

# **Brahma Sutra and Vedadikara Nirupanam**

## **(Authoritarian Critique of Vedas)**

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The Vedas are one of the oldest manuscripts in the world literature. The word Veda is derived from the Sanskrit root 'vid' which means knowledge, but it could be attributed as a bundle of knowledge of the Vedic period. All the Indian chronicles and myths extol the Vedas. There is not even a single mantra anywhere in the sacred text repudiating anyone the right to become versed in Vedas but the authority to study and teach the Vedas abounding with knowledge, has been interpreted as the right of a monopolized community gradually.

Prominent social reformers like Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda who visited India in the late 19th century argued that everyone has the right to study the Vedas. Meanwhile, Chattampi Swami wrote *Vedadikara Nirupanam*, proclaiming that the right to study Veda belongs to everyone in Kerala. In this book, Chattampi Swami analyses extensively the question of who is qualified to study the Vedas and has explicitly established that everyone who has the desire to study the Vedas and the customs in rapport with it are eligible for the study. The dissension created by this work was tremendous during the time when the elite castes and scholars of the society strongly believed and argued that only Brahmins had the dominion to study the Vedas.

Vyaptheshcha Samajasam is elaborated in the Brahma Sutras as follows. Para brahma swaroopi, Parameswaran (Lord Shiva) is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient and absolute. On account of this, it is equitable to say that even if there is a disparity in the name or context of the theosophical form of knowledge, the objective serves as the same. The purpose of all techniques is to illustrate the essence of God in copious ways. They all have similarities in it. Therefore every theosophy is analogous.

After reflecting the Vedic forms and significance of the Vedas, Chattampi Swami encompasses the principles of Shruti (what is heard), Yukti (logic) and Anubhavam (experience) and depicts his own perceptions. Similarly, Swami meticulously discusses who is a Brahmin. For instance, Swami examines whether any of these qualities like pure knowledge, birth, noble action and self knowledge make a person a Brahmin or a combination of all these. From this discussion it is implicit that a Brahmin is only one who has wisdom and associated noble deeds.

The dogma that the Shudras cannot be educated 'nasthrishudrau vedamathiyatham', this verse is neither a Veda nor a Smriti, it is just a sutra (aphorism). It is not accepted or studied anywhere in Shruti (what is heard) Smriti (what is recollected) mythological texts. Therefore, it does not have to be accepted as a doctrine. The verse means that women and Shudras need not have to study but it cannot be interpreted that they are incapable to learn.

Even if it is argued that Shudras (lowest ranked of the four varnas of Hindu caste system) have no authority to study the Puranas, many of the authors of the Puranas are Shudras. The veracity of the matter cannot be denied. Most people know that the author of the *Suta Samhita* is also a Shudra. Ergo, the eminence of that book cannot be deemed as inferior. Parasaran, the son of Odakkari, and Vyasa, the son of Mukuvathi (fisherwoman) compiled the Vedas and were also Brahmins.

In the beginning of the twenty-eighth chapter of Shukla Yajus, Yethemam vacham kalyanima vadhani janebyam... samridamyamu pamadhonamathu...

The Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, friend, foe and all the people who utter this auspicious verse, the one who preaches the Vedas in order to gain the favour of the Goddesses that are propitious for all the castes, including the Shudras so that he may be successful in the world.

The Vedic influence of women can be perceived in the Vedic scripture of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad dated back to the story of a woman named Gargi who participated in a knowledge-based debate with Saint Yajnavalakya, who could not be defeated even by sages like Ashvalan, Arthabhaga, Bhujja Ushasta and Kaholajan.

It is debated that on the one hand, Shudras are prohibited to study the Vedas alone and on the other hand, it does not restrict them from knowing the meaning of the Vedas. If the argument is valid, then verses are more important than the meaning of the Vedas. If someone argues that the box that holds the precious nine gemstones is more important than the gemstones, which assertion should be accepted? There is no doubt that the relationship between the box and the material itself is similar to that of verses and its meanings. It can be illustrated here, if there is no dissimilitude between the two, then when someone asks if you need a box, there is no doubt that the one who says that you need a box and not the gemstones is also insane and the comparison between the word and the meaning of the Vedas is explicit from the Vedic script itself. It is said in the Rig Veda that one who does not know the Vedas thoroughly is a bearing pillar of excellence.

It has been a long time since the Brahma Sutras, one of the three texts that are collectively called Prasthan Traya, and its translator, Shankaracharya, have begun to propagate that some atheists who hanker for caste supremacy are disseminating the view that the Shudra does not deserve to study the Vedas. These distorted arguments have been sharply criticized and debated by many great personalities, including Chattampi Swami. Chattampi Swami has presented it gracefully in his book *Vedadikara Nirupana*.

The Brahma Sutra Commentary, Chapter one, *pada* 3, aphorisms or sutras from 26 to 38 are showcased as documents comprising grotesque arguments. It is argued that the Shudras are not entitled to study the Vedas. If we examine this *pada*, we can comprehend that these aphoristic verses (sutras) are a deviation from the main subject. The third *pada* denotes nirguna Brahma (worship of God without form). Brahma (God of creation, knowledge and Vedas) is attributed to be the baseline of all the universe and the earth and letters are said to be Brahma. Man is different from other living beings on the basis of intelligence. Sutras 26 to 33 elaborate that it is through the human birth that life is freed from the bondage of speech by meditation. Sutras 34 to 38 interrogate the authority of the Shudra. The only way to combine it later. The interpreter makes it clear that man possesses authority. If man has authority then why Shudra doesn't inhibit authority. Isn't Shudra a human being? Shudra is classified only based on the colour variation that is associated with dissimilarities in human attributes. The colour varies just like the qualities and actions of the same person alters. It is evident from the scriptures that a Shudra is constructed by the colour variations and not by birth. This is recurrently posited in Shruti and Smriti. Further instances can be spotted in his book *Vedadikara Nirupanam*. It is conspicuous from the Brahma Sutra that community of birth or caste is not important to attain Vedic knowledge but noble deed is necessary.

The Veda Samhita is a collection of verses written by sages during ceremonies and rituals. The Veda Samhita was compiled by Badarayana who was later known as Veda Vyasa. It is estimated that Vyas lived between 1800 and 1500 BC. The compilation of Veda Samhita by Vyasa laid foundation of the Aryan religion. The aim of the Veda Samhita was to modulate Aryan religion by performing the Vedic rituals concordantly. Subsequently an extensive Vedic literature developed. The study of the Vedas, interpretation, structure, grammatical interpretations between mantras and deeds, all these became appendages. The Vedas were interpreted from many angles. There are seven types of interpretation of the Vedas: Nairuktam (related to etymology), Yajnikam (ritualistic or sacrificial method of interpretation), Vaiyakaranam (grammarian school of interpretation), jyothisham (astrological interpretation), Sampradayakam, Adhyathmikam (Spiritual) and Aithihisikam (Epic).

A system was developed which ascribed the Vedas to the spirituality and the Vedic mantras to the mystic divinity and turned the practical lessons of the Yajnas into a means of material prosperity. This is how the a small group of powerful people took over the Vedas on the pretext of impermanence. Due to this reason Vedic study was forbidden for a massive section. Vedic knowledge became the monopoly of the Brahmins in a social system intertwined with caste divisions.

Chattampi Swami completed *Vedadikara Nirupanam* in 1893, but published only nineteen years later, in 1918. The manuscript discloses that everyone has equitable right to study and teach the Vedas. Chattampi Swami described the Vedas as the storehouse of enlightenment that gives rise to the dharma and eternal consciousness of life. Veda is the repository of the ultimate wisdom.

The *Vedadikara Nirupanam* of Chattambi Swami was a revolutionary text of knowledge that was meant to enlighten the entire society. Swami critiques the authority of the Vedas through a method of scientific analysis that includes the nature of the Vedas, the significance of the Vedas, the critique of authority, post-doctrinal thinking and rational thought.

In 19th century, the study of the Vedas was denied to the vast majority of the people of Kerala, accompanied by the statement, Na Stree Shuda *Vedamadhiyatham*. Women and Shudras are barred from even entering the realm of Indian spirituality and philosophy. Chattambi Swami hid outside the Kollur Matha temple without permission and entered the world of literacy, grammar and poetry as the Nair community, which he represented in the Chaturvarnya system, belonged to the Shudra caste. It also became an educational revolution when Chattambi Swami decided that his own experience should not be passed on to the future generations.

The relevance of the *Vedadikara Nirupana* signifies a social revolution in which Swami engaged in spreading the knowledge of his homeland to everyone and reviving themselves in the light of the modern age. This work is a result of the painstaking discussions of Swami that prolonged at least twenty years. This is not an incomplete concept confined to the pages of a book as a manuscript. It embodies an explosion of thoughts and emotions that has unfurled and obtained effectiveness as a brisk social issue. The mission of *Vedadikara Nirupanam* is to perish the values with ideas, just like they smash a rock with gunpowder.

The consecration of temples by Sree Narayana Guru and the Devarchana Paddhati and Achara Paddhati by Sree Neelkanda Theerthapadha are the results of this revolution. There were assurances in the land that the non-Brahmins would also practice tantra, mantra and worship, and that the Avarnas (sections of people in the Hinduism who do not belong to the four major Varnas) would no longer be enslaved in the presence of those who had become the intermediaries of God and later authority.

In *Aitareya Brahmana* there is a story in which a hunter named Kavano, who was denied the study of the Vedas was thrown into the desert, and made his own impulse, obtained the pleasure of the Goddess by reciting the said Vedic mantra, and the river Saraswati flowed into the desert in search of him and thus became the scholar of the Vedas and was respected by the sages. This demonstrates the event in which the Shudra gained Vedic authority and Yajna (a ritual done in front of sacred fire) authority.

Chattambi Swami challenged the two assumptions associated with the Vedas. The notion that the Vedas are *apaurusheya* (disciplines dealing with knowledge not contingent on individuals but were divine creation) and that only Brahmins have authority over them.

Swami's major corrections are:

1. The Vedas are man-made.
2. Among the writers and practitioners of Vedas are women, non-Brahmins and Shudras. Chattambi Swami confirms his argument by completing the list of authors of Vedas such as Vishwamitra's son Madhu who was a non-Brahmin, Janakan, a Kshatriya, women like Gari, Maitreyi, and Karthiyan, and Shudras like King Janashruti

It seems intelligible to examine the rationale behind the prohibition of Vedas to the Shudras. All the spiritual scriptures suggest that the knowledge of the living entity and his action plans are essential for the attainment of salvation. However by insisting that the Shudra shouldn't study the Vedas, the path to salvation and thus salvation itself gets obstructed. If this law is divine and has been practiced since ancient times, hasn't a single Shudra ever attained salvation? So how did the Shudra Janashruti compose Vedic mantras in ancient times? Doesn't it mean that the Shudra was not hindered from learning and teaching but also from compiling Vedas? Didn't this injustice happen later? *Vedadikara Nirupanam* is the first work in South India that inquires the Brahminical authority that denied the Vedas to a vast majority.

Swami's revolution was not limited to religion and spirituality. The time when these temples, schools and many cultural and administrative institutions were excluded for Avarnas. It was a time when no social advancement was marked. Ordinary people who lived like beasts, accepting various kinds of domination as fate. Although only a small portion of the English-speaking population may be rushing to the windows opened by foreign powers, the majority live

selfishly within the divided caste supremacy. There are denigrated sections of the Nair-Ezhava community and other degraded community who had been driven out of history. Swami taught children that they can mature and develop only through knowledge.

... if you have not acquired knowledge

You're similar to a trash child...

It is said in the lullaby Pillalathalo Lipi written by Swami. Swami explains what kind of knowledge must be acquired in the following lines,

Shirt and hat are nothing

But... education

It is not the jugglery education imparted by the people who wear hat and suit but the glorious admonition that the knowledge of insightful wisdom of Vedic knowledge should be transferred to children.

Swami who indubitably proved that the non-Brahmins and Shudras were among those who compiled and taught the Vedas from the time of their birth, asserted that the Shudras had the power to build temples and erect idols. It was Swami who advised his disciple Narayanan with his strategy and persuaded him to build a temple at Aruvipuram and worship Lord Shiva. A defining moment in the social history of Kerala created by the *Vedadikara Nirupanam* was the installation of Aruvipuram prathista and the ritual reforms of the Theerthapada saints.

Sree Narayana Guru constructed temples in several places in Kerala. Temples, rituals, and the way of prayer became more simple, transparent and rational. At least a few temples awakened to the popular imprints of education and the arts. The Avarnars formed struggles for access to the temple. The upper castes themselves declared the entrance of the temple and opened the doors of the temple to the lower castes of the Hindus. The mantras of the Chattambi Swami later acted as a catalyst for transformation, from Pindhibhojanam (inter-dining of all castes) to intercaste marriages, through caste equality. Nataraja Guru, who heard the argument of Vedadikara Nirupanam, exclaimed that it was amazing that the paper on which these letters were written did not catch fire. He meant that the revolutionary zeal of his letters were tremendous.

The same revolutionary words later became a catastrophic fire and culture. These mantras transmuted into an innovative and sacred fire while their revolutionary power becomes activated. The arguments made by Swami by analyzing the Vedas became the mantras for the social revolution. Other communities were able to perform all the poojas, karmas and rituals performed by the Brahmins. Therefore, *Vedadikara Nirupanam* epitomized the mantra of the Renaissance.

Swami challenged the Brahmanical supremacy by writing the *Vedadikara Nirupanam* and proclaimed that knowledge belongs to everyone like sunshine. The acquisition of knowledge should not be confined to a selected people. The foremost task Chattambi Swami did was to establish that the Vedas were written by humans or paurusheyam (belonging to an individual).

The real foundation of renaissance was laid in Kerala. By Chattambi Swami through Vedadikara Nirupanam. Swami was also able to envision the rise and resurrection of a new egalitarian Kerala through the idea of enabling the distribution of knowledge to all castes equitably. In the flux of time, the significance and relevance of Swami's *Vedadikara Nirupana* and his philosophy is heightened.

Chattambi Swami remains one of the unsurpassed figures in the Kerala Renaissance. Swami was of the view that our own customs, beliefs, caste discrimination, inequality and freedom should be altered and must be reformed. The struggle of Swami was a spiritual and revolutionary mantra to attain fortitude through inner purgation.

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