

Bhagavata Dharma.

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Sir Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar has tried to prove in his book "Vaishnavism, Shaivism and minor religious systems" that the ancient Vedic religion was reformed by persons who did not believe in the efficacy of Vedic sacrifices and that, as a result of such a reform, a new religion arose which was called Bhāgavata Dharma, and that in this religion the worship of Vāsudeva was at first introduced and later on some new names were given to Vāsudeva like Kṛṣṇa, Govinda, out of which the name Kṛṣṇa was derived from the word Christ. The conclusions arrived at by Bhandarkar have been generally accepted by the modern scholars who follow the Western lines of research. I shall attempt to examine in this article how far the conclusions of Bhandarkar are tenable.

Bhandarkar says that the doctrines of the Bhāgavata Dharma were first compiled in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. It follows, therefore, that, if according to the tenets of the Bhāgavata Dharma sacrifices were inefficacious, the doctrine should have been mentioned in the *Gītā*. But nowhere in the *Gītā* can this doctrine be found. On the other hand, there is clear mention in the *Gītā* that it is good to perform sacrifices and that they should not be given up, that, by performing sacrifices with desire for the fruits thereof, one may attain heaven,

whereas by performing sacrifices without desire for the fruits the mind becomes free from impurity and fit for the reception of *Brahma Jñāna* (Divine knowledge). In fact, the opinion of the *Gītā* on the subject of sacrifices is exactly the same as that of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. The theory of Bhandarkar that as regards sacrifices the *Gītā* preaches doctrines which are contrary to the Vedas is therefore not true. Following is a translation of the *Gītā* 3rd chapter, 10 to 13 verses, "Prajāpati in the remote past created men along with sacrifices and told them 'You will flourish with the help of the sacrifices. These sacrifices will give you your desired objects. You should worship the gods with these sacrifices and the gods will then shower blessings on you. In this way you should help each other and attain the highest good.' If the gods are worshipped by means of sacrifices, they will give you desired objects. The person, who enjoys the things of the world without offering them to the gods from whom he receives them, is a thief. The person who enjoys the remnants of sacrifices is freed from all sins. The man who cooks for himself merely eats sins." The 20th and 21st verses of the 9th chapter of the *Gītā* run as follows: "Those who perform sacrifices according to the Vedas and pray for heaven go to heaven after

death and enjoy heavenly pleasures. When their *Puṇyas* (merits) come to an end they are born again in this world." The Vedas and the Upaniṣads say the same thing about sacrifices. Hence, it is not true that, according to the *Gītā* or the Bhāgavata Dharma sacrifices are inefficacious. In the 5th verse of the 18th chapter of the *Gītā* the Lord says, "Sacrifices, charities and austerities should never be given up. They should be performed. By performing them, a man becomes pure." In the 11th verse of the 17th chapter of the *Gītā* it has been said that a Sattvik sacrifice is that which is performed in accordance with the injunctions (of the Śāstras) and in the 13th verse it has been said that a sacrifice which is not performed in accordance with the injunctions (of the Śāstras) is *Tāmasa* sacrifice, that is to say, a sacrifice of a very inferior kind. From these verses it is clear that, according to the *Gītā*, sacrifices should be performed in accordance with the injunctions of the Vedas. If the intention of the *Gītā* had been otherwise, it would have been no doubt mentioned explicitly.

Bhandarkar thinks that in the story of King Vasu Uparichara in the Śānti Parva of the *Mahābhārata*, a religion has been preached which is against the Vedas. For, Vasu Uparichara performed an Aśwamedha sacrifice but did not kill a horse, and God was pleased with his sacrifice and showed Himself personally to the King. Bhandarkar says that, from this story, it is clear that in the opinion of the author, sacrifices and

austerities are inefficacious, because those who perform sacrifices and austerities cannot see God, but Vasu Uparichara saw God on account of his devotion. This conclusion of Bhandarkar is also wrong. In the Vedas it is nowhere laid down that God can be seen by a person who performs the Aśwamedha sacrifice. It has merely been said that by performing this sacrifice one can go to heaven. If in the story of Vasu Uparichara it had been shown that, by performing this sacrifice, one could not go to heaven, then it could have been said that the story was against the Vedas. But this doctrine has nowhere been propounded in the story. It cannot, therefore, be concluded that the author of this story considered that sacrifices were inefficacious. It may be observed that it has been stated in the Vedas that God cannot be attained by learning the Vedas, and that He reveals Himself to those with whom He is pleased.

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो  
 न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।  
 यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्य-  
 स्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तन् २ स्वाम् ॥

( *Kathopanishad* 1. 2. 23 )

"Brahma cannot be attained by learning or intelligence. He reveals His Self to those whom He chooses."

The religion which is preached by the story of Vasu Uparichara can never be against the Vedas. This will be clear by considering some comments made in the *Mahābhārata* in this connection. In the introduction

to the Bhāgavata Dharma, it has been said that Nārada bowed down to Nārāyaṇa and said "Lord, Your qualities have been described in the Vedas, Vedāngas and Purāṇas" (Śānti Parva 345 chapter). It is thus clear that what has been called *Brahma* in the Vedas has been called *Nārāyaṇa* in the *Bhāgavata Dharma* and that there is no difference between the objects of worship. Again in the same chapter, it has been said "The Brahmachāris who study the Vedas and also men belonging to other Āśramas can pass to the supreme state of existence by worshipping Him and attaining His grace." In the next chapter Nārada says "I have carefully studied the Vedas and performed austerities. By means of these acts my heart has been purified." In this chapter it has also been said that the original book on the Bhāgavata religion was written by the seven sages Marīchi, Atri, etc., and that this religion is in accordance with the four Vedas. It has again been said that this Śāstra is not inconsistent with the four Vedas. At the end of this chapter it has been said that this Śāstra has its origin in the Vedas and the Vedāntas. In the next chapter it has been described that the followers of Vasu Uparichara went to the White Island in order to see the supreme Being mentioned in the Bhāgavata Dharma and that there they saw that sages devoted to God were uttering the *Brahma Mantra* and kept their mind fixed upon *Brahma*. From these passages, it is clear that the Supreme Being mentioned in the Bhāgavata Dharma

is no other than the *Brahma* of the Upaniṣads, and that the Bhāgavata Dharma is based on the Vedas. Bhandarkar is, therefore, wrong when he says that this religion is not in accordance with the Vedas.

Bhandarkar says that in the Bhāgavata Dharma God was at first called by the name Vāsudeva and that his name Kṛṣṇa was afterwards given to Him. He also says that Kṛṣṇa is a corruption of Christ and hence in Gujerat and in Bengal Kṛṣṇa is called Kuṣṭa and Kṛṣṭa. But Bhandarkar himself admits that the *Gītā* was written in the fourth century B. C. The word Kṛṣṇa is found in the *Gītā*. It is also found in the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali which was written long before the advent of Christ. In these circumstances, how can it be said that the word Kṛṣṇa has been derived from the word Christ? The word Kṛṣṭa has been used in Bengal long after the word Kṛṣṇa was used in the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas. Hence, it cannot be said that the Christ was at first changed into the word Kṛṣṭa and then into Kṛṣṇa. As a matter of fact, the word Kṛṣṇa has been changed into Kṛṣṭa, and neither the word Kṛṣṭa nor Kṛṣṇa have been derived from the word Christ. Bhandarkar's conclusion in this respect are absolutely untenable. In this connection, Bhandarkar has started another theory. In the Vedas there is a Ṛṣi called Kṛṣṇa. He fancies that after the Bhāgavata Dharma was preached Vāsudeva was identified with this Ṛṣi Kṛṣṇa.

If this theory be accepted, how can it be held that the word Kṛṣṇa has been derived from Christ? For the Vedas must have been composed long before Christ? It will thus be seen that the theories of Bhandarkar are also self-contradictory.

It is true that in the *Gītā* there is mention of incarnation of God, and that in the Vedas there is no clear mention of incarnation. But from that the doctrine of incarnation cannot be considered to be against the Vedas. In the *Kena Upaniṣad* it is found that *Brahma* appeared in the form of a halo and subsequently assumed the extremely beautiful form of Umā, the daughter of Himāwat and spoke to the gods. If *Brahma* can assume a definite form, there can also be incarnation. *Brahma* is all-powerful. He must, therefore, have the power of being incarnated. It must also be remembered that many portions of the Vedas have been lost and in those lost portions there might have been mention of the incarnations. In any case, there can be no objection to consider that the doctrine of incarnation, as preached in the *Gītā*, is a natural development of the idea of *Brahma* as preached in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. From a seed comes a tree and from the tree come out flowers. There is no contradiction between the flower and the seed. One who is far-seeing enough can see in the seed the existence of the flower. In the same way, from the doctrine of unmanifested *Brahma* comes the doctrine of the manifested *Brahma* and from that the doctrine

of incarnation. One, whose vision is limited, may consider the aspects to be different. But one who is capable of taking a comprehensive view, can realize in them stages in the development of the same idea. Hence, there is no conflict between the religion of the Vedas and the religion of the *Gītā*. In fact, they are both the same religion. The *Gītā* describes God in the same way as He has been described by the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. In some places of the *Gītā*, verses of the Upaniṣads have been reproduced verbatim or with very slight alteration. We find in the *Gītā* mention of the minor deities, like Indra, who are mentioned in the Vedas. The *Gītā* supports sacrifices by means of which these minor gods have to be worshipped in accordance with the Vedas. The *Gītā*, no doubt, condemns performance of sacrifices with the intention of attaining heaven, but such condemnation does not proceed from the idea that it is not possible to attain heaven by means of sacrifices. The idea is that as a man has to be born again in the world after residence in heaven, attainment of heaven cannot be regarded as the highest aim of life. The *Gītā* lays down, as the basis of society, the division into the four castes which are mentioned in the Vedas and Upaniṣads. In the *Puruṣasukta* of the *R̥g Veda*, the four castes are clearly mentioned. In many other passages in the Vedas, the names of the castes are to be found. The Upaniṣads clearly mention caste as determined by birth. The *Gītā*

supports the same system. When Arjuna refused to fight as it involved killing his relatives and superiors and was prepared to adopt the profession of begging, the Lord says that, although it might, on a superficial view, appear to be cruel, yet it was the duty of Arjuna to fight in a righteous war as he was a Kṣatriya. In the 18th chapter, 45 and 46 verses of the *Gītā*, we find that every person should perform the duties laid down for the caste in which he is born and he should consider that, by performing those duties, he is carrying out the commands of God, and is, in fact, worshipping Him. In this way, the idea of worshipping God has been blended into the daily duties of a Hindu and the religious idea has been disseminated among all castes.

The Vedas and the Upaniṣads mention rebirth according to *Karma*. The *Gītā* also does so. In fact, Kṛṣṇa preached a religion in accordance with the Vedas and not against the Vedas. Vedic scholars, like Śankara and Rāmānuja, have also said that the religion of the *Gītā* is the same as the religion of the Vedas. In spite of all this Bhandarkar says that Kṛṣṇa preached a new religion in the *Gītā* ("an independent sect").

Bhandarkar says in the introduction to his book that the Vedas and the Upaniṣads are a collection of many irreconcilable theories. It is well known that Āchāryas, like Śankara and Rāmānuja, have declared that the Hindu religion is based on

the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. They have repeatedly declared that whatever the Vedas say must be true. If the Vedas and Upaniṣads contain many irreconcilable statements, no intelligent man can declare them to be true. Were Śankara and Rāmānuja so lacking in intelligence that they characterized as wholly true a book which contained any contradictory statement. The old Vedic scholars had noticed long ago that there are some apparent discrepancies between different passages of the Vedas. But on considering the matter more deeply, they realized that it was possible to effect reconciliation between apparently contradictory passages. Jaimini in his *Pūrova Mimāmsa* has indicated the methods by which these discrepancies can be reconciled. These methods have been followed in the *Uttara Mimāmsa* and a complete system of religion and philosophy has been built on the Upaniṣads. Sāyaṇa has explained the entire Vedas in accordance with these principles and Śankarāchārya has written lengthy commentaries on the principal Upaniṣads. These scholars must have considered that they have been able to reconcile these apparently contradictory portions in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Without pointing out wherein they were wrong, Bhandarkar has pronounced a summary verdict that the Vedas are full of irreconcilable statements.

Bhandarkar fancies that at first a doubt arose in the mind of many persons whether the Vedic sacrifices were inefficacious, and that from such doubts originated the Upaniṣads. If

this theory is true, then it is to be admitted that the Vedas contain contradictory statements, for the Upaniṣads are part of the Vedas. But in the Upaniṣads nowhere has any doubt been expressed as to whether sacrifices can lead to heaven. On the other hand, in many places it has been clearly stated that one can attain heaven by means of sacrifices. A few instances are given below:—

एष तेऽग्निर्नचिकेतः स्वर्गोऽयमवृणीथा द्वितीयेन वरेण ।

( *Kathopanishad* 1. 1. 19 )

Yama says to Nachiketâ:—

“One can attain heaven by performing sacrifices with the help of the fire about which I have told you. You wanted to know it as your second boon.”

इष्टापूर्तं मन्यमाना वरिष्ठं नान्यच्छ्रेयो वेदयन्ते प्रमूढाः ।

नाकस्य पृष्ठे ते सुकृतेऽनुभूत्वेमं लोकं हीनतरं वा विशन्ति ॥

( *Mundaka Upanishad* 1. 2. 10 )

“Those who consider that performance of sacrifices, constructing wells, etc. are the best work, go to heaven as a result of such work, but are born again either on the earth or in a worse place.”

य इमे ग्राम इष्टापूर्ते दत्तमित्युपासते । एष सोमो राजा ।

( *Chhandogya Upanishad* 5. 19. 3-4 )

“Those who perform sacrifices, dig wells, make gifts, attain a divine body in the heaven.”

In fact, the reason why it is necessary to know *Brahma* is not that one cannot attain heaven by means of sacrifices. The reason is that the heaven is not everlasting, and when the merits come to an end, one has to be born again on the earth. But on knowing *Brahma* one

has not to be born again on this earth. One can attain *Mokṣa* after death.

परीक्ष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्राह्मणो निवेदमायात्रास्त्यक्तः कृतेन ।  
तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् ॥

( *Mundaka Upanishad* 1. 2. 12 )

“A Brahmin should consider that the heaven, which he can attain by performing sacrifices and such other work, cannot be infinite. Hence he should go to a preceptor to know *Brahma*.”

From these passages it is clear that, according to the Upaniṣads, Vedic sacrifices are not inefficacious but enable the person to attain heaven. The contrary theory laid down by Bhandarkar must be considered to be wrong.

Bhandarkar says that Śrī Chaitanya condemned the caste system. This is also wrong. It has been mentioned in the *Chaitanya-charitāmṛta* in connection with his journey from Puri to Brindaban that he took food at the house of a Brahmin if there was any in the village, and that if there was no Brahmin in the village his companion ( a Brahmin ) would cook the food. It has been mentioned in the *Chaitanya Bhāgavata* that he fell ill on his way to Gaya and drank the water with which the feet of a Brahmin was washed for the cure of his illness. The only fact mentioned by Bhandarkar in support of his statement that Śrī Chaitanya condemned the caste system was that he accepted even Mohammedans as his disciples. But there is no rule in the caste system that a Mohammedan cannot be accepted as a disciple.

