

Oral and Textual Traditions of Vedas in Andhra & Telangana Regions

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ABSTRACT

The two new states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, which were part of undivided Andhra Pradesh, have a rich heritage of maintaining Vedic Studies for several millennia. There are plenty of references to the Vedic culture of these states in several books of ancient times also. The recent excavations at Keesaragutta, near Hyderabad, have spotted several sacrificial altars belonging to Asvamedhayagas, which unequivocally reflect and substantiate the Vedic culture and Vedic studies in this region, in a remote past of at least two thousand years. The Vedic traditions were maintained to the maximum extent possible, even during the toughest times of foreign aggressions and alien rule.

But with the passage of time, and particularly after emergence of India as an independent country, in 1947, the condition of the Vedic studies has become quite alarming. In contrast to the support extended by the pre-independence princely states for continuing the traditional studies, the Central and State Governments in independent India have not done much to the Vedic studies compared to the secular studies. The reason for this situation appears to be mainly the apathy of the society as a whole, and so the Governments.

Under these conditions, some individuals and institutions have initiated several steps in late seventies of 20th century, for arresting the decline of Vedic studies on one side, and simultaneously promoting the working conditions of members of Vedic community on the other side. Their efforts have started yielding positive results after about three decades. The present situation is definitely reassuring, though not fully satisfactory.

The details of the efforts and the present status of the studies are vividly presented in the paper along with some recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Andhra Pradesh has been in the forefront in preserving and propagating the Vedic Knowledge of both the forms, i.e., oral and textual traditions, for several thousands of years. There are references in Valmiki Ramayana and Mahabharata about the Vedic culture in Andhra region.

The Vedic studies went deep into all layers of the society during Satavahana period and continued without hindrance upto Kakatiya period. However, about 800 years back, the king Prataparudra had to take special emergency steps for protection of Vedic scholars and Vedic culture against the back drop of severe attacks from the enemies of Sanatana Dharma.

Even about 70 years back, i.e., at the time of India becoming independent, the Godavari and Krishna delta were having more than 500 Vedic pandits each. Scores of agraharams were having several flourishing Veda pathasalas. For example, the pathasalas at Rajahmundry have a known history of two centuries, the one of Podagatlapalli, which happens to be the native place of my forefathers of several generations, with about 160 years, that one at Mukkamala for the past 120 years, of Kapileswarapuram, Iragavaram etc., for the past 70 years, and so on. Similar is the situation at places like Vijayawada, Tenali, Machilipatnam, Guduwada, etc., in Krishna delta.

But, after India became independent, the rulers of local Government and Central Government virtually discontinued their support to the study of Vedas. Hence, the number has dwindled very fast in the past seven decades. In fact there was an absolute dry spell and drought w.r.to Vedic studies, for about 20 years during 1950 to 1970, and there was financial crisis in every family of Vedic community.

EFFORTS OF A GREAT PANDIT

However, with the initiative of Brahmasri Uppuluri Ganapati Sastry garu, the great Vedic pandit who lived for full 100 years and who was honoured by Government of India with the award of Padmabhushan, the system of paying monthly honorarium to the pundits started in 1970s during the Chief Ministership of Dr. Marri ChannaReddy. Every Vedic pandit in Andhra Pradesh of today owes his existence in this field to this great Veda purusha who strived and struggled for their survival.

As per the recommendations of that great scholar, the TTD introduced the scheme of Veda Parayana at temples. Each Vedic pandit is assigned a temple where he has to carry out the chanting of the respective Veda of his study, everyday, two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. In fact it is his working place.

It may be known to most of the people that TTD started making monthly payment of salaries to the Vedic scholars, who are covered under Veda Parayana scheme in Andhra Pradesh. The salary of a Krama pathi, started with an amount of Rs.200/ per month in 70s. The quantum of payment is periodically revised for all the years. The latest revision is carried out in the month of September, 2014.

HONORARIUM FOR VEDIC SCHOLARS

Now the honorarium of a Kramapathi is fixed at Rs.15,000/ per month. The salary of a Ghanapathi is revised to Rs. 16,000/- The Supervisors are paid Rs.19,000, plus travelling expenses of Rs.2000/-. The Vedic pandits who are drafted into the Executive Council, are also paid Rs.19,000/ monthly. The Ahitagnis, who are qualified in Soma panchakam, are honoured with a monthly remuneration of Rs.10,000/-. The most reassuring aspect of the generosity of TTD is that they have introduced a welfare scheme to look after the widows of Vedic pundits. Each such lady is paid an amount of Rs.5,000/- every month. It is gratifying to note that the pandits whose age is more than 70 years and who are physically weak and not in a position to go to the temple daily, are also paid a pension of Rs. 10,000/- monthly.

It is a happy news for most of us when we come to know that the total number of Parayanadars maintained by TTD is about 3,000 in the entire country. Among them, 500 alone are in Andhra Pradesh itself. A Kramapathi is adjudged as equivalent to a graduate from any modern University.

VEDIC UNIVERSITY AT TIRUPATI

TTD has floated one wing under its roof for exclusively looking after the Vedic pundits, and also for promotion of further higher studies. This wing was titled as Sri Venkateswara Institute of Higher Vedic Studies. But this aspect is now taken care of by Sri Venkateswara Vedic University, Tirupati. Here a mention has to be made about the great contribution of Sri Rameswar Thakur, Who was the Governor of Andhra Pradesh about 8 years back, and who put his all pressure to get this the status of University under UGC. As a corollary, several departments related to Vedas have come into existence.

Thus , as a first step, the Vedic pandits were taken care off by TTD. Subsequently some action oriented philanthropic organisations, Trusts and individuals also started extending financial support for the cause of Vedas. Simultaneously, many young boys of the Vedic families, who migrated to the Technical fields, particularly computers and information technology, got well settled in during the past 20 years, and started helping the Vedic cause. Because of all these factors, the green revolution in Vedic studies slowly picked up.

STATUS IN ANDHRA PADESH

The over all strength of the pandits in Andhra Pradesh as on today in various categories is given as follows. There are about 70 Ghanapathis, 250 Kramapathis, and about 1500 students, exdusively in the subject of Vedas At present, 14 scholars are covered under the Ahitagni category. One encouraging point in these items is that Sukla Yajurveda, which was once totally neglected, is now having about 100 pandits.

CATEGORIES OF VEDA PATHASALAS

The pathasalas of Andhra Pradesh can be broadly divided into three categories. The first category pathasalas are those which are directly owned and developed by TTD. The second category

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In undivided Andhra Pradesh, there are about 150 Veda Pathasalas, out of which, 7 schools belong to the first category, about 120 belong to the second category, that is, which are aided by TTD. About 23 schools belong to the third category.

FIRST CATEGORY OF PATHASALAS

The schools which are totally owned By TTD are located at Dharmagiri, Keesaragutta, I Bhimavaram, Nallagondla, Chilukuru, Vijayanagaram and Kotappakonda.

The TTD Vedapathasala at Dharmagiri is accommodating about 650 students totally, and among them, about 230 students belong to Vedic studies only. This pathasala is having an unbroken history of about 170 years. Presently this has got about 60 adhyapakas of various disciplines. To be more specific, there are 4 pundits for Rigveda, 3 for Samaveda, 2 for Atharvaveda, 3 for Shukla Yajurveda, 3 for Krishna Yajurveda, all fully involved as faculty members.

In Keesaragutta pathasala, all the 4 Vedas are taught. At Chilukuru, only Krishna Yajurvedam is being taught. Same is the case at Nallagondla, where as at Vijayanagaram, only Samaveda is being imparted, but the significant aspect is that all the three available branches of Samaveda, that is, Ranayaniya, Kouthuma and Jaiminiya are being taught. Same is the case at Dharmagiri on the hills of Tirumala. The school at kotappakonda is going to be opened very shortly. In addition to Krishna Yajurveda, Apastamba Paurohityam and Saivagamam are planned. At Yellamada, 6 acres of land is demarcated for buildings.

The special attraction of the TTD Veda pathasalas is they have a scheme of paying Rs.3 lakhs to each student at the end of completion of moolam of each of the Vedas, which normally takes about 8 years. Of course, the smartham student is paid an amount of Rs.1.0 lakhs, after completion of his course, in about 4 years. It is a pleasant news to know that the Kumara Adhyapaka paddhti has successfully completed 7 such batches of full 8 year cycles.

SECOND CATEGORY OF PATHASALAS

The amount of grant approved and released by TTD to the pathasalas is like, Rs.1.5 lakhs, 3.0 lakhs, and so on, depending on the number of pupils receiving the instruction, and the number of teachers imparting. However, the one at Bapatla is has got additional Rs.4.0 lakhs as a special grant. Here both Rigveda and Samaveda are being taught.

VEDIC STUDIES IN GODAVARI DELTA

Now Godavari region itself is proud of running about 15 pathasalas, both East and west Godavari districts put together and about 200 students are being trained in this region itself.

At Rajahmundry, there are 2 pathasalas running, one by Sri Gullapalli Trust and the other one at Kotilingala Satram. At Podagatlapalli, there are 23 students, 8 students in Machilipatnam school, 8 students at Srisailam, about 80 students at Vedabhavan of Secunderabad.

The number of students in Podagatlapalli, Rajahmundry and Kapileaswarapuram stands at 20 to 25, each, Mukkamala and Daksharamam with about 10 each, Daksharamam and Ganganapalli with about 15 each. It is interesting to note that the last pathasala, which is near Kakinada, is running classes of all four Vedas.

At Kapileaswarapuram, where the Veda pathasala is running for the past 70 years has 23 students, 16 of Krishna Yajurveda and 7 of Atharvaveda. At Pithapuram Veda pathasala of HH Sri Ganapati Sachchidananda Swami, is having 13 students of Krishna Yajurveda.

TTD BUDGET FOR VEDAS

The over all budget of TTD is having an allocation of Rs.about Rs.30 crores annually in recent years

THIRD CATEGORY OF PATHASALAS

The third category of Veda pathasalas, that is, without the support from TTD, are having an example at Mukkamala in East Godavari. This is accredited to Kanchi peetham. This is partly supported by philanthropists like Sri Maganti Subrahmanyam garu of Vijayawada and other donors..

VEDIC STUDIES AT PUTTAPARTHI

The data furnished by Sri Ganesh, a nuclear Scientist and the organiser of Vedic events at Puttaparthi informs as follows: During Dasara in 1961, one yajna was performed wherein an announcement was made that a Veda Pathasala has to start functioning from His Birth day in 1962 onwards. Accordingly the Vedic school was inaugurated on 23rd November, 1962 at Puttaparthi. Sri Cherukumilli Kamavadhanulu garu, a great Vedic scholar of Kadali, East Godavari District, was appointed as the Principal.

There are 4 wings in the total campus, covering primary, higher secondary, college and university level. There are about 2000 students in the campus. All the students are trained in the chantings of Namakam, chamakam, purusha suktam, srisuktam, Arunam, Taittiriya Upanishad etc, with well defined grade wise syllabus. Here all are allowed to learn the Vedic mantras, without any distinction on the basis of religion, caste or gender, or country. All programmes start with Vedic chantings. Assembly services, suprabhatam, vedic classes, have one mantra taught everyday.

TEXTUAL STUDIES

The textual tradition is involving the study of Vidyananya Bhashya. There are illustrious scholars like Dr. Vishnubhatla Subrahmanya Deekshitulu salakshana ghanapathi, Sri Chirravuri Sri Rama Sarma and Sri Prava Ramakrishna who are developing the students in this field. Their standard of teaching is graded as the best by HH Sri Sringeri Swamiji. Among them, the first one is more than 70 years, the second one is of 66 years, and the third one is in his 40s, and is working in SVVU. There are 3 students for Sri Subrahmanya Deekshitulu,, 3 students for Sri Rama Sarma, about 15 students for Prava. However the syllabus in the University prescribes only 20 Chapters for exams. A student who qualifies in this gets the Degree accordingly. But he is supposed to continue the studies subsequently for covering the full text. For teaching the Bhashyam of Rigveda, one pandit is working on contract basis.

But as a whole, as on date, there are about 15 Upadhyayas who are striving to increase the strength of Bhashya pandits. About 30 students are being trained in this subject.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF DR. AVADHANULU & SHRI VEDA BHARATHI FOR PRESERVATION OF ORAL AND TEXTUAL TRADITION OF VEDAS

The author of this paper, Dr. Remella Avadhanulu, is a Vedic scholar and also a pioneer in Computer Science, in addition to several distinctions. A detailed study by him brought out the following qualitative and quantitative information. This is followed by some highly important remedial measures initiated by Dr. Avadhanulu, as briefly given in the following paragraphs.

URGENCY FOR PRESERVATION OF RARE VEDIC CHANTINGS

The word 'Veda' means knowledge or wisdom of highest order. The four Vedas were said to have 1131 branches earlier. But now only 7 are being taught in Vedic schools. Thus we are left with less than 1% Vedic knowledge only... And hence the urgency. In nutshell, the Vedas are facing the threat of extinction. It is our sacred duty to preserve them.

With a view to maintain perfection w.r.to pronundation, the Rigveda was earlier provided 11 types of chantings for each of its mantras. But the number of pandits who can confidently chant all these types are very very rare, just few in number, in the entire country. Most of the educated people also have never heard even the names of chantings, leave alone their contents. These rare chantings of Rigveda are facing the threat of extinction. Hence the urgency. It is our sacred duty to preserve them.

Names of rare Chantings of Rigveda: Maala, Sikha, Rekha, Dhawaja, Danda and Ratha

Kanchi Paramacharya is said to have quoted once as follows:

PRESERVATION—IT IS NOW OR NEVER

“If we, of this generation, create a break in the Vedic study kept up for ages, from generation to generation, we shall be committing the unforgivable crime of denying our descendents the opportunity of learning the Vedas.”

The author made elaborate preparations for solving the above problems technically, to the extent possible, as described briefly below.

Phase 1: INTRODUCED INDIAN LANGUAGES IN COMPUTERS FOR THE FIRST TIME

1. Till 1975, the computers were having English as the only medium for data entry and information retrieval.
2. Dr. RVSS Avadhanulu and his team introduced Indian languages in computers for the first time, by designing and developing Telugu FORTRAN and Devanagari FORTRAN compilers in 1976.

3. The Official Language committee of Parliament of India appreciated this achievement and encouraged further, because of which it has become possible to have all communications in computers using Indian languages.

4. This paved the way subsequently for design of Vedic Database in Computer Systems.

Phase 2: INTRODUCED COMPUTERS TO THE VEDAS FOR THE FIRST TIME

1. Dr. RVSS Avadhanulu introduced Computer technology to the Vedas for the first time and demonstrated the same at the National Vedic Conference, Tirupati in 1992.
2. This attracted the attention of the entire Vedic Community including Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, the then Vice President of India, who inaugurated the Conference.
3. The unique technique opened up a whole new world and a new trend, which is now followed by several Vedic Scientists throughout the globe.

Phase 3: CREATED "SHRI VEDA BHARATHI " – A Public Charitable Trust

Shri Veda Bharathi (SVB) was established in 1994 as a historical necessity. It is a Public Charitable Trust, registered at Hyderabad, , India. The **main objectives** of Shri Veda Bharathi are :

1. Preservation of Vedas and rare Vedic Chantings
2. Propagation of Vedic wisdom
3. Research for Scientific Aspects in Vedic Literature
4. Promotion of Sanskrit language to explore the Vedic sciences in their original form

Accordingly it is decided to design and develop Multilingual Multimedia Vedic Database, and bring out the products in the form of CD ROMs/ DVD ROMs etc.

Work Done so Far -Report 1: RECORDED ABOUT 1200 HOURS OF CHANTING OF RIGVEDA AND YAJURVEDA.

Completed the Recording of 3 types of chantings (out of 11 types) of Rigveda (viz., Moolam, Pada and Krama).

Completed recording of Sikha mode of chanting of 32 chapters of Rigveda.

The first set of Vedic floppy discs of Yajurveda (Taittiriya Sakha) were presented to Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, President of India, on 20.04.1995.

The first batch of 23 CD ROMs were released by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of India, on 14 the April, 2000.

The second batch of 15 CD ROMs were released by H.H. Swami Tejomayananda, President of Chinmaya Mission, World wide, on 14th Sept' 2000.

The Audio DVD of Entire Rigveda Samhita (64 Chapters), with introductions to all the 64 Chapters(English), Moolam (Samhita) mode of Chanting, running for about 32 hours, was released by

Param Pujaniya Shri Mohan Bhagawat, Sarsanghchalak of RSS, on 23.07.2011.

Work Done so far -Report 2:RESEARCH CONDUCTED FOR SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS IN VEDIC LITERATURE

The subject matter of Vedas is a holistic Cosmos, with 'Man' as a harmonious part of it. This careful look also reveals astounding aspects of Science and Technology of the past and more importantly, aspects of possible current and future relevance, in a form beneficial to man and society. In this background the exploration for Science and Technology in Vedas and Śāstras is felt as the need of the hour.

SVB is conducting research studies with respect to Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Medicine, Spectroscopy, Space science, Cognition etc. The findings are brought out in the form of books, few of which are titled as follows:

- "Vedas and Computers"(Computer Science in Vedas)
- "Science and Technology in Vedas and Sastras".
- "Vedic Mathematics, Lilavathi Ganitham & Pavuluri Ganitham"-Both in English and Telugu, and in Braille script
- Predictability of Earth Quakes using Jyotisha Sastra

In recent times there indeed is a widening chasm- Science & Technology on one hand, and spirituality and religion on the other. These two are indeed alternative paths. SVB is providing guidance to several modern researchers on topics related to Vedas and Sastras.

Work Done so far -Report 3:SECURED "PATENT RIGHTS" (INTELLECTUAL PROPERTYRIGHTS) FOR DESIGN OF MULTILINGUAL MULTIMEDIA VEDIC DATABASE

Dr. RVSS Avadhanulu took up an exciting project of designing the Multimedia CD ROMs for Vedas. This allows the following facilities simultaneously:

- Display of original mantra text in Devanagari with Swara symbols
- Display of Telugu/Hindi translations of the mantra
- Display of English translation of the mantra
- Display of a graphics drawn for the mantras
- Display of encyclopaedia information if the Mantra available, like
- Identification code
- Rishi
- Devata
- Chandas

- Kanya
- Alamkara
- Modern subject like physics and chemistry to which the mantra appears to be related.
- Names of the authors for translation etc.

This is to state with pleasure that Multimedia CDs are brought for the first three chapters of Rigveda.

Work Done so far -Report 4:CARRIED OUT PROPAGATION OF VEDIC WISDOM –THROUGH DEMOS, LECTURES, CONFERENCES, PRESS & ELECTRONIC MEDIA

For creating interest among the public on the subject of Vedas, SVB has been conducting lecture programs at various Institutions through out the country.

The lectures on “Veda Vijnanam” (75 episodes) telecast in TTD(SVBC) Channel created interest among modern scientists for further research in Vedic Sciences.

SVB has been spreading the message of Vedas utilizing the mass media, viz. Television, Radio and Press. The talks on Vedas and Vedic sciences are covered under repeat programmes on several channels.

SVB organised a World Vedic Conference at Hyderabad in 1994 with participants from several countries like USA, UK, Italy and Nepal.

SVB organised a Vedic Conference at National level in December,2005 on Scientific aspects in ancient Indian literature. Mananiya Shri Sudarshanji, Sarsanghchalak of RSS inaugurated the conference.

Work Done so far -Report 5:HONOURED THE SCHOLARS OF VEDAS & SASTRAS

SVB has been organizing conferences on Vedas and Sastras, for the past several years, and honouring outstanding Veda -Sastra Pandits and Sanskrit scholars.

Some of the Pandits honoured so far are :

- Mahamahopadhyaya Sri Dongare Veereswara Krishna Sastry garu
- Mahamahopadhyaya Sri Remella SuryaPrakasa Sastry garu
- Mahamahopadhyaya Sri Sannidhanam Lakshminarayana Murthy Sastry garu
- Mahamahopadhyaya Prof. Pullela SriRamachandrudu garu
- SRI CBV Subrahmanya Sastry garu, “Jyotisha Sarvabhuma”
- Prof.Rajendra Mishra, Vice Chancellor, Sanskrit University, Varanasi
- Dr. Rajanna Sastry garu, Osmania University (Retd)
- Dr. Kharwandikar, Ahmadnagar(Maharashtra)
- Dr.Radhamohan Upadhyaya,Colcutta(West Bengal), and
- Dr.Siddharth Y Wakankar,Vadodara(Gujarat) etc.

PROJECTS ON HAND

- Preservation of Vedas and Rare chantings of Rigveda (continued).
- Multimedia Database for Vedas (to bring out “Sachitra Vedam”)
- Propagation of life values & Indian culture, Based on Vedas (through Samkshipta Parichayam booklet series of Veda Sastralu, Upanishads, Pradhana Samskaralu, Brahma Sutralu, Bhagavadgita etc.)

CONCLUSIONS

With the blessings of Lord Venkateswara, the efforts of several great individuals and institutions are yielding positive results. Fairly satisfactory working conditions are now provided for the Pandits. There is a definite increase in the number of members of Vedic community.

Simultaneously, the power of computers is exploited for preservation and propagation of Vedic knowledge. The oral and textual traditions of Vedas are being captured into electronic media. The vedic information is instantly made available for extensive research.

However there is every need to improve the social conditions of Vedic scholars who are virtually facing a social boycott in matters like marriages for their children.

For resolving this kind of problems, several awareness programs have to be conducted at various levels of the society, highlighting the significance of the Vedic subjects and also about the value system preserved and rigorously adopted by the Vedic pandits for maintenance of Vedic knowledge with highest precision and purity.