

वृत्तपत्राचे नांव :- दि न्यु इंडिया एक्सप्रेस
वृत्तपत्र प्रकाशनाचे ठिकाण :- कोची
वृत्तपत्र पान क्र :- 10
दिनांक :- 10/08/07

Rigveda belongs to world, not just India

BY RANJIT KUMAR DASH

THE UNESCO recently placed the Rigveda on its World Heritage List. Weeks later, in the same country where the UN is headquartered, it met with a reception that says little has changed in how the world views the Vedas, UN recognition or no.

It was an eclectic first when the US Senate opened with recitation from the Rigveda. The priest, Rajan Zed, had barely begun his 90-second Vedic prayer to mark the opening of the US Upper House, when a few Christian fundamentalists protested: "Lord Jesus, protect us from this abomination." Zed just carried on: "Lead us from unreal to real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality."

What is so unacceptable about these words? Zed had begun with the Gayatri mantra — a prayer that mentions no sectarian god-head, a prayer every American who goes to a yoga studio in the US or an ashram in Haridwar, would not mind saying. The same holds true for the other prayer, from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: "Lead us from... (Asato ma sad-gamaya...)" — which is sort of de rigueur at the end of

any traditional yogic session.

Where physical well-being is the focus, there is no objection to any package where Vedic prayers feature. But the same ideas and sentiments, rendered into English, turn out to be a no-no — even "evil" — if their use widens.

While this is not the first time that higher thoughts from India are stirring interest abroad, obscurantist objections are inevitable, given the regimentation within organised religions today. The appeal of this Veda, in the current wave of renewed interest, could possibly outweigh the kind of hide-bound reactions we saw last month in the US. But not before a thing or two are addressed. First, there is a general ignorance about what the Rigveda essentially is.

So how best to focus international attention on it? As scripture from a prehistoric ethos of sky gods and chants for their propitiation in what came to be known as brahmanic rituals? Or as a body of composition to which only a section of the humanity can relate? Or,

indeed, as the first artefact of intellect where the mind is finding itself in contemplation, postulating immortality, dwelling upon eternity?

In a world now buried under best-sellers which survive a week, not many know that the Rigveda is what can be called man's first footprint on logos. It records the first glimmers of man's cognitive engagement, as it were, with the world in the making.

No one knows for sure how the Vedas came into existence. The dates assigned to them vary greatly, their provenance going back to a formidable oral tradition drawn between 6000 and 1250 BCE. Tradition has it that the Vedas are ever-existent (nitya) and of impersonal origin (apaurusheya) — which is to be understood as composition by seers, of anonymous antiquity, in a state of inspiration.

The Rigveda is the most important for its scope and originality, the other three — Yajur, Sama, and Atharva — in part derived from it. While the main body of each Veda is the respective

Samhita (recension), there are massive appendices (of ritual manuals) to the recensions, known as Brahmanas, and the Upanishads, which are in turn appendices to the Brahmanas. Together with the mystical Aranyakas, the Samhita, Brahmanas and the pre-eminently philosophical Upanishads complete the Vedic corpus.

Being the fount of India's gnostic tradition of free enquiry, the Rigveda proffers different theories of creation, including the ex-nihilo variety, with their scintillating insights into the nature of man and the universe in Nasadiya Sukta through Purusha Sukta. The Rigveda has an overarching monistic world view, where we do meet a skyful of gods; but the idea of One Ultimate Principle prevails. Here there is not even the later antinomy between soul and substance — purusha and prakriti.

The Vedas go beyond the scope of the usual scripture. The Rigveda contains the seeds of the sciences including astronomy and mathematics, and foreshadows later schools philosophy, social ideals and economic concepts.