

## Chapter V

### Rishis and Devatas of the Mantras

The general notion of the 'Western' Scholars and their Indian followers is that the Rishis whose names are mentioned on the Mantras are their composers and devatas are the deities to be worshipped. But this is a very erroneous view. By Rishis are meant, according to all ancient Authorities, the seers who made out the secrets of the Vedas and propagated them. Yaskacharya, the well known philologist and author of the Nirukta.says in 1-91.

साक्षात्कृतधर्माण ऋषयो बभूवुस्तेऽसाक्षात्कृतधर्मभ्य उपदेशेन मन्त्रान्  
सम्प्रादुः॥ निरुक्त १.१६॥

The original seers were men of realisation who saw or perfectly understood' the Dharma. They taught it to those who themselves had not realised it or were not inspired persons.

In Nirukta 2-11 Yaskacharya says –

ऋषयो मन्त्रद्रष्टारः ऋषिर्दर्शनात्स्तोमान् ददर्शेत्यौपमन्यवः। यदेनान्  
तपस्यमानान् ब्रह्म स्वयम्भू अभ्यानर्षत् तदृषीणामृषित्वमिति विज्ञापते॥

i.e. The Rishis are seers of the Mantras. The word Rishi means Drashta. Opaomanyava Acharya is of opinion that those who by austerities, realised the Yedic-hymns were called Rishis.”

The Taittiriya Aranyak (2-9-1) says similarly -

ऋषयो यत् एनान् तपस्यमानान् ब्रह्मस्वयम्भू अभ्यानर्षत् तेऋषयोऽभवन्  
तदृषयोऽभवन् तदृषीणामृषित्वम् ।

Those that after tapas or deep meditation realised the secret meaning of the Vedic Mantras, became Rishis by the Grace of the Almighty.

Thus it is evident that the Rishis whose names found over the Mantras or the hymns in printed books, were not the authors or the composers of the Mantras, but the seers who made out the Secret meaning of the Mantras and propagated them. Those who have not studied the Vedic Literature deeply, labour under the delusion that the names of Vasistha, Vishvamitra, Bharadvaja, Kanva, Jamadagni etc. that are found in some Vedic verses, stand for the names of the Rishis and therefore, the Vedas cannot be believed to be eternal. They were composed by the Rishis in different periods.

In the Meemansa Shastra, Jaimini has raised this Question of the historical names found in the Vedas through the aphorisms like अनित्यदर्शनाच्च मीमांसा १.२८ and has answered it in परन्तु श्रुतिसामान्यमात्रम्॥ मीमांसा १. ३१ i.e. In the Vedas there are no proper nouns denoting the names of certain persons, but only common nouns denoting certain attributes. For instance, the following meanings are given in the Shatapath Brahmana (which is a commentary on the Yajurveda) of some words of this type.

प्राणो वै वसिष्ठ ऋषिः॥ शतपथ ८.१.१.६॥  
मनो वै भारद्वाज ऋषिः॥ शतपथ ८.१.१.६॥  
श्रोत्रं वै विश्वामित्र ऋषिः॥ शतपथ ८.१.२.६॥  
प्रजापतिर्वै जमदग्निः ऋषिः॥ शतपथ ८.१.२.२॥  
प्राणो वा अंगिराः॥ शतपथ ६.१.२.२८॥  
वाग्वै विश्वकर्मा ऋषिः॥ शतपथ ८.१.२.६॥

i. e. Prana (Vital Breath) is called Vasishtha Rishi because it is the best. Mind is called Bharadvaja Rishi— the bearer of knowledge. Ear is called Vishvamitra Rishi, because it is friend of all. Eye and the Prajapati

(Lord) are called Jamadagni, Prana or vital breath is called Angirah. Vak or speech is called Vishva Karma, for it is with its help, that a man is able to do many works by expressing what is to be done.”

In the Nighantu— the Vedic Lexicon it is stated –

कण्व इति मेधाविनाम । निघण्टु ३.१५ ।

गृत्स इति मेधाविनाम । निघण्टु ३.१५ ।

ऋभुः इति मेधाविनाम । निघण्टु ३.१५ ।

Kanva does not mean in the Veda name of a particular sage, but a wise man in general. The same is the case with words Gritsa, Vena, Ribhu and others.

यदवः इति मनुष्यनाम निघ० २.३ । पूरवः इति मनुष्यनाम निघु० २.३ ।  
नहुष इति मनुष्यनाम । निघण्टु २.३ ।

It means that the words नहुषाः, यदवः, पूरवः etc. when found in the Vedas, do not stand for any particular persons or they are not proper nouns, but they denote men in general. This cuts at the root of the so called historical references in the Vedas.

The word अथर्वा (Atharva) is used for a non-violent Yogi who has steadied his mind, as it is derived from the root थर्व (Tharva) to be unsteady or restless. In the Nighantu we read थर्वतिश्चरतिकर्मा ५.३ ॥

According to Kashakritsna Dhatu Path, the root tharva थर्व means हिंसा or violence थर्व-हिंसायाम् Therefore अथर्वा (Atharva) means a non-violent Yogi. In Kausheetaki Brahmana of the Rigveda 25-2, 26-15 it is stated.

प्रजापतिर्वै वसिष्ठः॥ कौषीतकी ब्राह्मण २५.२.२६.१५ ॥

i.e. वसिष्ठः means God as well as the protector of the people.

In Gopath Brahmana Uttar 3-9 (commentary on the Atharva Veda) it is stated – येन श्रेष्ठस्तेन वसिष्ठः । (Vasishtha) means the best. In Shatapath 8-11-6 it is stated –

यद्वै नु श्रेष्ठस्तेन वसिष्ठः अथोयद् वस्तृतमो भवति तेनो एव वसिष्ठः॥  
शतपथ ब्राह्मणे ८.१.१.६॥

Here also the meaning of the word वसिष्ठः (Vasishtha) has been given as the best or one who bears the attributes of God to the largest extent.

In the Shatapath Brahman 13-2-2-44 the word जमदग्नि (Jamadagni) has been explained as प्रजापतिर्वै जमदग्निः ऋषिः Jamadagni is God or a King who protects his subjects well.

In the Ninukta, the word Jamadagni ( जमदग्नि ) has been used for a person Who performs Yajnas (non-violent sacrifices) properly and keeps in his home fire always burning.

जमदग्निभिराहुतः इति जमदग्नयः प्रजमिताग्नयो वाप्रज्वलिताग्नयो वा॥  
निरुक्त० ७.७.२४॥

The word अत्रि (Atri) which means tongue according to the Shatapath 14-5-2-2 वागेवात्रिर्वाचा ह्यन्नमद्यते अत्तिर्ह वै नामैतद् यदन्निरिति means also a Sanyasi when it is derived from यत्—सातत्यगमने he Who moves from place to place for preaching Dharma. Hundreds of such passages can be quoted.

So it is wrong to take such words वसिष्ठ, विश्वामित्र, जमदग्नि, भारद्वाज etc. when they are found in the Vedic Mantras as the names of particular seers. They should be taken as common nouns denoting certain attributes and persons who possess them. It should always be borne in mind that

all Vedic words are Yougikas or derivatives as clearly stated by Yaskacharya in “Nirukta 1-4-11.

नामानि आख्यातजानि इति नैरुक्तसमयः॥ निरुक्त १.४.११॥

i.e. All nouns are dervied from verbal roots or dhatus and therefore in Vedas रुढि (rudhi) or arbitrary meanings are never used. They are resolvable to their roots. The Sage Patanjali – the distinguished grammaratarian – author of the Mahabhashya has said the same thing.

Many grammartarians like Shakatayana and others accept the above principle in toto.

Even Prof. Max. Muller had to admit this important principle of the Vedic Terminology willy-nilly saying:—

“But there is a Charm in the primitive strains discoverable in no other class of poetry. Every word retains something of its radical meaning, every epithet tells, every thought, in spite of the most intricate and abrupt expressions, is if one disentangles it, true, complete.” (Max Muller’s Hisory of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, Page 553)

Two Insurmountable difficulties in accepting Rishis as Authors or Composers of the Mantras.

1. There are several Mantras whose Rishis are a hundred or more. For instance, in.Rig. 9-66-19 and Sama Veda 627, 1464 we find the following well-known mantra.

अग्न आयूंषि पवसासुवोर्जमिषं च नः । आरे बाधस्व दुच्छुनाम् ॥

About its Rishis, it is stated वैसानसा ऋषयः i e. There are one hundred Banaprasthas as its Rishis. Is it reasonable to believe that one hundred Rishis composed together this short Mantra of 24 letters ? How absurd

the idea looks ? In Rig. 9-11-53 and Sama Veda 653 we find the following Mantra स नः पवस्व शं गवे शं जनाय शमर्वते । शं राजन्नोषधीभ्यः॥ About its Rishis also, it is stated वैसानसा ऋषयः i.e. its Rishis are one hundred Banaprasthas. How absurd it is to suppose that one hundred seers composed this short Mantra of about 24 letters? On the other hand, if we take Rishis to be the seers of the Mantras, who pondered over them and preached to others about it, there is no difficulty at all. In Rig. 8-34 we find 3 Mantras beginning with एन्द्र वाहिहरिभिः about which it is stated वसुरोचिषोऽगिरसः सहस्रसख्याका ऋषयः There are one thousand seers as their Rishis. Is it reasonable to believe that one thousand seers assembled to compose these short Mantras? It is absurd on the very face of it. On the other hand if we accept the Rishis to be the seers and preachers of the Mantras, there is no difficulty in taking one thousand or even more seers to be their Rishis.

2. The second insurmountable difficulty in accepting the Rishis as authors of the Mantras is the use of the Superlative degree with the so-called names of the Rishis in the following besides many others.

In Rig. 1-48-4 we read:—

अत्राह तत् कण्व एषां कण्वतमो नाम गृणाति नृणाम्॥

In Rig. 10-115-5 we read स इदग्निः कण्वतमः कण्व सखायः॥

in Rig. 1-100-4 we find सो अंगिरोभिरंगिरस्तमोऽभूत्॥

In Rig. 1-107-6 we read त्वं विप्रो भवोऽगिरस्तमः॥

In Rig 7-79-3 we read अभूदुषा इन्द्रतमा मधोनी अंगिरस्तमा सुकृते वसूनि॥

No where the superlative degree is used with the proper nouns. But in the above and many other Mantra, we find adjectives like कण्वतमः, अंगिरस्तमः, इन्द्रतमः etc. which are possible only when all these words like Kanva, Angira and Indra are taken as derivatives meaning:—

कण्व इति मेधाविनाम (निघु० ६.५) अंगिरा उ ह्यग्निः॥ शतपथ १.४.१. २५ ॥ प्राणो वा अंगिराः॥ शतपथ ३.१.२.२८ ॥ इन्द्रो वै देवानामोजिष्ठो बलिष्ठः॥ कौषीतकी ६.१४ ॥ इति परमैश्वर्ये ।

a wise man, a knower of the science of agni (fire) and Prana and the most heroic person etc.

## **The Devatas of the Mantras.**

What is meant by the devata of a Mantra ? Generally Western Scholars translate the word devata as a deity. But that is misleading and wrong. By devata of Mantra is not meant deity, but the subject matter. In the Sarvanukramani it is stated या तेन उच्यते सा देवता i.e. the subject matter of the Mantra is called देवता Devata. Yaskacharya the famous author of the Nirukta also says the same thing. यत्काम ऋषिर्यस्यां देवतायामार्थपत्यम् इच्छन् स्तुतिं प्रयुक्तेतम् दैवतः स मन्त्रो भवति ॥ i.e. When God, desiring to impart instruction about a particular object, describes its properties in a Mantra, it is said to have that object as its devata. That is why there are many abstract ideas mentioned as devatas. For instance Shraddha - genuine faith-is the devata of Rig. 10-151. धनदानप्रशंसा or praise of charity is the devata of Rig. 10-117 दक्षिणा or largess is the devata of Rig. 10-107 अरण्यानी (dense forest) is the devata of Rig. 10-146 घृतनिन्दा

or the Censure of gambling is the devata of Rig. 10-34 ओषधयः or herbs of Rig. 10-101 etc. These are sufficient to show that by devata is meant the subject matter of the Mantra and not a deity which is to be worshipped.