

A review of Vishnvarchana – a commentary on Purusha sukta

Dr. Shrinidhi S Pyati

Introduction

The Vedas stand as the ultimate *pramāṇa* for Vaidikas. For those seeking liberation from this mundane world, understanding the true essence of the Vedas should be the ultimate goal. However, as time progressed, inquiries into Vedic meanings gradually receded, giving way to the widespread popularity of chanting and recitation. Despite Bhagavan Vyāsa's comprehensive commentaries on the Brahmasūtras, intended to unveil the authentic meaning of the Vedas, there emerged a disinterest in exploring Vedas beyond what was discussed in these Sūtras. Consequently, a void emerged in the realm of Vedic commentary, overshadowing the significance of delving deeper into Vedic literature.

Amidst this gloom, *Viṣṇvarcā* emerges as a beacon of hope. Authored by Prof. Veeranarayana Pandurangi, this commentary breathes fresh life into the understanding of the Ṛgveda's pivotal hymns. It offers solace to those eager to unravel the profound truths embedded within the Vedas, rekindling enthusiasm for the exploration of Vedic wisdom.

Style of commentary

In the first edition of *Viṣṇvarcanā*, the author delves into two significant hymns of the Ṛgveda: Puruṣasūkta and *Viṣṇusūkta*. Throughout the commentary, the author's style appears to draw inspiration from Śrīman Madhvācārya, emphasizing the elucidation of hymn meanings through the presentation of *pramāṇas* from various literary sources, rather than relying solely on personal interpretation. Notably, the author frequently challenges previous commentators' interpretations, providing compelling justifications alongside suitable meanings.

A detailed examination of the birth-based *Varṇa* system is undertaken, supported by a wealth of original sources. Furthermore,

the author demonstrates how several non-Vedic schools align with Vedic principles regarding the birth-based *Varṇa* concept. Exhaustive efforts are made to substantiate interpretations using *pramāṇas* from the Vedas, *Purāṇas*, Mahābhārata, and Upaniṣads¹.

While reading the commentary, it becomes evident that the author has put painstaking effort into exploring all possible meanings of the *Puruṣasūkta* without compromising its merits.

In addition, the author has documented recensions of the *Puruṣasūkta*².

In the colophon, the author affirms the documentation of all preceding commentaries, notably those of Rangaswamy, Vadirājatīrtha, Rāghavendraīrtha, and Satyābhinavatīrtha. Despite modest claims of only introducing a few novel aspects, the commentary remarkably explores previously uncharted dimensions of the *Puruṣasūkta*, offering fresh insights and bolstering its uniqueness among other commentaries.

This review aims to spotlight aspects of the commentary not commonly found in other interpretations of the *Puruṣasūkta*.

Unexplored dimensions of the *Puruṣasūkta*.

Numerous commentaries already exist for the *Puruṣasūkta*, leading one to question the necessity of yet another. However, upon delving into the present commentary, the rationale for its existence becomes evident. This magnum opus work unveils many previously hidden meanings within the *Puruṣasūkta*, enriching our understanding of this profound hymn.

For instance, the second stanza of the first mantra is meticulously examined, yielding over twenty interpretations. This level of depth is maintained throughout the commentary, with each mantra explored from multiple angles. Furthermore, every interpretation is meticulously supported by a plethora of *pramāṇas*, ensuring the robustness of the analysis.

The commentary also introduces numerous novel aspects previously overlooked by other commentators. These untouched dimensions shed new light on the *Puruṣasūkta*, enriching our comprehension of its intricate teachings.

In summary, the present work distinguishes itself through its

exhaustive exploration of the *Puruṣasūkta*, revealing hidden meanings and offering fresh perspectives that enhance our appreciation of this timeless hymn. I will briefly explain this with some examples.

Who is Ṛṣi Nārāyaṇa?³

Every person who recites a particular Vedic mantra is expected to possess knowledge of the Ṛṣi, Chandas, Devata, and its viniyoga. Here, the author meticulously elucidates all these aspects, which are not commonly found in previous commentaries. While every commentator acknowledges that the Ṛṣi of the *Puruṣasūkta* is Nārāyaṇa, deeper insights into Ṛṣi Nārāyaṇa's identity are often lacking. Is Nārāyaṇa Puruṣa himself, or is he a Ṛṣi named Nārāyaṇa? If he is indeed Puruṣa himself, questions arise regarding whether he exists in his *mūla* (original) form or as an *avatāra* (incarnation) known as Ṛṣi Nārāyaṇa.

This commentary provides answers to these queries by drawing upon references from texts such as the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Ṛgvidhāna, and Mahābhārata. It is clarified that Nārāyaṇa is indeed Puruṣa himself, but he chose to reveal *Puruṣasūkta* in an *avatāra* (incarnation) known as Ṛṣi Nārāyaṇa. . While there may be no explicit differentiation between the *mūla* form and *avatāra* form of Śrī Hari, understanding a particular *avatāra* engenders reverence towards Śrīhari, ultimately leading to devotion.

Śrī Hari has chosen to manifest himself as Ṛṣi Nārāyaṇa, born as the son of Dharma and Mūrti. Mūrti is the daughter of Dakṣa Prajāpati, and Dharma has four sons: Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Hari, and Kṛṣṇa. Among them, Nara is an *avatāra* of Śeṣa, while the others are *avatāras* of Nārāyaṇa. Nara and Nārāyaṇa, residing in Badarikāśrama, engage in penance for the well-being of the world. Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi and Nārāyaṇa, situated in the Milky Ocean, remain indifferent.

An intriguing aspect highlighted by the author is that the Ṛṣi of the *Puruṣasūkta*, Nārāyaṇa, has incarnated himself as one among the Sādhyās. This revelation sheds light on why the Sādhyā are mentioned repeatedly in the *Puruṣasūkta*.

puzzling, as the creation of such a mixture, or even of ghee or curd individually, appears disconnected from the cosmic narrative at play.

One possible interpretation is that this hymn could be referring to the creation of the instruments essential for the yajña, which had already been touched upon in the preceding hymn, "Vasanto asyāsīdājya." However, this interpretation alone does not fully elucidate the significance of Prṣadājya in the context of creation.

Various commentators have attempted to unravel the mystery behind Prṣadājya. Rangaramanuja suggests interpreting "Prṣadājya" as "Retas," symbolizing the seminal essence that serves as a vital instrument in the act of creation. Mangalacharya offers a unique perspective, interpreting "Prṣad" as deer and "Ājya" as a group of sheep, possibly symbolizing certain aspects of creation.

Śaunaka presents yet another intriguing interpretation, suggesting that "Prṣadājya" could symbolize the light of knowledge, which plays a crucial role in the cosmic order of creation. Despite these diverse interpretations, none of the commentaries seem to provide a definitive justification for the contextual meaning of Prṣadājya within the hymn.

In essence, the conundrum surrounding Prṣadājya invites contemplation and interpretation, adding layers of depth to the profound symbolism embedded within the Puruṣasūkta.

Sri Vādirāju offers an insightful interpretation of the term "Prṣadājya," equating "Prṣad" with Amukta-varga, representing non-liberated souls, and "Ājya" with Mukta-varga, signifying liberated souls. Alternatively, he suggests that the hymn may be elucidating the creation of water, which serves as the instrument for the genesis of the world.

In analyzing this hymn, three plausible explanations emerge:

1. Prṣadājya itself gave rise to Vāyavya-paśu.
2. Vishnu independently created both Prṣadājya and Vāyavya-paśu.
3. Vishnu either fashioned the paśu using Prṣadājya or created Prṣadājya first and then formed the paśu, with a direct correlation between the two.

The author diverges from previous interpretations by

Who are the *Sādhyās*?⁴

The *Sādhyā*, mentioned in the 8th hymn of the *Puruṣasūkta*, are elucidated by the author within the context of a Yagna where *Devas*, *Ṛṣis*, and *Sādhyā* partake, considering Brahman as the *Yajñapaśu* (sacrificial animal). The author highlights an intriguing point regarding the use of the word "*Praukṣan*," indicating that animals should not be sacrificed but rather released after performing *Prokṣaṇa-saṃskāra*. Supporting this argument, the author cites verses from the *Brahma Purāṇa*.

Various interpretations of the term "*Sādhyā*" have been proposed. Ranga Ramanuja interprets it as denoting those residing in *Vaikuṇṭha*, the abode of Sri Vishnu, suggesting that the hymn describes a *Yajña* performed by liberated souls residing in *Vaikuṇṭha*. Mahīdhara interprets "*Sādhyā*" as one capable of creation.

However, the author presents four distinct interpretations of the term "*Sādhyā*":

1. *Sādhyā* refers to a distinguished group of *Devas* born from the face of Caturmukha-Brahman. This meaning is supported by quotes from *Purāṇas* to *Upanishads*.
2. *Sādhyā* is used as an adjective for *Devas*. *Sādhyā* *Devas* consisting of eight *Vasus*, eleven *Rudras*, and eleven *Ādityas*.
3. *Sādhyā* denotes certain *Ṛju* *Devas* such as Brahman, *Garuḍa*, *Śeṣa*, *Rudra*, *Sarasvatī*, *Suparṇi*, and *Vārūni*, a meaning established by *Madhvācārya* in *Cāndogya-bhāṣya*.
4. According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, *Prāṇas* should be considered as *Sādhyā*.

Further the author meticulously explores all possible meanings of the hymn, underscoring the complexity and depth of interpretation surrounding the term "*Sādhyā*."

Prṣadājyam – a mixture of ghee and curd.⁵

The ninth hymn of the *Puruṣasūkta* delves into the intricate concept of creation. It says that *yajña* who is Vishnu has created *Prṣadājya*. It introduces the term "*Prṣadājya*," which literally translates to a mixture of ghee and curd. At first glance, this seems

asserting that the initial segment of the hymn pertains to the nourishment or protection of the world. Consequently, "Pṛṣadājya" is

