

ROLE OF ĀRAṆYAKAS IN VEDIC LITERATURE

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Āraṇyakas constitute the third stage of development of the Vedic literature. They are placed in between Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads. There are six Āraṇyakas available to us. Two belong to Ṛgveda, they are Aitareyāraṇyaka and Śāṅkhāyanāraṇyaka, three belong to Yajurveda, they are, Brhadāraṇyaka of Śuklayajurveda, Taittirīyāraṇyaka and Maitrāyaṇīyāraṇyaka of Kṛṣṇayajurveda and one belongs to Sāmaveda, it is Talavakārāraṇyaka. There is no any Āraṇyaka belongs to Atharvaveda. Āraṇyakas have a significant place in the Vedic literature. It is indicated in Mahābhārata that Āraṇyakas are the essence of the Vedas. But till now the exact role of Āraṇyakas in the Vedic literature is not illuminated. The questions such as, what the term Āraṇyaka means? When the Āraṇyaka developed? What are their contents? etc., should be answered in order to find out the real picture of Āraṇyaka.

Meaning of the word Āraṇyaka

Generally the word "Āraṇyaka" is associated with the forest and Āraṇyakas are known as the "forest texts", which contain the meditations of hermits in forests and ascetics on God, man and world. Both the traditional and modern scholars have the same concept about Āraṇyakas. Based on this concept a feeling of separation generates in the sequence of the Vedic literature namely, Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads. Really these four are not different and distinct parts of the Vedas, but they represent a sequence of development of the Vedic thought, and the scope of Āraṇyakas should not be reduced by calling them mere "forest texts".

The great grammarian Pāṇini describes the term Āraṇyaka in

the sense of man associated with forest and prescribes the suffix būñ (baUHa\) to be attached with Araṇya . Kātyāyana another grammarian is the first man to describe the term in the sense of a chapter or treatise relating to forest .

The famous commentator of the Vedas, Sāyaṇa says that the texts Āraṇyakas are studied in the forests . So they called so. He also indicates that Aitareyāraṇyaka is a part of the Aitareyabrāhmaṇa. Śaṅkara, the great Vedāntin also interested to associate the term Āraṇyaka with forest. According to him Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad is so named because it is preached in the forest . Sureśvara, a disciple of Śaṅkara when commenting this part of his master also upholds the same view .

The modern scholars like Macdonell, Paul Deussen, A.B. Keith, Winternitz, etc. also describe the term Āraṇyaka in association with forests and they added mysticism and symbolism as the features of Āraṇyakas.

Macdonell describes the term Āraṇyakas as the "treatises which have theosophical character and are meant to be imparted or studied in the solitude of forests" .

According to Oldenberg Āraṇyakas are, however, "treatises which, owing to the superior mystic sanctity of their contents, were intended to be communicated to the pupil by his teacher in the solitude of the forest instead of in the village" .

According to Paul Deussen Āraṇyakas contain the discussion on the explanations of the rituals and allegorical speculations on them and remain as the substitute for the actual sacrificial observances in the solitude of forests .

According to A.B. Keith Āraṇyaka meant a book of instruction to be given in the forest. They give secret explanation of the rituals .

Winternitz remarks that Āraṇyakas are of secret uncanny nature

and dangerous for the uninitiated. So they should be taught and learnt only in the forest. According to him the main content of Āraṇyakas are not only the explanation of rules of performances of the sacrifices but also mysticism and symbolism of sacrifice and priestly philosophy .

V.S. Apte gives an explanation of the word Āraṇyaka as follows; it is one of a class of religious and philosophical writing (connected with Brāhmanas) which are either composed in a forest or must be studied there .

Thus most the scholars both traditional and modern scholars associate the term Āraṇyaka with forest and the modern scholars added symbolism and mysticism as the features of Āraṇyakas. Pāṇini did not mention the term "Āraṇyaka" as a treatise or a text. Kātyāna described it as the treatise associated with forest. Sāyaṇa, Śaṅkara and Sureśvara described it as the text to be studied in the forest. Most the traditional scholars are interested to describe the term in connection with the study in forest. But the scholars have not definitely answered the problem why Āraṇyakas are to be studied in the forests and also they do not define the essential nature of the Āraṇyakas. If the study of a particular treatise in forest becomes the criterion to call it Āraṇyaka, then any text which is studied in forests should get the same title.

While dealing with Āraṇyakas the modern scholars mostly concentrated to illuminate the symbolic and mystical features of them and their general opinion about Āraṇyakas is that they are explanations of the meaning of the rituals. But it is not absolutely true. Even Āraṇyakas contain symbolism but it is not the only feature of them. They also contain other aspects like metaphysics, philosophy, illustrations of bad omens for death, preparation of an amulet called bilva, particular sacrifice for attaining particular results, etc. So there is nothing unique in them to designate this part as Āraṇyaka. But general assumption can be made that Āraṇyakas not only contain symbolism but also other as-

pects, but symbolism is considered as their main feature because it is mostly discussed in them.

Thus the descriptions of the term "Āraṇyaka" by both the traditional and the modern scholars are not fully satisfactory. They do not describe the essential nature and scope of Āraṇyakas. The teaching or studying in the forest is not an essential feature of them. They do not describe only secret or mystic subjects. They describe daily rituals like sandhyopāsanam, pancamahāyajña, brahmopāsanam, etc. for a common man or a householder. The study of these teachings of the Vedas which are known as Āraṇyakas not make any harm to the persons who studies them. So the attitude towards Āraṇyakas as mystic and secret, and texts for restricted studies in forests etc. should be removed. Really Āraṇyakas are not meant for restricted forest study and also not meant for symbolism. They are the sequence of the Vedic thought, which started from the Saṃhitās and which moves from higher to highest, from deeper to deepest and from gross to subtle. So one has to approach them with high purity and responsibility. For this type of thinking one has to practice concentration and meditation. So he has to select a calm place far away from the people and ordinary life. This calm place can be indicated by the term "Araṇya", and the treatises or texts which should be renounced by this way of thinking can be called as "Āraṇyakas"

Role of Āraṇyakas in Vedic Literature

The general view on the Vedic literature is that the Vedas consists of four parts namely, Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads. Saṃhitās are the collection of hymns and prayers. Brāhmaṇas contain the descriptions and instructions of the rituals. Āraṇyakas are the texts of mysticism and symbolism and Upaniṣads contain the discussion of philosophy. Brāhmaṇas, which describe rituals and Upaniṣads, which describe philosophy are treated rival elements in the Vedic literature and Āraṇyakas are regarded as revolutionary or the transitional phase from

ritual to philosophy. Macdonell says that " Āraṇyakas in tone and content form a transition to Upaniṣads" . According to Deussen Āraṇyakas consist of the allegorical speculations on rituals, which for the most parts were not practicable and as such they emancipated from the limitations of a formal cult. So they form a natural transition from rituals of Brāhmaṇas to the speculations of Upaniṣads . Thus the four, Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads are wrongly regarded as four distinct parts of the Vedas.

Since Āraṇyakas constitute the third part of the Vedas, they follow a sequence of development of Vedic thought and philosophy. In Saṃhitās there are various hymns devoted to various Gods like Indra, Agni, Varuṇa, etc., which are meant for prosperity and wealth. The hymns are an outright pouring of the heart of the devotees to the Gods, who were kind and sympathetic and who bestowed worldly prosperity, heroic sons, etc. on the devotees. There are also hymns, which have philosophical touch such as Puruṣasūkta, Nāsadīyasūkta, etc. The Vedic seers were not only satisfied by the worship of Gods and gaining of wealth but also they made attempt to realize the supreme God of the Gods. Some verses in Saṃhitās can be found in later Upaniṣads in the same form or with some minor variations . Thus there can find two streams of thoughts; one for only worldly prosperity, which can be called as religious or ritualistic thought, and another for finding the ultimate reality, which can be called as philosophical thought. In Brāhmaṇa period the ritualistic thought developed into practice of various sacrifices like Agniṣṭoma, Vājapeya, Darśapūrṇamāsa, etc. Then the Ṛgvedic verses came to be considered to be of secret power and were used in the various rituals for attaining desired boons or gifts for sacrificer from the Gods. At that time philosophical thought also developed, but in a minute way. Some times philosophical terms such as Brahman, Ātman etc. are used in Brāhmaṇas in the line of the philosophical thinking. Aitareyabrāhmaṇa describes the existence of all the things in Brahman.

It says ether is rested in air, air is rested in earth, earth is rested in water, water is rested in truth, truth is rested in Brahman and Brahman is rested in penance . Kauṣītakībrāhmaṇa says Puruṣa, the Prajāpati is the first of everything . Gopathabrāhmaṇa describes Ātman in association with creation. Ātman is said to be the creator of earth, air and ether . Śatapathabrāhmaṇa proclaims Ātman as eternal . In Śatapathabrāhmaṇa Brahman is described as the first creative principle . It says that by that knowledge of Ātman which attained by seeing and hearing makes everything known . The identification of Brahman and Puruṣa is also brought about in Śatapathabrāhmaṇa . All these descriptions indicate the existence of philosophical thought in Brāhmaṇas.

In Āraṇyakas there can be found a compromise between these two thoughts; ritualistic and philosophical. Āraṇyakas do not reject the significance of the sacrifices but they advise to realize the truth which is behind the sacrifices. In the tenth chapter of Śāṅkhāyanāraṇyaka, it was taught as a secret teaching that how different process of daily life are to be understood as sacrifice in a deeper sense and how higher reward comes to the lot of one who carries it out in practice, knowing its secret significance. In this way the breathing process is interpreted as a five sacrifice and a very high reward is promised to him who always performs the five sacrifices through breathing on the strength of the knowledge . It is also said that who performs external sacrifice without knowing the internal truth, and then the sacrifice becomes fruitless like fruitless offerings into ashes . Thus Āraṇyakas bridge the gap between the two streams of thoughts; ritualistic and philosophical.

In the thirteenth chapter of Śāṅkhāyanāraṇyaka, it is said that, "Then when his body has been made prepared for indifference to desire, he should bend on Brahman offerings. So he drives repeated death away. The self is to be seen, to be heard, to be thought, to be meditated on etc." . So definitely a sequence of development of philosophy can be found in Āraṇyakas, which started from the early Saṃhitās and flour-

ished in Upaniṣads.

Conclusion

Ancient Indian scholars considered Āraṇyakas as the texts to be studied in forests. Modern foreign scholars interpreted them as the substitute for the actual sacrificial observances and added symbolism and mysticism as their features. Āraṇyakas are not meant for secret and restricted study in forests. They provide a series of philosophical thought started from Saṃhitās and which moves from gross to subtle, higher to highest and deeper to deepest. In order to cultivate a thought like this one has to practice it in an atmosphere which is away from disturbance. This calm place which is away from disturbance can be indicated by the term araṇya. Those teachings in Āraṇyakas are not harmful to one who wishes to study them. They not only contain mystical descriptions. There is nothing unique in Āraṇyakas to regard it as the feature of Āraṇyakas. They contain philosophy, ritualism, symbolism, etc.

Āraṇyakas possess significant place in Vedic literature. Saṃhitās, the first portion of the Vedas contain prayers devoted to different gods in order to get wealth and prosperity. Saṃhitās also contain prayers with philosophical touch. Even there are many hymns devoted to different gods such as Indra, Agni, Varuṇa, etc. in Saṃhitās, sages try to find the supreme god of gods. They were not satisfied with wealth and prosperity and they tried to discover the reality of realities. Thus there were two streams of thought; religious or ritualistic thought and philosophical thought. In the period of Brāhmaṇas the former developed in to the practice of different rituals and the latter developed in a minute way. In Āraṇyakas a compromise between these thoughts is made. Āraṇyakas never reject significance and fruits of rituals. They show limitations of rituals and advice to realize the truth behind them. They proclaim realization of Brahman as the ultimate goal of life which stops the life of miseries. Thus Āraṇyakas bridges the gap between those two streams of

thought; ritualistic thought and philosophical thought. Upaniṣads which are the concluding portion of Vedas mainly deal with descriptions about Brahman and means to realize Brahman. Saṃhitās provide prayers devoted to sources of power in the universe. In Brāhmaṇas they worshipped as gods who come at the time of sacrifices and receive oblations. Āraṇyakas provides the truth behind the sacrifices and speaks about the reality which is higher than gods. Upaniṣads provide the knowledge of ultimate reality Brahman and unity of universal self and individual self. Thus a series of thought which moves from gross to subtle, deeper to deepest and higher to highest can found through Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads.

नवनीतम् यथा दध्नो मलयाच्चन्दनम् यथा ।

आरण्यकम् च वेदेभ्यः औषधीभ्योऽमृतम् यथा । ।

Mahābhārata, Śāntiparva, 343.12-13.

अरण्यान्मनुष्ये । Aṣṭādhyāyī, 4.2.129.

पथ्याध्यायन्यायविहारमनुष्यहस्तिष्विति वक्तव्यम् । Kātyāyana, Vārttika.

ऐतरेयब्राह्मणेऽस्ति काण्डम् आरण्यकाभिधं अरण्य एव पाठ्यं स्यात् आरण्यकमितीर्यते ।

Sāyaṇa, Introductory Commentary of Aitareyabrāhmaṇa.

सोऽयम् षडध्यायी अरण्येऽनूच्यमानत्वादरण्यकम् ।

Śaṅkara, Introductory commentary of the Br. Up.

यथोक्तविद्याजनकत्वे ग्रन्थस्य तदध्येतृणां सर्वेषां किमिति सा न भवतीत्याशङ्क्य श्रवणादिपराणामेव

अरण्यानुवचनादिनियमाधीताक्षरेभ्यस्तज्जन्मेत्यशयेन 'सेयं षडध्यायी'त्यादिभाष्यार्थमाह अरण्येति ।

Sureśvara, Bṛhadāraṇyakavārttikam, Introduction.

A.A. Macdonell, A History of Sanskrit Literature, p.28.

A.A. Macdonell, A History of Sanskrit Literature, p.206.

Paul Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads, p.4.

A.B.Keith, The Aitareyārṇyaka, p.16.

M. Winternitz, History of Indian Literature Ed.II.

V.S. Apte, The Student's Sanskrit-English Dictionary, p.85.

A.A.Macdonell, A History of Sanskrit Literature, p.172.
 P.Deussen, The philosophy of the Upanishads, p.120.
 रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव । R̥gveda, VI.47.18, Br̥Up., II.5.19.
 हंसः शुचिषत्..... । R̥gveda, IV, 40.5., Kathopanishad, II.5.2.
 द्यौरन्तरीक्षे प्रतिष्ठिता अन्तरीक्षं पृथिव्यां पृथिव्यप्सु आपः सत्ये ब्रह्मणि ब्रह्म तपसीत्येता
 एव तत्प्रतिष्ठिताः । Aitareyabrāhmaṇa, 11.6.
 स वै पुरुषः प्रजापतिः पूर्वोऽस्य सर्वस्य । Kauṣītakiḥbrāhmaṇa, 23.4.
 स आत्मन एव त्रीकान्निरमित पृथ्वीमन्तरीक्षं दिवमिति ।
 Gopathabrāhmaṇa, Pūrvagopatha, 1.6.
 अविनाशी वा अरेऽयमात्मा । Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, XIV.7.1.15.
 इयमेव प्रथमा समिधेनी.....तेन दिशं जयति । Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, XI.2.3.3.
 आत्मनो वाऽरे दशनिन श्रवणेन मत्या विज्ञानेनेदं सर्वम् विदितम् । Śatapathabrāhmaṇa,
 XIV.5.8.5.
 सत्यं ब्रह्मयुपासीतप्रत्याभिसंभवति । Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, X.4.6.1.
 य एवं विद्वान् अश्नाति च पिबति च आशयति च पाययति च । Śāṅkhāyanāraṇyaka,
 X.8.
 अथ य इदम् अविद्वान् अग्निहोत्रं जुहोति यथाऽङ्गारान् अपोह्य भस्मनि हुतम् तादृक्
 स्यात् ।
 Śāṅkhāyanāraṇyaka, X.8.
 अथातो वैराग्यसंस्कृते शरीरे ब्रह्मयज्ञनिष्ठो भवेत् । अप पुनर्मृत्युं जयति । तद उ ह वा आत्मा
 द्रष्टव्यः
 श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्य इति । Śāṅkhāyanāraṇyaka, XIII.1.

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