

11. Value In Vedas

“*Vetthi ithi Vedah*”; Knowing, knowledge is Veda. That is to say, man can know from the Vedas, the Code of Right Activity and the Body of Right Knowledge. The Vedas teach man his duties from birth to death. They describe his rights and duties, obligations and responsibilities in all stages of life—as a student, householder, recluse and monk. In order to make plain the Vedic dicta and axioms and enable all to understand the meaning and purpose of the do’s and don’ts, the Vedangas, Puranas and Epic texts appeared, in course of time. Therefore, if man is eager to grasp his own significance and true reality, he has to understand the importance of these later explanatory compositions also.

This is the reason why the ancients taught the Vedangas and other related texts even before the pupils learnt the Vedas. This was a must in the *Gurukulas* or Hermitage

Schools of the past. In those days, the Bharathiyas studied the “Fourteen *Vidyas*” or “Subjects.” The Vedas were learnt by rote. The master of the Vedas, who had learnt the Vedas in this manner was called Jada, or Inert. But the word did not convey the meaning that he had not known anything. It only meant that he had nothing more to learn and was therefore “inactive” and “content.” Through the study of the Vedas, he had become the master of all knowledge. In order to make this human career worthwhile, the study of the Vedas was considered very essential.

The stream of Indian culture always emphasised the authority of the Vedas as the supreme authority for deciding the values of human living. Of the Vedas, the first is the Rig Veda. It is generally considered as composed of ten “*mandalas*” or sections. In the first nine sections, hymns in praise of God under the names of Agni, Indra, Marut, Ushas, etc., are found. Historians and researchers have suggested certain theories to explain how these hymns of praise arose. Men in those days realised that *Agni* (Fire), *Vayu* (Air), *Marut* (Wind), etc. were far more powerful than they; and so they described their Divine qualities and propitiated them.

The second of the Vedas is the Yajur Veda. This Veda has two recensions—the Krishna Yajur Veda and the Sukla Yajur Veda. This Veda refers to the Ganga river and its region. It is the source of the Uttara Mimamsa school of thought and interpretation. The people had by then

demarcated the forest areas from the cultivable areas around the villages and had taken to habitation in the villages. There is a prominent reason that prompted the separation of certain portions of the Veda into the Yajur Veda. The Yajur Veda has seven sections called *Aranyakas* or Forest Texts, indicating by that very name, that it refers more to disciplines and spiritual exercises which can be practised only in the seclusion and silence of the forest.

The third Veda is the Sama Veda. In this collection, many of the hymns (Rks) of the Rig Veda are repeated, but with additional musical notes so that they may be sung during Vedic rituals and ceremonies. So the Sama Veda is mainly *Swara* or musical notation. The Rig-Veda Aryans lived on the banks of the Sindhu river while the Yajur-Veda people came to their awareness when they were on the banks of the Ganga. The Sama Veda songs are also visualisations of the same era, but the people seem to have occupied even the middle region of Bharath. The Sama Veda is referred to as the Gaana Veda also, in order to highlight its musical nature. All musical schools are derivatives from the styles that are marked out by the Sama Veda. All tones and notes are embedded in that Veda.

The fourth is the Atharvan or Atharva Veda. Many have described it in many diverse ways. Some have even denied it the status of a Veda. Others say that it is made up of what remained after the collation of the rest. In the other Vedas, the might and mystery of the Gods are described.

But in this Veda, the possibility of man acquiring certain powers and mysteries by his own effort and exercises are mentioned. This is its specialty. Hatha Yoga, Thiraskarani Vidya, Ashta Yoga—these are made available for man only in this Veda. Of course, by winning the Grace of God, man can acquire even skills that are otherwise impossible of attainment.

In short, it must be realised that the Vedas are very important for man and that they cover the entire range of knowledge. They are the source and spring of Bharathiya culture. They are the recordings of visions and divine experiences. Their source is not some one definite person. They were revealed by God Himself, of His own innate mercy. The Vedic inheritance has been preserved pure and unsullied even to this day, because, it was handed down from the master to the disciple, in regular succession. Since it is timeless and authorless, it is worthy of acceptance by all. No one can afford to neglect or deny their value.

Whatever may be the diversities in contents, the commentators agree that the essential teaching of all the four Vedas is the same. The sections dealing with rites, modes of worship and the conclusions of inquiry help man to achieve the four goals of life—Dharma, *Artha* (wealth), *Kama* (desire for things of sensory world) and Moksha. Since it is very hard to master the Vedas, we have developed a vast Smrithi literature to expound the Sruthi texts—the

Puranas and the Ithihasas. Farsighted seers composed these out of historical and legendary incidents and events.

Karma and Jnana are related as cause and effect, and so, the Karma sections of the Sruthi and Smrithi, which emphasised activity led to the discovery of new facets of Truth and rendered the ideas of a transcendent God clearer and nearer. So too, the discovery of clearer concepts of God through spiritual inquiry along the Jnana *Marga* (path) fed “activity” with better meaning and higher purpose. The benefit of Karma was proportionate to the faith and the faith in Karma was in proportion to the awareness of God, won through Jnana. For involving oneself in good activities, Jnana is an essential prerequisite. That Jnana has ultimately to be derived from the Vedas. It is based on the teachings of the Vedas.

Karma is, really speaking, the practice of Dharma. The Upanishads give us guidance on what has to be done and what has to be avoided, in the spiritual journey. They direct us to revere the mother as God, revere the father as God, revere the preceptor as God, revere the guest as God and also, warn us that Truth shall not be neglected, Dharma shall not be neglected. So, there are both positive and negative instructions—follow these counsels not others. Whatever conduces to your progress in goodness, accept; avoid other counsels—thus do the Upanishads instruct.

In those centuries, the King himself studied in hermitages at the feet of the Upanishadic sages, and helped

others to study by granting economic aid profusely to the centres of learning which shone as repositories of Vedic lore. As the king, so the subjects. Fostering the Vedas meant fostering the Vedic scholars and practitioners, the Vedavidis. At the present time, encouragement is afforded and scholarship is honoured in other branches of learning. The Vedic scholars are not given similar encouragement and emoluments. But this is an important aspect that has to be attended to.

Dharmo rakshati rakshitah; Dharma protects those who protect it, says the Sruthi. If people come forward to foster the sources of Dharma, that good act, by itself, will help foster those who do it. The study of the Vedas has become today the task of the economically weak. People have reconciled themselves to this situation. They associate the study with such a sad and pitiable picture. Vedic studies have come down to this deplorable pass. The very pundits who have attained scholarship in the Vedas are using it as a commercial item that can be sold. They do not demonstrate the value of Vedic study in the peace and harmony of their lives and thus win reverence for the Vedas by personal example. The Vedas are being misused by them for earning a pittance, rather than liberation and peace. This is the reason why Dharma is receiving a setback and anxiety and fear are spreading among men. The World can win back peace and harmony only when such persons are persuaded to practise the ideals laid down in the Vedas, and thereby serve as beacon lights to guide mankind aright. Else, downfall is inevitable.

The Bharathiya spiritual stream has until the present times fertilised Vedic learning and practice. Its message has been always, “Journey forward along the Vedic Path.” One may dilate on Vedantha and Vedas; but unless one holds forth the value of these ideals on the basis of his own experience and practice, it is a waste. This truth has been forgotten by these personages. Let them awake in time and save the traditions and values of the ageless Vedic culture.

