

## Parallelism in Interpreting The Veda

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In a well known Rik<sup>1</sup>, Rishi, Deerghatamas exhorts that one must needs know the meaning of the Vedic Riks with a view to understanding the nature of the gods who dwell in the highest heaven sitting on the imperishable (seat of) Riks. Since then immense efforts have been made to understand the Veda by ancient and modern scholars.

The Vedas are not the creations of individual Rishi -poets in isolation from each other. They are conscious and concerted works of the Rishi-poets who were well aware of fellow poets' poetic creations. The Vedas were widely recited and understood by a large section of Vedic society, particularly the priestly elite class. In this connection, the words *vidatha* (RV 2.1.16d, etc.)<sup>2</sup> and *vaajin* (RV 10.71.5, etc.)<sup>3</sup>, frequently found in Vedic literature, are significant. *Vidatha* was a kind of meeting place within the ambience of Vedic rites and rituals, where Rishi-poets of older generations (*pratnaasaha*)<sup>4</sup> and younger ones (*nootanaasaha*)<sup>5</sup>, and also Vedic intelligentsia used to meet, discuss, and exchange views, and where Rishi-poets recited their poetic works. It is worthy to note here the following remark of Gonda: "the (Vedic) audience knew to whom the events narrated (in the Vedas) were to be associated".<sup>6</sup>

Many times, one comes across a word or a phrase which apparently does not give out clear meaning. Some times the segregation of some passages from the main theme and their isolated and independent usages elsewhere pose difficulty in understanding the meaning. In such cases, parallel passages of identical nature or mythological legends help, to a great extent, in deciding the meaning which otherwise is not clear. Vedic poetry is a coherent and well-knit work of Rishi-poets, who, it appears, were well conversant with other Rishis' poetic creations.

In this light, we take up a few verses from the Veda and see how parallelism can help in understanding the meaning. It may be pointed out that there must have been some kind of norms or even theories which were followed by the Rishi-poets.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, in order to interpret the Veda, one must needs have a holistic approach and look at the Veda in totality, as it seems, the Vedic Rishi-poets themselves had.

RV 2.13.9 reads:

zt< va ySy dz sakma\* @kSy iüàE yĭ caedmeivw,  
Ar³4aE dSyUNTSmunBdÉItye suàaVyae AÉv> saSyuKWyh.

What do the numerals *shatam dasha* in the Rik indicate? Ludwig changes the reading *vaa yasya* in the verse as *daasasya*.

Following him, Griffith translates the verse as:

You bound up the Daasa's hundred friends and ten, when at one's hearing, thou helpst your worshipper. You for Dabheeti bound Dasyus (but) not with cords, you were a mighty help; worthy of lauds you are.

This translation is not convincing. Firstly, because Griffith opines that the words *vaa yasya* in the verse are unintelligible, and, following Ludwig, changes *vaa yasya* to *daasasya*. Secondly, he supplies the word 'friends' to explain *shatam dasha*, for which there is no word in the verse.

Now going back to our *shatam dasha* in RV 2.13.9 which does not have a noun to qualify, how does one understand the words *shatam dasha*? It is *Saayana*, who borrows the word *harayaha* from RV 6.47.18 to explain *shatam dasha*. *Saayana* with his very deep and comprehensive knowledge of the Vedas has convincingly explained it as follows:

he #NÔ @kSy @kaikn> iëóSy va ySy te iüàE suoinimÄe tdwRm! zt< dz dz ztain hryae vahnaw; ÉviNt, twa c mÛv[R>- #NÔae mayaiÉ>

puéêp \$yte yu 'a ýSy hry> zta dz' (\. s<.6.47.18) #it,

It may be pointed out that *shatam dasha*, without a noun, occurs in the second *mandala* (2.13.9) and *shatam dasha* with the noun *harayaha* occurs in the sixth *mandala* (6.47.13). It is to the credit of the great knowledge of Saayana that he has supplied the word *harayaha* from 6.47.18 to explain *shatam dasha* in 2.13.9. Thus, following Saayana, the verse may be translated as follows:

O Indra, for your complete pleasure, a thousand horses are ready (to be yoked to your chariot) ...

But how did the Vedic Rishi-poets know that *Shatam dasha* in the second *mandala* without a noun would be understood as *shataa dasha harayaha* in the sixth *mandala* by two different Rishis (Gritsamada and Bhaaradvaja respectively)? The answer is the same: *vidatha* which was a meeting place for the Rishi-poets and which enabled them to know each other's poetic creations. What decides the meaning of *shatam dasha* in the second *mandala* is the awareness of the Rishi-poet of *shataa dasha harayaha* in the sixth *mandala*. Thus parallel usage of *shataa dasha harayaha* helps to explain *shatam dasha* (without a noun). Saayana took the help of the parallel passage, but Ludwig and Griffith did not. Hence, these scholars changed *vaa yasya* to *daasasya* and supplied 'friends' to explain the words *shatam dasha*. The poet in the first half of the *Rik* is not talking about the hundred and ten 'friends' of *Daasa* (that he does in the second half of the *Rik*) but *Indra's* great chariot yoked with a thousand horses, as he is always ready to come to the succour of those who need it.

### Adjective as Substantive

Parallelism also helps in understanding the meaning of adjectives which are often used without substantives, and, in many cases, themselves function as substantives.<sup>8</sup> The adjective *shyaavaaha* (dark coloured) has been used in *RV* 1.126.3 without a noun.

%p ma Zyava> Svnyen dÄa vxUmNtae dz rwasae ASwu>,

;ið> shömnu gVymagaTsnTk]Iva~ AiÉipTve Aûam!.

In *RV* 8.46.22, a feminine form of *shyaava* i.e., *shyaaveenaam* occurs :

;ið< shöaZVySyayutasnmuð+ana< ivzit< zta,

dz ZyavIna< zta dz Èyé;I[a< dz gva< shöa.

Here again without a noun.

In the first instance *shyaavaaha* stands for *shyaavavarnaaha* as (dark coloured horses) and in the second instance *shyaaveenaam* stands for *shyaavavarnaanaam vadavaanaam* (of dark coloured mares). But, again, what is the basis for supplying *ashvaaha* in the first instance and *vadavaaha* in the second? The adjective *shyaaveenaam* occurs in *RV* 8.46.22 cd. In the same *sookta*, the following *mantra* (8.46.23 ab) has *shyaavaaha* with the substantive *aashavaha* and the word *dasha*.

dz Zyava \xÔyae vItvarase Aazv>,

m×a neim< in vav&t>.

RV 8.46.23

### Saayana Explains:

dz dzs<Oyaka> Zyava> Zyv[v[aR> Aazv> Aña> neim< rwneim< in vav&tu> invtRyiNt, rw< vhNtITywr>, \$†zaSte \dÔy> àv&Ïvega> vItvaras> ³aNtbla> àaÝbla va Aazv> mWna mwznIla>,

Hence on the parallelism of *shyaavaaha aashavaha* in vs. 23, one can understand *shyaaveenaam* in the previous vs. 22 as *shyaaveenaam vadavaanaam*. Both the words occur in the eighth *mandala* and the Rishi is the same, namely, *Vasa*. But the case in *RV* 1.126.3 where *shyaavaaha* occurs without a noun, is different. Here the Rishi is *Kaksheevaana*. How did he know that his usage of *shyaavaaha* without a noun would be understood as *shyaavaaha* with *ashvaaha*? The answer lies in the same concept of *vidatha* and the Rishi-poets' awareness of other Rishis' poetic works.

Similarly, the adjective *shyetaasaha* occurs, again without a substantive, in the fifth *mandala*:

vhNtu ma dz Zyetasae ASy gaEiri]tSy ³tuiÉnuR sñe

RV 5.33.8 cd

Here *dasha shyetaasaha* stands for *dasha shyetaasaha ashvaaha*.

An interesting usage of the numeral *dasha* occurs in the *Shatarudriya* mantras (VS 16.64-66).<sup>9</sup>

The second part of the mantra:

*te\_yae dz àacIdRz di][a dz àtIcIdRzaedIcIdRzaeXvaR>* is to be considered. What does the numeral *daṛa*, which occurs here without a substantive, indicate? Here again one has to take recourse to the parallel usages of *daṛa* with or without a noun. The numeral *daṛa* in the *Īgveda* has been used with the following words:

1. *Kshipaha* (fingers)

*dasha kshipaha* (ten fingers): RV 3.23.3; 5.43.4; etc.

2. *Svasaaraha* (sisters)

*dasha svasaaraha* (ten sisters : ten fingers) :  
RV 3.23.13; 9.1.7; etc.

3. *Yoshanaha* (maidens)

*dasha yoshanaha* (ten maidens : ten fingers) :  
RV 9.6.5; 9.56.3; etc.

4. *Haritaha* (green ones)

*dasha haritaha* (ten green ones: ten fingers): RV 9.39.3

5. *Yuvatayaha* (maidens)

*dasha yuvatayaha* (ten maidens : ten directions):  
RV 1.95.2

6. *Dheetayaha*

*dasha dheetayaha* (ten Intelligent ones; ten fingers) :  
RV 1.144.5 (cf 1.141.2)

The above data reveals that the numeral *dasha* has been used, in the *Rigveda*, with the substantives *kship*, *svasr*, *yoshan*, *harit*, and *dheeti*, all of which mean ‘finger’ metaphorically. In the Vedic sacrifices, ten fingers are employed either for pressing the Soma or for churning out fire from the two *Aranis*. In this connection, there seems to be a set pattern in using the numeral *dasha*. It is found that *dasha* with *svasaaraha*, *yoshanaha*, and *kshipaha* refers to Soma pressing. And *dasha* with *yuvatayaha* and *dheetayaha* refers to Agni. The words *svasaaraha*, *yuvatayaha*, *yoshanaha*, *dheetayaha*, etc. in the proximity of the word *daṛa* mean ‘ten fingers’. Once this meaning had been established, it was widely used and understood, so much so that the numeral *dasha* became as if infused with the meaning ‘fingers’, and the Rishi-poets often used *dasha* to mean fingers without actually using a word for ‘finger’.

Now, on this data let us go back to VS 16.64-66. The context here is the pacification of Rudra by reciting the *Shatarudriya* mantras after the fire altar has been completely built. While the *Shatarudriya* recitation is coming to the end, the *Adhvaryu*, who recites it, while reciting the concluding three mantras under consideration, folds his two hands, and continuing with the recitation, turns to the east, to the south, to the west, to the north, and then raises both his folded hands upward. Therefore, *dasha* in the mantra refers to ten fingers of his both hands raised up in salutation. This can be understood only by the help of parallel occurrences in which the word *dasha* has been used, or by actually watching the *Shatarudriya* performance.

The structure of Vedic poetry has certain set patterns which were accepted and adopted by the Rishi-poets in general. They were well conversant with other poets’ poetic works. Parallelism is a device that helps in understanding the meaning of a word or a phrase or a verse.

### References and Notes

1. \cae A]re prme Vyaemn! yiSmNdeva Aix ivñe inzeÊ>, yStNt ved ikm&ca kirZyit y #t! tdœ ivÊSt #me smaste.

RV 1.164.39

2. b&hdœ vdem ivdxe suvIra>.

3. %t Tv< sOye iSwrpItma-nERn< ihNvNTyip vaijne;u,

AxeNva crit mayyE; vac< zuiuva~ A)lmpu:pam!.

RV 10.71.5

4 RV 4.2.16; 5.8.1; 6.21.5

5 RV 6.21.5; 6.27.1; 6.27.2.

6 J. Gonda, *Ellipsis, Brachylogy, and other forms of Brevity in Speech in the Rigveda*, Vknhaw - Letterkunde, n.r. 67 (4), Amsterdam 1960, 25.

7 See the Select Bibliography.

8 Gonda, *op.cit.*, p.17; J.S. Speyer, *Sanskrit Syntax*, Leiden, 1886, 179f.

9 These three mantras form the concluding part of the Shatarudriya litany.

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