

Vedic knowledge: an integral and scientific approach

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Abstract

The objective of the present research paper is to clarify how Vedic knowledge is the science of self-knowledge, how Vedic science has an integral approach to spiritual and material sciences; and how the meditative mind is the best instrument of gaining knowledge. The Veda is the most ancient text in Sanskrit and the oldest scripture of the world as well. Vedas are called *apauruseya* which means impersonal, or which has not been written by a person. It means uncreated, self-generated and eternal. It is said that it was created by Lord Brahma for the well being of the whole humanity. The knowledge of Veda was revealed to the Seers in state of trance so that they can be communicated to the whole human race for their physical, mental and spiritual well being. Since Vedic knowledge is logical and scientific it has a universal application transcending the boundary of caste, creed, religion, sect and geography. The Veda has been organized as the most complete and absolute expression of pure knowledge, The Veda is the most precious gift for which the West had been indebted to the East. The Veda is the treasure house of wisdom capable of solving all the problems, the humanity is suffering from.

Key words: Veda, Vedic science, Self-knowledge, Humanity, Wisdom

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Introduction:

The Vedas represent the most sacred heritage of the mankind. The word 'Veda' originates from the Sanskrit root 'Vid'. The Sanskrit verb 'Vid' means 'to know'. The word 'Veda' literally means knowledge [1]. The Veda is concerned with "knowledge par excellence. The word 'Veda' also refers to accomplishment. The knowledge which helps a man in realizing his supreme goal is the Veda [2]. The Vedas constitute the sublime knowledge revealed to our great ancestors while they were doing their penance. It is not an acquired knowledge. It is the sublime knowledge revealed to them in their meditation by the Supreme Divinity. The ancient sages, while doing their *tapasya* and *sadhana*, 'heard' the divine truths. Whatever was 'heard' or 'revealed' to the great sages was presented in the Vedas and the Upanishads. Time or place can not affect the significance of the knowledge 'contained' in the Vedas. The Vedas are divine and eternal. The Vedas are truly considered to be the boundless repository of "knowledge par excellence". The Vedas are known as the *Shruti* literature. The *Shruti* is treated as the supreme and ultimate authority. The authentic *Smriti* literature has had its basis in the *Shruti*. Whenever a difference arises between the *Shruti* and the *Smriti*, the *Shruti* statement is accepted as the final word. Needless to say, the *Smriti* is to be interpreted in consonance with the *Shruti*. From time to time the *Smriti* might undergo modifications, but the *Shruti* cannot be altered at all. The ancient Rishis led a very pious life which was further sanctified by the austerity of penance [3]. They could 'hear' the silence of the Divinity and could 'see' the Infinite. The Vedic Rishi is referred to as a *drashta* or a seer. The Vedic Rishis could 'see' even the transcendental truth as they were great 'seers' [4]. The 'divine truths' were revealed to them while they were in meditation on higher spiritual planes. The Vedas contain the 'divine knowledge' revealed to the great Rishis in their "Supra-normal

Consciousness", as *Shri Aurobindo* says. The Vedas present the sublime form of knowledge. This knowledge is impersonal. It is divine. It is absolute, veritable and inviolable. It is eternal; it is timeless. It remains unaffected at all times, at all places, under all circumstances. Hence the Vedas are adjudged the *Swatah Pramana* or self-evident. That means their truths do not need any proof, support or elaboration. The Vedas encompass the human life. They do not belong to a particular religion or a race or a country. They are the holy scriptures of Hinduism, but they equally belong to the human race. Dr. Radhakrishnan refers to the Vedas as "the earliest documents of the human mind" [5].

What do the Vedas contain?

The Vedas contain the mantras. These mantras have different specific purposes. Most of them are symbolic. Some of them are hymns addressed to the deities. Some of them are for ceremonial purposes or for the rites and rituals. Some deal with the social life. There are references to the sciences and mathematics also. Discussions on the topics of chemistry, astronomy, botany, zoology, physiology, medical therapeutics and bio-sciences are also found in the Vedas [6].

The Vedas reflect all the aspects of existence. They throw light on the *Srishti* (the creation), the Brahman, the atman, the life and all the related issues of spiritualism. The Vedas present a record of the philosophical progress of man. However it should be remembered that neither the Vedas nor the Upanishads propagate a specific ideology or a doctrine. As such they are not philosophical treatises. Yet one finds ample evidence of subtle philosophical thoughts from the verses. A great deal of scholastic ability is required to interpret the Vedas. A single word may have different meanings in different contexts. Many mantras are cryptic statements to a lay man. Some of

them are too enigmatic to be followed. They are ambiguous or symbolic. This is why the Vedas have often been misinterpreted even by learned scholars of reputation. Unfortunately, some of the Western philosophers have not done justice to the Vedas. Many of them failed to understand them correctly and presented distorted views on several counts. Some of the Indian scholars have been influenced by their Western counterparts. On the other hand, Dayananda Saraswati, Shri Aurobindo and others have challenged the Westerners and made great efforts to re-evaluate the Vedas. One may now remember that the Vedas could only be interpreted with the help of an elaborate explanation by an expert. Once understood thoroughly, they open up new vistas of knowledge and radically transform life.

Vedic Science: an integral approach:

In India, science and spirituality have always gone together. Spirituality through Yoga and Vedanta has always been conceived of as a science, a way of knowledge to be approached with reason and experimentation through Yoga and meditation leading to the direct perception of truth. Other Indic systems of thought like Buddhism and Jainism have shared similar views.

Veda itself means knowledge, deriving from the Sanskrit root '*vid*' meaning to know, to see or to cognize. The Vedas are called *Vidyas* which means ways of knowledge or perception (a term cognate with Latin *video*!). The Vedas we might say are the *Vidyas* or videos of the sages shown on the inner screen of the meditative mind. They were said to have been cognized by the human mind in tune with the universal Being or Brahman.

The Vedas address all aspects of existence through Dharma, the natural laws that uphold the universe, which reflect not only matter and energy but life, mind and consciousness. As such, the Vedas constitute what could be called a science in the modern sense of the word and

much more. We can find among the Vedic sciences a whole range of sciences from astronomy and chemistry to psychology and surgery, extending to astrology and to the science of Yoga itself. We can call this integral approach to both the spiritual and material sciences as 'Vedic science.'

Unlike medieval Europe, traditional India never saw a conflict between science and spirituality. It never suppressed science or art in favor of religion. Rather its arts and sciences developed in harmony with spirituality. However, it did discriminate between the material and the spiritual sciences. This the *Mundaka Upanishad* makes this clear. "Two sciences are to be known, the higher and the lower. The higher is through which the eternal is known."

The lower knowledge consists of the outer forms of knowledge through which the transient factors are known, the aspects of name, form and action. The higher knowledge is Self-knowledge through which the nameless, formless being is known. This division of the higher and lower forms of knowledge reflects the Vedantic definition of reality as that which is eternal and the transient as an illusion. Because of this orientation, historically in India the inner or spiritual science gained the greatest attention, though the outer sciences were not neglected [7].

The material sciences, moreover, can similarly be divided into two groups. The first are the usual material sciences like astronomy and medicine such as formulated in modern science. Second are what could be called 'occult' sciences like astrology and *Vastu*, which modern science has generally neglected or rejected, which suggest subtle influences of intelligence pervading the forces of nature. While the Vedic mind never saw a real division between these two types of outer sciences (for example, Vedic *Jyotish* includes both astronomy and astrology), since the modern mind does, it is important to note this distinction.

The Meditative Mind: the Best Instrument of knowledge:

Vedic thought holds that the best instrument of knowledge is the silent mind. This allows the mind itself, like an unflawed mirror, to directly reflect reality inside oneself. The mind becomes a reliable instrument of direct knowledge beyond the limitations of the senses. This silent mind is clearly defined in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and other texts as the state of *samadhi*. When the mind is in a state of peace and balance it becomes capable of directly perceiving the nature of things, which is consciousness and bliss. This is *samadhi-pramana*, *samadhi* as a means of knowledge in yogic thought, which opens up the inner world of the mind as clearly as our eyes open up the outer world of the senses.

In Vedic science, the meditative mind in *samadhi* is regarded as the appropriate instrument for knowing the inner reality. Pure consciousness, God or Brahman, after all, is beyond name, form, number, time, place and person or it would just be another object or entity in the outer world. That which comprises the totality but is not limited by the totality cannot be examined by the instruments that work to provide knowledge of limited things. This does not mean that examining the brain waves of meditators and other scientific experiments of this order are not of any value but that these are secondary and indirect means of knowing the internal reality, like trying to examine a person through their body as reflected in a mirror, rather than examining the body directly.

We must employ the right instrument of knowledge to gain adequate knowledge something. One cannot see the Sun with one's ears, for example. Only the eyes will reveal the light of the Sun. Similarly, the appropriate instrument for knowing the universal Being is not a limited instrument which looks externally, like a telescope, but the silent mind that is able to see within. Yet while *samadhi* may not be ordinarily recognized means of

knowledge in science, we must note that many great scientific discoveries have been made by scientists when they were in the reverie of the inspired, concentrated or peaceful mind, in a kind of *samadhi*. Those who do deep research or concentrating thinking also develop the mind in a yogic way that can fall into *samadhi*, even without knowing what the state is! One could argue that all great discoveries or inspirations arise in a *samadhi*-like state of absorption and concentration.

Yet *samadhis* cannot be taken without scrutiny either and, like any source of knowledge, they also can be limited, mixed or partial. They are of different types and lesser *Samadhis* may not yield entirely correct knowledge [8].

Important Vedic Sciences:

Vedic Sciences include both subtle or occult sciences like astrology and the inner science of Self-knowledge through Yoga and Vedanta. Yet it sees all sciences as related. All knowledge is ultimately self-knowledge. Our true self is not merely the human or psychological self but the universal Self. Each one of us is a unique manifestation of the universal consciousness, a human embodiment of it, but our true being is one with the entire universe, with all beings, and ultimately with the Absolute beyond all time and space (*Parabrahman*). The key even to understanding medicine or physics is to look at the forces of the universe as existing both within and around us as powers of consciousness – to our true being in the universe and the entire universe within ourselves.

Yogic Science:

Yoga in the classical sense is the practical means of developing the meditative mind to allow for direct perception of truth. As such, it is the basis of all the inner or Vedic sciences. *Vyasa*, the main ancient commentator on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, the most important classical text on Yoga, defines Yoga as *samadhi* or the mind free of conditioning and

preconception, the mind in a state of deep meditation. The Yoga Sutras begin with *Samadhi Pada* or the section dealing with Samadhi. The third and fourth sections of the book also deal mainly with *Samyama*, which is the joint practice of *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and Samadhi.

In the third section of the Yoga Sutras, different forms of knowledge gained by Samadhi are outlined. These include meditations on objects from sites in one's own body to the forces of nature that reveal both the nature of the universe and can grant superhuman powers. The greatest knowledge that can be revealed by *samadhi* is that of the *Purusha*, which is not only our true Self but the Self of the universe and yet, in its own nature, is beyond all manifestation.

The field of Yogic science is vast. It includes practices like *asana*, *pranayama*, ritual, mantra and meditation. It can reveal knowledge not only of our ordinary body and mind, but of all aspects of the collective and cosmic minds, extending to the very processes of creation. Yoga contains special ways of knowledge relative to the body, mind, *prana*, senses and consciousness internally and to the powers of energy, light, matter and space externally [9].

Ayurveda:

Yet the deeper knowledge not only relates to spiritual practices, but to bringing well-being to all aspects of our nature as well. In the Vedic sciences, human well-being is defined as the harmony of body, mind, *prana* and soul (*Atman* or *Purusha*). *Ayurveda*, Vedic medicine, shows us how to find health and well-being through understanding the forces of nature and consciousness both within and around us [10].

The main different between *Ayurveda* and what we could call scientific medicine is that it recognizes an underlying *prana* or vital energy behind all bodily activities. Modern medicine tries to explain all these processes, sometimes extending to human emotion and intelligence,

according to biochemistry alone, as if there were no conscious entity or force of life behind the process. In this regard, modern medicine is often more reductionist and physically based than is modern physics!

The concept of *prana* posits an overall field of energy and intelligence as a totalistic and holistic power to explain the factors of life at both individual and cosmic levels. As science is now looking for an underlying consciousness behind the universe to explain the laws of physics, it must also look to an underlying cosmic life-force behind life to explain its development. An organic system must include some unique being above and beyond its particular components, processes or chemical reactions.

Vedic Astrology:

If we live in a conscious universe, then the lights of the stars which illumine our world must reflect some power of consciousness as well. Jyotish or Vedic astrology is aimed at helping us understand how the lights of the stars and planets affect our own bodies and minds and the fate of our world as a whole.

Time is not simply a force of physics but a power of intelligence and a process of the manifestation of consciousness. Vedic astrology helps us understand the karmic influences coming to us from the greater universe as channeled through the sun, moon and planets of the solar system. It holds that time is not simply neutral or a mere continuum but reflects various rhythms which project forces that affect the life and karma of living beings [11].

That time is projecting karma through the movement of the luminaries or heavenly bodies are an idea that seems illogical to modern science. But if we recognize that the universe is pervaded by consciousness, we can recognize that light ultimately is a power of consciousness, which means that astronomy must recognize astrology [12].

Astronomers have often complained that astrology is illogical. Yet actions that go beyond time and space or the ordinary laws of physics are part and parcel of the new physics. With its quarks and quasars, its uncertainty principle and quantum mechanics, physics does not appear any stranger than astrology. Such subtle connections of the new physics may provide some eventual credence for astrology as well.

Conclusion:

A vast number of statements and materials presented in the ancient Vedic literatures can be shown to agree with modern scientific findings and they also reveal a highly developed scientific content in these literatures. The great cultural wealth of this knowledge is highly relevant in the modern world.

Once we recognize the place and value of both the outer and inner sciences, we can learn to use both to improve our lives on all levels. This should be our real work as a species and it can be a great adventure of discovery and transformation. This universal pursuit of knowledge can be used to set aside our political and religious differences, which are not a matter of truth or direct perception but of clashing beliefs and opinions. The ultimate unity of science and spirituality can provide a light forward to a true global age of peace and harmony. In such a world the inner technologies of Yoga will be found to be as important as the latest advances in technology, if not more so.

The Vedas are eternal. They are timeless. They are beyond the boundary of time and place. Today when humanity is facing problems like communalism, corruption, terrorism, and racism, the eternal knowledge of the Veda can

show the righteous path of universal peace, prosperity and harmony to the entire humanity.

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