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the dress of another. In fact, there are very few texts, such as the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahā-bhāṣya* which have escaped later-day changes. We feel, therefore, that the *Arthasāstra* contains materials of a period, anterior to the beginning of the Christian Era, although it is difficult to believe that the text, in its present form, has reached us without any changes.

ANCIENT SCHOOLS OF VEDIC INTERPRETATION*

By DR. S. K. GUPTA

IN my paper '*Nature of Vedic Śākhās*' read before the 15th Session of the Oriental Conference I tried to show that the Śākhā-texts of a Saṁhitā formed the earliest step towards its interpretation. These texts differed from each other in some cases minutely and in some cases vitally as well as widely. These differences must have been due to the individual taste, theological beliefs and practices and level of learning of the originators and of the teachers-in-charge of those schools. Apart from textual differences, the differences in explanation of these texts and their theological application must have been very prominent. What these differences were it is impossible to suggest under the present state of our knowledge.

In the Brāhmanas and the Upaniṣads the verses from the Vedas have been explained mostly with reference to the sacrifice and metaphysics respectively. Other types of explanation, also, are found. The Brāhmanas do not lack legends and historical stories in connection with Vedic Mantras. Numerous physical explanations are met with. Etymologies are very common. In spite of such a variety of interpretation of Vedic words and Vedic verses no attempt has ever been made to reduce them to different schools. The modern scholars summarily accept that the sole purpose of the Brāhmanas is ritual and they treat all explanations given in the Brāhmanas as sacrificial. But the Brāhmanas do contain much material that is not sacrificial. They have preserved for us some reminiscences of the various types of explanations that must have been current in the days of Śākhās. To cite an example the

* This paper was read in the Vedic Section of A.I.O.C. 1951.

Śatapatha-Bṛhmaṇa gives us some glimpses of etymological, sacerdotal, historical or legendary and metaphysical as well as physical explanations. This Brāhmaṇa does not hesitate to include in its body such diverse views. It indicates that the differences in such explanations were neither of principles nor of a vital nature. There was an essential unity behind them. This is further supported by the unity underlying behind the various schools of Vedic interpretation mentioned in the *Nirukta* as we shall presently see.

The Pada texts were named after the names of their authors. The differences in the various Pada texts of the same Sāmhita could only be in the nature of differences in the analysis of certain words and consequent differences in their meanings. There could not have been vital differences calculated to allot them to particular schools of Vedic interpretation. The differences in these texts must have been completely individual and in matters of details only and not in principles.

It is only the *Nirukta* where several schools of Vedic interpretation have been clearly mentioned and quoted for their views. These schools are: (i) the Adhidāivata, (ii) the Adhyātma, (iii) the Ākhyāna Samaya or the Aithihāsika, (iv) the Naidāna, (v) the Nairukta, (vi) the Parivrājaka, (vii) the Pūrve Yājñika and (viii) the Yājñika. Camūpati makes this number ten by including the Vaiyākaraṇa school and taking the Ākhyāna Samaya and the Aithihāsika as two separate schools. He has also changed the names of the Adhidāivata and the Adhyātma schools to Ātma Pravāda and Ārṣa¹. The Vaiyākaraṇas do not appear to have maintained a separate school of Vedic interpretation. Yāska's remarks that the science of etymology is a completion of grammar²

¹ Yāska: Yuga, p. 11.

² *Nirukta* I, 15. Cp. 'tadidam vidyāsthānam vyākaraṇasya kārtsnyam.'

and that etymologies should not be explained to one who is not a Vaiyākaraṇa³ clearly show that Yāska does not consider the grammarians as different from the etymologists. Similarly, Yāska by using the word Ākhyāna in the sense of Itihāsa in the N. xi, 34 and other places impresses that he considers these two words as synonyms⁴.

Yāska deals with the Aithihāsika or the Ākhyāna school at length along with the Nairukta schools to which he himself belongs. His treatment of other schools is very scanty.

The Vaiyākaraṇas have been referred to in the N. I, 12 and in IX, 5. In I, 12 the point at discussion is the origin of nouns. The etymologists believe that all nouns are derived from roots. Some of the grammarians do not contribute to this view. Yāska's words 'Vaiyākaraṇānām caike' suggest that there were two sections among the grammarians on this point. One of them, perhaps the major one agreed with the etymologists. The word 'eke' can lead to this conclusion only. In IX, 5 the formation of 'maṇḍūka' is discussed. The grammarians derive it from *maṇḍ* whereas the etymologists derive it from *masj*, *mad* or *mand*. The grammarians attach more importance to form than to matter or sense. The etymologists attach due importance to both with particular emphasis on the sense of the word in question. In XIII, 9 the view of the grammarians about the explanation of the words 'catvāri vāk'⁵ is given. It is the same as given by Patañjali.

It is, therefore, evident that the differences between these two schools were the relative importance of sense or form in the derivation of a word and that a section of the grammarians did not accept the view of the etymologists that all nouns are derived from roots. One of the Nairuktas

³ N. II, 3, cp. 'naikapadāni nirbrūyāt. nāvaiyākaraṇāya.'

⁴ Priya Ratna Ārṣa, Veda meṁ itihāsa nahim hai, pp. ca-jha.

⁵ Rv. I, 164.45.

also appears to have differed on this point⁶. It is not clear from the text of Yāska whether these dissenters denied this proposition only in the case of proper nouns or only in the case of nouns used in the classical Sanskrit alone or in the case of certain nouns used in the Vedic language also. Whatever the case may have been the grammarians were agreed to the etymologists on the vital points in the matter of Vedic interpretation.

The Naidānas have been quoted in the N. VI, 9 and VII, 12. In VI, 9 they hold that a 'syāla' is so called because he becomes near on account of his relationship.⁷ The Nairuktas derive it as syāt lājān āvapati, 'he sows parched grain from a winnowing basket⁸.' In VII, 12 the Naidānas derive the word 'sāma' as 'ṛcām samam mene' 'he thought it equal to the stanza⁹.' The Nairuktas, on the other hand, derive it as 'sammitam ṛcā, 'measured out by the stanza¹⁰ or from as to throw. This school, thus, agrees in two main principles with the Nairuktas. It believes in deriving nouns from certain roots laying special emphasis on their sense. Of course, they appear to have believed in some original sense of words which in some cases undergoes changes on account of long use, change in customs and environments. They appear to have been the Semantists¹¹ of ancient India. In spite of such a difference in their approach to the problem the results do not appear to have

⁶ He is Gārgya.

⁷ Cp. 'syāla āsannaḥ saṁyogena.'

⁸ Dr. L. Sarup's translation.

⁹ Dr. L. Sarup's translation.

¹⁰ Dr. L. Sarup's translation.

¹¹ Dr. Sarup has translated the word Naidānāḥ as "they who are well-versed in primary causes" in N. VI, 9 and by 'they who are well-versed in Vedic metres' in N. VII, 12. He has not been able to give a consistent translation in these two places. How could the same name denote two sets of scholars who were not necessarily identical? The correct translation in both these places should be 'those who explain words with reference to their original sense.'

been substantially different from those of the etymologists.

The Parivrājakas are mentioned in the N. II, 8 on the interpretation of 'bahuprajāḥ nirṛtim āviveśa¹².' Their name indicates that they must have been wandering ascetics. They had a metaphysical outlook. It was natural. Their stand about the principles of interpretation does not appear to have been different from that of the etymologists. The results arrived at by them in interpreting a Mantra do not appear to have been very different from those arrived at by other schools especially the etymologists. In most cases they must have been identical with those arrived at by the etymologists. Their metaphysical outlook must have had some influence on their etymologies, some of which must have differed from those of the etymologists. Yāska has noted only one case. In his opinion no other differences were noteworthy.

The Pūrve Yājñikas have been quoted in the N. VII, 23. They regard Vaiṣvānara as Āditya. Their arguments are ritualistic in nature. They appear to have explained Vedic verses with reference to their application in sacrifice and the ceremonies connected with it. They, thus, had a leaning towards ritualistic explanation of Vedic verses. They might have belonged to the orthodox school of the Yājñikas who probably did not attach too much importance to the outward form of the sacrifice. They do not appear to have explained many verses in terms of sacrificial technic. Yāska has supplied such a scanty information that nothing can be said with certainty.

The Yājñikas have been mentioned in the N. V, II; VII, 4; XI, 29; 31; 42; and 43. In V, 11 their explanation of 'sarāṁsi trīṁśatām' and other words¹³ is quoted. The Yājñikas hold that the words Anumati and Rākā both mean the last day of the bright fortnight¹⁴ and that the words Sinī-

¹² Rv. I, 164.32.

¹³ Rv. VIII, 77.4.

¹⁴ N. XI, 29.

vāli and Kuhū both mean the last day of the dark fortnight¹⁵. They translate 'gauḥ' in the R̥. I, 164. 41 as 'gharmadhug' (giver of warm milk)¹⁶, i.e., a sacrificial cow¹⁷. Their explanations are thus sacrificial.

They also hold that the deity of a Mantra which has not been used in sacrifice and for which no deity has been specified has Prajāpati as its deity¹⁸.

The Yājñikas, thus, represent a school with elaborate sacrificial details and ceremonies. They are thoroughly sacerdotal in their outlook and can see nothing else than sacrificial details in Vedic verses. They appear to be the predecessors of the later Mīmāṃsakas. They have been distinguished from the earlier Yājñikas which fact forcibly leads to the conclusion that the elaborate details of sacrificial ceremonies and sacrificial explanation of verses of the Vedas is of later origin and hence was not acceptable to the earlier school. Yāska's treatment of this school shows that these ritualists differed from the etymologists in restricting the Vedic verses to sacrifice only. There appears to have been a complete agreement between the two schools in regard to other general principles of Vedic interpretation.

In the Supplement (N. XIII, 9) the views of the schools of Ārṣa and Ātmapravāda have been quoted. The former appear to have been metaphysical in their explanations. The latter appear to have an influence of natural sciences on their outlook and interpretations. They have explained the R̥. I, 164.45 with reference to men and beasts. The views of another school of Ācāryas under the words 'eke' have also been quoted at the same place. They appear to belong to the Ātmapravāda school for they have explained the R̥. I, 164. 45 with reference to birds, reptiles and men. The Ātmapravāda, thus, must have been identical with the Adhidaivata school.

¹⁵ N. XI, 31.

¹⁷ N. XI, 42;43.

¹⁶ Sarup's translation.

¹⁸ N. VII, 4.

The Aitihāsikas have been quoted in the N. II, 16; XII, 1 and XII, 10. They hold that Vṛtra is Tvāṣṭra Asura (II, 16); the two Aśvins are Rājānau Puṇyakṛtau (XII,1); the word 'mithunā' in the R̥. X, 17.2 refers to Yama and Yamī. The legend quoted in the N. XII, 10 gives the impression that Vivasvān, Saranyū, and Aśvinau are historical personalities.

The Ākhyāna Samayaḥ has been quoted in the N. VII, 7. This school believes that the description of Vedic deities found in the Mantras is figurative only. They are not real historical beings or persons having hands and feet and performing certain actions. In their opinion the anthropomorphic traits of Vedic deities are nothing but personifications of various phenomena going on in Nature¹⁹. This school, thus, must have explained Vedic descriptions in the form of the allegories and legends. There appears to be no other difference between the Ākhyāna Samayaḥ or the Aitihāsika school and the Nairukta school.

Besides these references several itihāsas and Ākhyānas have been narrated by Yāska in connection with his interpretation of Vedic verses. The purpose of these Ākhyānas is that Yāska wishes to impress upon the students of etymology that these Ākhyānas or itihāsas should not be treated in their literal sense but should be taken as figurative descriptions. They are not real history but are mere allegories. As such there remains practically no difference in the interpretation of the Nairukta and the Aitihāsika schools. But in due course of time the real significance of what Yāska intended to convey was forgotten and the legends connected with the Mantras to bring home the points discussed in those texts were taken as real facts. The mistake committed by the medieval commentators was repeated and vehemently defended by the originators as well as the followers

¹⁹ Cp. 'api vā puruṣavidhānāmeva satām karmātmāna ete syuḥ. yathā yajño yajamānasya. eṣa cākhyānasamayāḥ'

of the modern school of Vedic studies. It was only Dayānanda who after several centuries pointed out where the mistake lay and what was the real sense behind these allegories.

The school of etymologists is represented by Yāska himself. The followers of this school hold that all nouns can and should be derived from roots according to certain principles. These derivations were not to be made for the purpose of intellectual exercises but had a definite purpose behind them. This purpose was that all nouns should be explained with reference to their derivative sense as far as the Vedic Mantras are concerned²⁰. This fundamental position of the etymologists was put into the background by the medieval commentators. Even Dr. L. Sarup could not leave the track of the medieval scholars and translated the explanations of Vedic Mantras given by Yāska in the *Nirukta* much against the intentions and principle of the etymologists. Dayānanda alone had the courage to point out this fundamental mistake committed by the medieval scholars.

The several schools of Vedic interpretation cited by Yāska are, thus agreed on the main principles of interpretation of the Vedas. Their differences are not vital. They depend on the outlook of the followers of a particular school. Such differences in details or explanations were bound to arise. The typical example 'the sun is set' given by the Rhetoricians would make the point clear. Just as the various interpreters of this sentence will not differ in the literal translation of this sentence but would differ vitally in their explanation of the significance of this simple sentence, similarly the various schools were agreed with the *Nairuktas* on the general principles and consequently in the literal interpretation of the sacred texts but they

²⁰ Vide Yāska's remark 'athāpīdamantareṇa...' (N. I, 15) at the close of the discussion on the derivative nature of nouns.

differed in their explanations which were influenced by their individual outlook.

With the passage of time Vedic studies declined. With this decline the unity of these schools and the underlying significance of their explanation were misunderstood. A blending of all the schools was effected by those scholars who wanted to show that there was no difference in all those schools. All was safe so far as the motive was concerned. But the lack of proper understanding on the part of these scholars resulted in disaster. All the schools irrespective of the shades of differences in their explanations were merged into one school which I have termed the medieval school represented by Skanda and Mādhava Bhaṭṭa. The new school was a complete metamorphosis of the ancient schools and was beyond all recognition to an ordinary man. The climax of this mis-blending is found in the commentary of Sāyaṇa. It is this Sāyaṇa who is regarded as a traditional commentator and is followed for all practical purposes by the modern school. Mr. T. V. Kapali Sastry has rightly observed:—

"Here again is a misconception or an ambiguity concerning what is called the traditional interpretation of Sāyaṇa. What is the tradition that was handed down to Sāyaṇa which he maintains in his interpretation of the Ṛgvedic hymns? Or, is it meant by the term the tradition that he himself started and that has been handed down to us through his commentary on the Ṛks? Such a question arises because when we go through his Ṛg-bhāṣya we find him maintaining a variety of traditions coming down from different schools of learning. He maintains mostly the ritualistic tradition that the Mantras are meant for sacrificial purpose, with great zeal, very often at the cost of a straight rendering of the text. But the Brāhmaṇas, the original ritualistic scriptures themselves, do not claim to be treated as the Vedas in the main of which the Mantras are a part

having their place in the rituals. In scores of places Sāyaṇa in his commentary maintains the Vedantic tradition, the Paurāṇik tradition and other Śāstric traditions without making any serious attempt to take notice of the discrepancies in his writings, much less to reconcile them at all. An instance may be cited to show that Sāyaṇa while endeavouring to expound the Ṛks in consonance with the tenets of the ritualist clean forgets that according to the latter there can be no mention of any actual historic occurrence in any portion of the Vedas, since they are eternal—every sentence, every word, every syllable. Again, when Sāyaṇa finds certain hymns clearly symbolic or containing allegorical allusions, he explains them in a quite simple way making references to minutiae of certain rites that are meant and ought to be so understood and avoids to mention any other possible significance of the Ṛks in question. He was quite aware of the fact that the ritualists were just one of the three main interpreters of the Vedas and this is clear when he occasionally quotes Yāska making reference to a threefold interpretation of the hymns of the Ṛgveda. When he gives us alternative meanings of words or verses, which he often does, it is obvious he does so as a scholar, with a certain indifference to the acceptance of the alternative meaning if it does not fit with a sacrificial context. What then is the tradition he himself received or he has left behind? It is a jumble of traditions that we find registered in his commentary, as has been stated already, although of course he started his work with the avowed object of demonstrating that the Ṛks are ancillary and indispensable to the ceremonial rites of Vedic sacrifices. . . . But he made his choice and sided with the ritualist supporting not fully, but to some extent, the Mīmāṃsakas and wrote the commentary. The ritualistic tradition of Vedic religion was there long before him and he imbibed its spirit. That is not the same as to say—and it will be a

travesty of truth—that that was also the tradition in regard to the interpretation of the Ṛks. If there was any tradition, it was the threefold interpretation of the Ṛks to which Yāska draws our attention. But Sāyaṇa's work has left us a new tradition that the Ṛks are to be interpreted only in one way and that is the way of the ritualist. The ancient tradition of a threefold interpretation has been thoroughly eclipsed, if not wiped out of the memory of Indian Vedist for the last time and for good²¹."

In spite of such a decline of Vedic studies the correct method of interpretation and the threefold way of explaining the Ṛks were not altogether forgotten. Some rays of light were continuously flowing. Virajānanda received them from his Gurus headed by Pūrṇāśrama Svāmin. Dayānanda received them from Virajānanda and revived the ancient school.

²¹ Arvindu Mandir Annual, 5.
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