third explanation¹ given in the Satapatha Brahmana:

“I settle thee in the ocean as they seat” Mind is the ocean. From the mind-ocean with speech for a shovel the gods dug out the triple Vedic science. Hence this verse has been uttered: ‘May the brilliant deity to-day know where they placed that offering which the gods dug out with sharp shovels. Mind is the ocean; speech is the sharp shovel; the triple Vedic science is the offering. In reference to this the verse has been uttered. He settles it in Mind”.

The Taittiriya-Brahmana has three explanations to offer. It speaks of the Vedas as being derived from Prajapati. It also says Prajapati created King Soma and after him the three Vedas were created². This Brahmana has another explanation³ quite unconnected with Prajapati. According to it:

“Vach (speech) is an imperishable thing, and the first-born of the ceremonial, the mother of the Vedas, and the centre-point of immortality. Delighting in us, she came to the sacrifice. May the protecting goddess be ready to listen to my invocation, she whom the wise rishis, the composers of hymns, the gods, sought by austere-fervour, and by laborious devotion.”

To crown all this the Taittiriya Brahmana offers a third explanation. It says that the Vedas came from the beard of Prajapati.

Legends regarding the origin of the Vedas are also to be found in the Upanishads.

The legend recorded in the Chhandogya Upanishad is the same as that found in the Satapatha Brahmana—namely that the Rig-Veda originated from Agni, Yajus from Vayu and Sam from the Sun.

The Brahad Aranyaka Upanishad which is a part of the Satapatha Brahmana, records quite a different legend. It says:

“Prajapati (identified with Death, or the Devourer) is said to have produced Vach (speech), and through her, together with soul, to have created all things, including the Vedas.”

“By that speech and that soul he created all things whatsoever, rich, yajush, and saman texts, metres, sacrifices, creatures, and animals. The three Vedas are (identifiable with) these three things (speech, mind and breath). Speech is the Rig-veda, mind the Yajur-veda, and breath the Sama-veda.”

¹ Muir I pp. 9-10.

² Muir I p. 8.

³ *Ibid.* I p. 10.

Coming to the Smritis there are two theories as to the origin of the Vedas to be found in the Manu Smriti. In one place it is said that the Vedas were created by Brahma:

“He (Brahma) in the beginning fashioned from the worlds of the Veda the several names, functions and separate conditions of all (creatures). That Lord also created the subtle host of active and living deities, and of Sadhyas, and eternal sacrifice, he drew forth from Agni, from Vayu, and from Surya, the triple eternal Veda, distinguished as Rich, Yajush, and Saman.”

In another place he seems to accept the story of Prajapati being the originator of the Vedas as would be evident from the following:

“Prajapati also milked out of the three Vedas the letters *a*, *u* and *m*, together with the words *bhuh*, *bhuvah* and *sva*. The same supreme Prajapati also milked from each of the three Vedas one of the (three) portions of the text called *saṁvit* (or *gayatri*), beginning with the word *tat* The three great imperishable particles (*bhuh*, *bhuvah*, *sva*) preceded by *om*, and the *gayatri* of three lines, are to be regarded as the mouth of Brahma”.

It is also interesting to note what the Puranas have to say about the origin of the Vedas. The Vishnu Purana says:

“From his eastern mouth Brahma formed the *gayatri*, the rich verses, the *trivrit*, the *samarathantra*, and of sacrifices, the *agnishtoma*. From his southern mouth he created the yajush verses the *trishṭubh* metre, the *pañchadasha stome*, the *vrihat-saman* and the *ukthya*. From his western mouth he formed the *saman* verses, the *jagati metre*, the *saptadasha-stome*, the *vairupa*, and the *atiratra*. From his northern mouth he framed the *ekavinsa*, the *atharvan*, the *apṛthivya*, with the *annusṭubh* and *biraj metres*.”

The Bhagvat Purana says:

“Once the Vedas sprang from the four-faced creator, as he was meditating ‘how shall I create the aggregate world as before?’ He formed from his eastern and other mouths the Vedas called *rich*, *yajush*, *saman*, and *atharvan*, together with praise, sacrifice, hymns, and expiration”.

The Markandeya Purana says :

“From the eastern mouth of Brahma, who sprang by an imperceptible birth from that divided egg, there suddenly issued first of all the *Rich* verses, 2. resembling China roses, brilliant in appearance, internally united, though separated from each other, and characterized by the quality of passion (*rajas*). 3. From his southern mouth came, unrestrained, the *Yajush* verses of the colour of gold, and disunited. 4. From the western mouth of the supreme

Brahma appeared the *Saman* verses and the metres. 5 and 6. From the northern mouth of the Vedas (Brahma) was manifested the entire Atharvana of the colour of black bees and collyrium, having a character at once terrible and not terrible, capable of neutralising the arts of enchanter pleasant, characterized by the qualities both of purity and darkness, and both beautiful and the contrary. The verses of the *Rich* are distinguished by the quality of passion (*rajas*), those of the *Yajush* by purity (*satva*) those of the *Saman* by darkness (*tamas*), and those of the *Atharvan* by both darkness and purity.”

The Harivamsa supports both theories that of Brahma and Prajapati:

“For the emancipation of the world, Brahma, sunk in contemplation, issuing in a luminous form from the region of the moon, penetrated into the heart of Gayatri, entering between her eyes. From her there was then produced a quadruple being in the form of a Male, lustrous as Brahma, undefined, eternal, undecaying devoid of bodily senses or qualities, distinguished by the attribute of brilliancy, pure as the rays of the moon, radiant, and embodied in letters. The god fashioned the Rigveda, with the Yajush from his eyes, the Sama-veda from the tip of his tongue, and the Atharvan from his head. These Vedas, as soon as they are born, find a body (kshetra). Hence they obtain their character of Vedas, because they find (vindanti) that abode. These Vedas then create the pre-existent eternal brahma (sacred science), a Male of celestial form, with their own mind-born qualities”.

It also accepts Prajapati as the origin. It says that when the Supreme being was intent on creating the Universe, Hiranyagarbha, or Prajapati, issued from his mouth, and was desired to divide himself—a process which he was in great doubt how he should effect; the Harivamsa proceeds:

“While he was thus reflecting, the sound ‘om’ issued from him, and resounded through the earth, air, and sky. While the god of gods was again and again repeating this, the essence of mind, the vashatkara proceeded from his heart. Next, the sacred and transcendent *vyahritis*, (*bhuh, bhuvah, svar*), formed of the great smiriti, in the form of sound, were produced from earth, air, and sky. Then appeared the goddess, the most excellent of metres, with twenty-four syllables (*the gayatri*). Reflecting on the divine text (beginning with) “tax”, the Lord formed the *savitri*. He then produced all the Vedas, the *Rich. Saman, Atharvan, and Yajush*, with their prayers and rites.”

Here we have eleven different explanations regarding the origin of the Vedas—(1) as originating from the mystical sacrifice of Purusha, (2) as resting on Skambha (3) as cut of scrapped off from him, as being his hair, and his mouth, (4) as springing from Indra, (5) as produced from Time, (6) as produced from Agni, Vayu and Surya, (7) as springing from Prajapati, and the Waters, (8) as being the breath of Brahma, (9) as being dug by the Gods out of the mind-ocean, (10) as being the hair of Prajapati's beard and (11) as being the Offspring of Vach.

This bewildering multiplicity of answers to a simple question is a riddle. The writers who have come forward to furnish these answers are all Brahmins. They belong to the same Vaidic School of thought. They alone were the guardians of the ancient religious lore. Why should such a coherent body of scholars should have given such incoherent and chaotic answers to a very simple question?

II

Who is the author of the Vedas? The belief of the Hindus is that the Vedas are supernatural productions. To use the technical term the Vedas are *Apaurusheya* i.e. made by a non-human agency.

What is the evidence in support of this dogma? Among the Ancient Sanskrit literature there is a class of works called *Anukramanis*. They are systematic indices to various portions of the Ancient Vedic literature. Every Veda has an Anukramani, sometimes 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 Sam-Veda there are two Anukramanis, one is called *Arsheya-Brahmana* and the other is known by the name *Parishistas*. One Anukramani to the Atharya-Veda is known to exist. Its title is *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 invocations.”

“Thus, O Indra, yoker of steeds, have the Gotamas made hymns for thee 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 art 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 of Indra.”

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

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

“We, the Rahuganas, 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 chaunter 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 mistakes against the theory of the Vedas being Apaurushya. 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 (conceive) 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 Navagva sages, desiring food, (resorted) with their hymns.”

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

A close 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 with progeny.”

“Agni, thou hast announced (or do thou announce) 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 life, the ancients, to stimulate thee the ancients, 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 Vrittra, 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 praised, 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 so extravagant view that the Vedas are of supernatural origin. What made the Brahmins propagate such a view?

III

What is the authority of the Vedas? With regard to this there prevail two distinct dogmas amongst the Hindus. The first is that the Vedas are eternal. Stopping to examine this dogma the question is what justification is there for such a view? If the Hindus believed that the Vedas were the most ancient works in the world no one can have any quarrel with them. But there is nothing to justify the extraordinary proposition that they are eternal in the sense that they had no beginning in time. Once it is established that the Rishis are the makers of the Vedas it needs no additional proof to establish that the Vedas have a beginning in time which must coincide with the existence of the Rishis. Given that the Rishis are the authors of the Vedas the dogma as to their eternal character is an absurdity.

The dogma is sought to be sustained by a series of reasoning which is no less absurd.

In the first place let it be noted that this dogma does not rest on the ground that the Vedas are created by God. That was the view of one school of philosophers called Naiyayiks. But strange as it may appear Jaimini the author of the Purva Mimansa whose views on this subject have become the dogmas of the Hindus was not prepared to accept this ground. The following quotation from the Mimansakas is worthy of note:

“But (asks the Mimansaka) how can the Veda 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 object (answers the Naiyayika) is not happy, because, though Parameshvara 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 inconducive.

“I shall now (says the Mimamsaka) 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 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? 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 sentences 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 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 a man were conceded 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 senses 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: ‘Whenever 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.’”

What is then the reasoning on which this dogma of the eternity of the Veda is founded? The reasoning can be best appreciated if I give it in the very words of *Jaimini’s Purva Mimansa*.

“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 dadhya atra, the original letter being altered into 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 answered in the following Sutras:

“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 recognise 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 implying 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 recognized 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 in Sutra 20”.

“Because each sound is not numerically different from itself repeated.”

“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 (held 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”.

Reduced to simple syllogism the sound is eternal, the words of the Vedas are sound, therefore words of the Vedas are eternal. Absurdity in reasoning cannot go further. The riddle is why did the Brahmins propound this doctrine of the eternity of the Vedas? Why did the Brahmins adopt such an absurd reasoning in support of their doctrine? Why did the Brahmins refuse to accept the view that the Vedas were the word of God?

The second dogma relating to the authority of the Vedas is that they are not only sacred but they are also infallible.

It is difficult to understand why the Brahmins endeavoured to invest the Vedas with infallibility?

There is no law in the Vedas in the strict sense of the term law.

The Vedas do not preach Dharma in the sense of morality. The three following extracts from the Vedas can hardly be said to be consonant with morality.

“(Yami speaks). I invite my friend to friendship, having come o’er the vast and desert ocean; may Vedhas, after reflecting, place in the earth the offspring (of thee) the father, endowed with excellent qualities”.

“(Yama speaks). Thy friend desires not this friendship, for although of one origin, she is of a different form; the hero sons of the great Asura (are) the upholders of heaven, enjoying vast renown.”

“(Yami speaks). The immortals take pleasure in (a union) like this which is forbidden to every mortal; let thy mind then concur with mine, and as the progenitor (of all) was the husband (of his daughter), do thou enjoy my person.”

“(Yama speaks). We have not done what was done formerly; for how can we who speak truth, utter now that which is untrue? Gandharva (the Sun) was in the watery (firmament), and the water was his bride. She is our common parent, hence our near affinity.”

“(Yami speaks). The divine omniform generator Twashtri, the progenitor, made us two, husband and wife, even in the womb; none frustrate his undertaking; earth and heaven are conscious of this our (union).”

“(Yama speaks). Who knows anything of this (his) first day (of existence)? Who has beheld it? Who has here revealed it? The dwelling of Mitra and of Varuna is vast. What sayest thou, who punishest men with hell?”

“(Yami speaks). The desire of Yama hath approached me Yami, to lie with him in the same bed; I will abandon my person as a wife to her husband; let us exert ourselves in union like the two wheels of a waggon.”

“(Yama speaks). The spies of the Gods, which wander upon earth, never stop, never close their eyes. Associate quickly, destructress, with some other than with me, and exert yourselves in union, like the two wheels of a waggon.”

“(Yami speaks). To him (Yama) let every worshipper sacrifice both day and night, on him let the eye of the Sun repeatedly rise; (for him may) the kindred pair (day and night unite) with heaven and earth. Yami will adhere to the non-affinity of Yama”.

“(Yama speaks). The subsequent ages will come, when sisters will choose one who is not a brother (as a husband); therefore, auspicious one, choose another husband than me, and make thine arm a pillow for thy mate.”

“(Yami speaks). Is he a brother whose sister has no lord? Is she a sister (whose brother) misfortune approaches? Overcome by desire, I strongly urge this one request; unite thy person with mine.”

“(Yama speaks). I will not unite my person with thine; they call him who approaches a sister, a sinner. Enjoy pleasure with some other than me; thy brother, auspicious one, has no such desire.”

“(Yami speaks). Alas, Yama, thou art feeble; we understand not thy mind or thy heart. Some other female embraces thee as a girth a horse, or as a creeper a tree.”

“(Yama speaks). Do thou, Yami, embrace another; and let another embrace thee as a creeper a tree; seek his affection, let him seek thine; and make a happy union”.

“May Agni, the destroyer of the Rakshasas consenting to our prayer, drive hence (the evil spirit) who (in the form of) sickness assails thine embryo, who, as the disease durnaman, assails thy womb.”

“May Agni, concurring in our prayer, destroy the cannibal who is sickness, assails thine embryo, who as the disease durnaman, assails thy womb.”

“May we exterminate from hence (the evil spirit) who destroys the impregnating energy, the germ as it settles, the moving embryo, who seeks to destroy (the babe) when born.”

“May we exterminate from hence (the evil spirit) who separate thy thighs, who lies between husband and wife, who, entering thy womb, devours (the seed).”

“May we exterminate from hence (the evil spirit), who in the form of brother, husband, or paramour, approaches thee, and seeks to destroy thy offspring.”

“May we exterminate from hence (the evil spirit) who, having beguiled thee by sleep or darkness, approaches thee, and seeks to destroy thy offspring.”

The Vedas contain two things. In the first place they contain the hopes and wishes of the Aryans as expressed by the Rishis. As observed by Mr. Muir:

“The whole character of these compositions, and the circumstances under which, from internal evidence, they appear to have arisen, are in harmony with the supposition that they were nothing more than the natural expression of the personal hopes and feelings of those ancient bards by whom they were first recited. In these songs the Aryan sages celebrated the praises of their ancestral gods (while at the same time they sought to conciliate their goodwill by a variety of oblations supposed to be acceptable to them), and besought of them all the blessings which men in general desire—health, wealth, long life, cattle, offspring, victory over their enemies, forgiveness of sin, and in some cases also celestial felicity.”

This is also the view of Yaska the author of Nirukta who says:

“(Of the four kinds of verses specified in the preceding section) (a) those which address a god as absent, (b) those which address him as present, and (c) those which address the worshippers as present and the god as absent, are the most numerous, while those (d) which refer to the speaker himself are rare. It happens also that a god is praised without any blessing being invoked, as in the hymn (R. V. i. 32). ‘I declare the heroic deeds of Indra’, etc. Again blessings are invoked without any praise being offered, as in the words, ‘May I see well with my eyes, be resplendent in my face, and hear well with my ears’. This frequently occurs in the Adhvaryava (Yajur), and in the sacrificial formula. Then again we find oaths and curses as in the words (R. V. vii. 104, 15), ‘May I die to-day, if I am a Yatudhana,’ etc. Further, we observe the desire to describe some particular state of things, as in the verse (R. V. x. 129, 2), ‘Death was not then, nor immortality,’ etc. Then there is lamentation, arising out of a certain state of things, as in the verse (R. V. x. 95, 14), ‘The beautiful god will disappear and never return,’ etc. Again, we have blame and praise, as in the words (R. V. x. 117, 6), ‘The man who eats alone, sins alone, etc. So, too, in the hymn to dice (R. V. x. 34, 13) there is a censure upon dice, and a commendation of agriculture. Thus the objects for which the hymns were seen by the rishis were very various.”

SUKTA XII (CLXIII)

The deity is the cure of Phthisis; the Rishi is Vivrihan, the son of Kasyapa; the metre is Anushtubh.

1. I banish disease from thine eyes, from thy head, from thy nose, from thy ears, from thy chin, from thy brain, from thy tongue.
2. I banish disease from thy neck, from thy sinews, from thy bones, from thy joints, from thy upper arms, from thy shoulders, and from thy fore-arms.
3. I banish disease from thine entrails, from thy anus, from thine abdomen, and from thy heart, from thy kidneys, from thy liver, from thy (other viscera).
4. I banish disease from thy thighs, from thy knees, from thy heels, from thy toes, from thy loins, from thy buttocks, from thy private parts.
5. I banish disease from thy urethra, from thy bladder, from thy hair, from thy nails, from thy whole person.
6. I banish disease from each limb, from each hair, from each joint where it is generated, from thy whole person.

As Prof. Wilson observes there is in the Rig-Veda (which is the stock Veda) scarcely any indication of doctrinal or philosophical speculation, no allusion to the later notions of the several schools, nor is there any hint of metempsychosis, or of the doctrine intimately allied to it, of the repeated renovation of the world. The Vedas may be useful as a source of information regarding the social life of the Aryans. As a picture of primitive life it is full of curiosity but there is nothing elevating. There are more vices and a few virtues.

Given the nature and substance of the contents of the Vedas it is a riddle why the Brahmins claimed infallibility for such superstitious writings as the Vedas.

There would have been some justification for this doctrine of infallibility if the Rishis who made the hymns had claimed it for themselves. But it is quite clear that the Rishis have made no such pretensions. On the contrary they have occasionally confessed their ignorance of matters in which they had interest and curiosity. Compare the following utterances of the Rishis as given in the Rig-Veda:

“Ignorant, not knowing in my mind, I enquire after these hidden abodes of the gods; the sages have stretched out seven threads for a hoof over the yearling calf (or over the sun, the abode of all things).

6. Not comprehending, I ask those sages who comprehend this matter; unknowing (I ask) that I may know; what is the one thing, in the form of the uncreated one, who has upheld these six worlds?

37. I do not recognize if I am like this; I go on perplexed and bound in mind. When the first born sons of sacrifice (or truth) come to me, then I enjoy a share of that word.”

“What was the forest, what the tree, out of which they fashioned heaven and earth, which continue to exist undecaying, whilst days, and many dawns have passed away?

“Which of these two (Heaven and Earth) is the first? Which is the last? How were they produced? Who, o sages, knows?”

“How many fires are there? How many suns? how many dawns? How many waters? I do not, fathers, say this to you in jest; I really ask you, sages, in order that I may know”. 5. “There ray (or cord), obliquely extended, was it below, or was it above? There were generative sources, and there were great powers, *svadha* (a self-supporting principle) below, and effort above. 6. Who knows, who hath here declared, whence this creation was produced, whence (it came)? The gods were subsequent to the creation of this universe; who then knows whence it sprang. 7. When this creation sprang, whether any one formed it or not, he who, in the highest heavens, is the overseer of this universe,— he indeed knows or he does not know.”

There are other points with regard to this dogma of infallibility which are noteworthy.

IV

The first point is, is this dogma original or is this a new contention raised at sometime later in the history of India. The general view is that it is the original doctrine. A reference to the Dharma Sutras which are the earliest law books which deal with this subject go to show that this is not a correct view. The Gautama Dharma Sutra lays down the following rule on the question of the infallibility of the vedas.

“The Veda is the source of the sacred law”. I.1.

“And the tradition and practice of those who know the (Veda)” — I.2.

“If (authorities) of equal force are conflicting (either may be followed at) pleasure”. I.4.

The Vashishta Dharma Sutra propounds the following view:

“The Sacred law has been settled by the revealed texts and by the tradition of the sages” I.4. “On the failure of (rules given in) these (two sources) the practice of Shistas has authority.” I.5.

“He whose heart is free from desire (is called) a shista”. I.6. The views of Baudhayana are given below:

Prasna 1, Adhyaya 1, Kandika 1.

1. The sacred law is taught in each Veda.
2. We will explain (it) in accordance with that.
3. (The sacred law), taught in the Tradition (Smriti, stands) second.
4. The practice of the Sishtas (stands) third.
5. Sishtas, forsooth, (are those) who are free from envy, free from pride, contented with a store of grain sufficient for ten days, free from covetousness, and free from hypocrisy, arrogance, greed, perplexity, and anger.
6. ‘(Those are called) Sishtas who, in accordance with the sacred law, have studied the Veda together with its appendages, know how to draw references from that, (and) are above to adduce proofs perceptible by the senses from the revealed texts’.
7. On failure of them, an assembly consisting at least of ten members (shall decide disputed points of law).
8. Now they quote also (the following verses): ‘Four men, who each know one of the four Vedas, a Mimamsaka, one who knows the Angas, one who recites (the works on) the sacred law, and three brahmanas belonging to (three different) order, (constitute) an assembly consisting, at least of ten members’.
9. ‘There may be five, or there may be three, or there may be one blameless man, who decides (questions regarding) the sacred law. But a, thousand fools (can) not (do it).’
10. ‘As an elephant made of wood, as an antelope made of leather, such an unlearned Brahmana; those three having nothing but the name (of their kind)’.

The view taken by the Apastamba Dharma Sutra is clear from the following extract from that Sutra:

“Now, therefore, we will declare the acts productive of merit which form part of the customs of daily life”. I.1.

“The authority (for these duties) is the agreement (samaya) of these who know the law”. I.2.

“And (the authorities for the latter are) the Vedas alone”. I.3.

A review of the Dharma Sutras show how this dogma of the infallibility of the Veda is a historical product. It shows that the (1) Veda, (2) Tradition (Smriti), (3) Practice of Sishta and (4) Agreement in an Assembly were the four different authorities about which the controversy as to which of these should be regarded as infallible. It also shows that there was a time when the Vedas were not the sole infallible authorities. That was the time represented by the Dharma Sutras of Vasistha and Baudhayana. It is only in the time of Gautama

that the Vedas came to be regarded as the only authority. There was a time when an agreed decision of the Assembly was admitted as one source of authority. That is the period represented by Baudhayana. Lastly the review shows that there was a time when the Veda was not at all regarded as a book of authority and when the only recognized source of authority was an agreement arrived at in an assembly of the learned. That is the period when Apastamba¹ wrote his Dharma Sutras i.e. somewhere between 600 and 200 B.C.²

It is thus obvious that there was a deliberate attempt to invest the Vedas with an infallible authority which they did not at one time possess and the question is what were the circumstances and the motives which led the Brahmins to propagate the sole and final authority of the Vedas.

The second point connected with this subject of infallibility of the Vedas relates to the discrimination made by the Brahmins in limiting the virtue of infallibility to certain Vedic writings only and not extending it to the whole range of them. To understand this point it is necessary to know what is meant by the phrase Vedic literature.

The phrase Vedic literature can be used in two senses. In its limited sense it includes (1) The Samhita, (2) The Brahmanas, (3) Aranyakas, (4) Upanishads and (5) Sutras. When used in an extended sense it includes two other heads (6) Itihasas and (7) Puranas.

The first thing to note is that there was a time when all these writings were classed in the same category, and no distinction was made between them on the basis of revealed and profane or on the basis of supernatural and human or on the basis of authoritative and non-authoritative. This is clear from the view expressed in the Satapatha Brahmana which says:

“This Male, Prajapati, desired, ‘May I multiply, may I be propagated.’ He toiled in devotion; he practised austere-fervour. Having done so he first of all created sacred knowledge the triple Vedic science. This became a basis for him. Wherefore men say, sacred knowledge is the basis of this universe.’ Hence after studying the veda a man has a standing ground; for sacred knowledge is his foundation. Resting on this basis he (Prajapati) practised austere-fervour. (9) He created the waters from Vach (speech) as their world. Vach was his: She was created. She pervaded all this whatever exists. As she pervaded (apnot) waters were called “apah”. As she covered (avrinot) all, water was called ‘var’. (10) He desired,

¹ The reference to the Vedas in the Apastamba Dharma Sutras must not be misunderstood. Apastamba does not invest the Vedas with any authority at all. Knowledge of Vedas is made by him as an electoral qualification for membership of the Assembly whose agreed decision is the law and the only law.

² This is the period assigned to the Sutras by Prof. Max-Muller. The Apastamba being the oldest.

May I be propagated from these waters. Along with this triple Vedic science he entered the waters. Thence sprang an egg. He gave it an impulse; and said, "Let there be, let there be, let there be again. Thence was first created sacred knowledge, the triple Vedic science. Wherefore men, say, 'Sacred knowledge is the first-born thing in this universe. Moreover, it was sacred knowledge which was created from that Male in front, wherefore it was created as his mouth. Hence they say of a man learned in the Veda,' 'He is like Agni; for sacred knowledge is Agni's Mouth'."

"As from a fire made of moist wood various modifications of smoke proceed, so is the breathing of this great being. The Rig-Veda, the Yajur-veda, the Sama-veda, the Atharvan-girases, the Itihasas, Puranas, science, the Upanishads, verses (slokas), aphorisms, comments of different kinds—all these are his breathings."

But when the Brahmans sought to establish their dogma of infallibility they made a distinction and divided the Vedic writings in two classes (1) Shruti and (2) Non-Shruti. In the first division they placed only two of them (1) Sanhitas and (2) the Brahmanas and invested them with infallibility. The rest they declared as non-Shruti therefore of no authority. When this distinction, was first made it is not possible to say. One can well understand why the last two categories were excluded from the Shruti part division of the Vedic literature. They were too elementary and too undeveloped and in all probability included in the Brahmanas.

One can well understand why the Aranyakas are not specifically mentioned as a part of the Shruti. They are part of the Shruti and must be for the simple reason that they are a part of the Brahmanas. The position of the Upanishads is not clear. But if they are not included in the Shruti one can well understand why they were excluded. But the case of the Sutras stands on a different footing. They are definitely excluded from the category of Shruti and for reasons, which it is not possible to comprehend. If there were good reasons for including the Brahmanas in the category of Shruti the same reasons could not fail to justify the inclusion of the Sutras. As Prof. Max Muller observes:

"We can understand how a nation might be led to ascribe a superhuman origin to their ancient national poetry, particularly if that poetry consisted chiefly of prayers and hymns addressed to their gods. But it is different with the prose compositions of the Brahmanas. The reason why the Brahmanas, which are evidently so much more modern than the Mantras, were allowed to participate in

the name of Sruti, could only have been because it was from these theological compositions, and not from the simple old poetry of the hymns, that a supposed divine authority could be derived for the greater 'number of the ambitious claims of the Brahmins. But, although we need not ascribe any weight to the arguments by which the Brahmins endeavoured to establish the contemporaneous origin of the Mantras and Brahmanas there seems to be no reason why we should reject as equally worthless the general opinion with regard to the more ancient date of both the Brahmanas and Mantras, if contrasted with the Sutras and the profane literature of India. It may easily happen, where there is a canon of sacred books, that later compositions become incorporated together with more ancient works, as was the case with the Brahmanas. But we can hardly imagine that old and genuine parts should ever have been excluded from a body of sacred writings, and a more modern date ascribed to them, unless it be in the interest of a party to deny the authority of certain doctrines contained in these rejected documents. There is nothing in the later literature of the Sutras to warrant a supposition of this kind. We can find no reason why the Sutras should not have been ranked as Sruti, except the lateness of their date, if compared with the Brahmanas, and still more with the Mantras. Whether the Brahmanas themselves were aware that ages must have elapsed between the period during which most of the poems of their rishis were composed, and the times which gave rise to the Brahmanas, is a question which we need hardly hesitate to answer in the affirmative. But the recklessness with which Indian theologians claim for these Brahmanas the same title and the same age as for the Mantras, shows that the reasons must have been peculiarly strong which deterred them from claiming the same divine authority for the Sutras."

The third point relates to the changes that took place in the scope of the term Shruti and in their infallibility. Manu excludes¹ the "Brahmanas" from the category of Shruti as may be seen from the following extract from his Smriti:

"By Sruti is meant the Veda, and by Smriti the institutes of law; the contents of these are not to be questioned by reason, since from them (a knowledge of) duty has shown forth. The Brahmin who, relying on rationalistic treatises, shall condemn these two primary

¹ some may dispute this on the ground that the word Veda includes 'Brahmana' also. This of course is a fact. But it seems to me that Manu uses the term Shruti in a restricted sense so as to exclude the Brahmanas. This is supported by the fact that there is in the Manu Smriti no reference to the Brahmanas except in one place (iv. 100) where he says that only the Mantra portion need be studied.

sources of knowledge must be excommunicated by the virtuous as a sceptic and reviler of the Vedas13. To those who are seeking a knowledge of duty, the Sruti is the supreme authority.”

The fourth point relates to the claim put forth in the Puranas for precedence over the Vedas in the order of creation.

The Vayu Purana says¹:

“First of all the Shastras, the Purana was uttered by Brahma. Subsequently the vedas issued from his mouth”.

The Matsya Purana not only claims priority of creation for the Puranas as against the Vedas, but also the qualities of eternity and identity with sound, which was once predicated of the Vedas alone. It says²:

“Pitamaha (Brahma), first of all the immortals, took shape; then the Vedas with their Angas and Upangas (appendages and minor appendages), and the various modes of their textual arrangement, were manifested. (3) The Purana, eternal, formed of sound, pure, extending to the length of a hundred crores of verses, was the first of the Sastras which Brahma uttered; and afterwards the Vedas, issued from his mouth; and also the Mimansa and the Nyaya with its eightfold system of proofs. (5) From him (Brahma), who was devoted to the study of the Vedas, and desirous of offspring, sprang mind-born sons, so called because they were at first created by his mind.”

The Bhagwat Purana claims equality of authority with the Vedas. It says:

“(Bramharatra) declared the Purana called the Bhagavata, which stands on an equality with the Veda.”

The Brahma-Vaivartta Purana has the audacity to claim superiority over the Vedas. It says:

“That about which venerable sage, you have inquired, and which you desire, is all known to me, the essence of the Puranas, the pre-eminent Brahma-Vaivarta, which refutes the errors of the Puranas and Upapuranas, and the Vedas.”

This survey discloses a number of riddles in regard to the Vedas. In addition to the three riddles namely why did the Brahmins insist that the Vedas were eternally pre-existing, that they were non-man, non-God made, that they were infallible. There are other riddles regarding the Vedas which are equally puzzling—The Vedas at one time did not have any precedence or infallibility. Why did the

¹ Quoted in Muir Sanskrit Texts Vol. III p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Brahmins feel it necessary to give the Vedas this infallibility, why did the Brahmins exclude the Sutras from the term Sruti and why did the Brahmins give up the infallibility of the Vedas and sought to give infallibility to the Puranas?

