CHAPTER–VI

SAYANA AS A VEDIC COMMENTATOR

Among the celebrated commentators on Vedas, Sayana is undoubtedly the most illustrious one. He commented upon almost all the Samhitas and leading Brāhmaṇas in Indian literature. His commentaries are proved to be the milestone in the history of Vedic interpretation.

That this great Vedic scholar flourished during the fourteenth century A.D. is an established fact. Acarya Baladeva Upādhyāya held that Sayana's commentaries on Vedas may be written perhaps on the later part of fourteenth century. Regarding his personal life a little information can be known from his commentaries. In fact, Acarya Baladeva Upādhyāya brought out a book on his life history and he titled it as Acarya Sāyana aur Mādhava and it is published from Vārānasi.

Most of the information regarding his life history can be taken out from his various introductions to the commentaries. At first, from his introduction to the Rgveda bhāsyā, we know that Sāyana himself said that he explained the Yajurveda first because all the verses of this Veda were applied in sacrifices. Now he will explain the Rgveda for the Hotr priest. But before that he, after offering salute to Lord Ganesa, stated that there were in ancient some blessed persons who had contributed greatly towards the interpretations of Vedas. Among the admirers of Vedas the king Bukka was a noted one.

He requested Acarya Mādhava to write commentaries on Vedas. In fact Mādhava

2. Rgvedabhāṣyopakramanikā, pg. 1.

ahavyayavasya yajñasya pradhānyadvyaktaḥ purā yajurvedo'tha hatrārthamṛgvedo
vyākaraṣyaate
was kind hearted and he after acquiring knowledge and interpreting the two Mimāṃsas became mentally prepared in interpreting Vedas. This scholar Madhava was a reputed scholar and Sāyana named all his commentaries as vedārthatprakāśā belonging to Madhava i.e. mādhaviya vedārthatprakāśā. Some of his commentaries shows a different reading of the word Sāyana in place of Madhava. It is learnt here that Madhavacārya was an admirer of king Bukka. King Bukka reigned the province of Vijaynagara along with his elder brother Harihara. They were the founder of the kingdom of Vijaynagara. Previously they were in the employ of the Hoysala king. Taking advantage of the unstable conditions of the country and uprisings of Muslim rule therein these two brothers defied the authority of the Hoysala king. Ten years later, on the death of the king, they declared themselves rulers of the kingdom. They followed the advice of Madhava Vidyāraṇya, a learned religious teacher. Harihara built the city of Vijaynagara and made it his capital. Bukka succeeded his brother Harihara, till 1377. Bukka's son Harihara-II (1377-1404) was the first to assume the Imperial title. It is here stated that Rayas of Vijaynagar were patrons of learning and encouraged Sanskrit and Telegu literature. Sāyana, the famous commentator of the Vedas, and his learned brother, Madhava, were encouraged by the early rulers. That Sāyana and Madhava were


yat katāksena tadṛṣpamādadhādbukka mahāpateḥ /

ādiṣanmādhavācāryain vedarthatasya prakāśane //3//
ye pūrvo arāmēmīṃse te vyākhyaṃyati saṁgrahōt /

kṛpālumādhavācāryo vedārthatān vaktumudyatalāḥ //4//

4. Taittiriya aryāvakopakramanīkā, kṛpālūḥ sāyanācāryo vedārthatān vaktumudyatalāḥ /


6. Ibid., pg. 131.
two brothers and they were patronised by the founder kings of Vijaynagara were clear from the above mentioned words of K.C. Vyas and his fellow scholar-cum authors. So it is clear that Sāyāṇa and Mādhava these two great teachers in Sanskrit flourished in the fourteenth century A.D. Śrīdhar Sārma agrees with this flourishing period of these two scholars and viewed that at the request of his elder brother Sri Mādhavacārya who was previously asked by king Harihara to write commentaries on four Vedas, Sāyāṇa completed his commentaries on four Vedas and named the commentaries in the name of his elder brother, i.e. Mādhava. He thereby quoted two verses of unknown source. Thus these two verses:

```
sa prāha nṛpatim rājan sāyāṇacāryo mamāmujah
sarvam vetyesa vedānāṁ vyākhyātrīvena yujyātām /
ityukto mādhavacāryena vīrabukkamahipatih
anvagāt sāyāṇacāryam vedārthasya prakāśane //
```

He took Śrī Harihara to be named as king Bukka. He asserted that Sāyāṇa was the chief minister of king Harihara as because Sāyāṇa spoke of himself as dhurandhara of kingdom of Harihara Another important point raised by Śrīdhar Sārma regarding personal life of Sāyāṇa is that Sāyāṇa was the disciple of a great teacher Śrīśalikarāṇanda, otherwise called as Vidyāūrītha who was of world fame by making running commentaries on Ātmapurāṇa, Gītā etc. The basis of his idea lies in the

---

7. Sārma Śrīdhar. Upodgātāh, Sūtāpathabrahmanāsya, pg. 27.
8. Loc eat.
introductory verse of Sayana himself. This verse is nothing but the first verse of his introduction to Vedic commentaries viz.,

\[
yasya nisvasitam veda
\]
\[
yo vedebyo' khilam jagat /
\]
\[
nirname tamaham vande
\]
\[
vidyātirthamahesvaram //
\]

Sridhar Sarmā takes this verse to be a praise of a guru or teacher. He pointed out that Sayana often concluded his commentary on every chapter of the Sat. Br. by saying,

\[
vedarthāsya prakāśena tamo ārdam nīvarayan /
pumārthānscaturo deyāvidyātirtha mahēśvarah /
\]

This verse is another proof of his being a disciple of great teacher Sankarānanda Vidyātīrtha. Sridhara Sarmā is of opinion that Sayana ornamented this land of India during the Vikramādha, 1372-1425 as a chief minister of Vijoynagara. Later on he became the Sankaracārya and owned fame as Vidyāraranyāśvāmi.

That Madhava was his elder brother is expressed by Sayana in his work, Yajñatantrasudhānaidhi as follows:

\[
tasyabhudvayaguruslatvā siddhāntadarśakah
sarvajñāḥ sāyānācāryo māyārāyatanādbhavaḥ /
upendrasyeva yasyāridindrah / sumanasaṁ priyaḥ
mahākratūnāma harítā mādhavāryāḥ sahodarāḥ //
\]

Modak, has discussed the family life of Sayana quoting certain relevant passages from Sanskrit texts. Parasaramadhava is stated as a commentary on Parāśarasūrī, a work on Dharma-Sāstra. He quotes a passage from its preface where it is said that

---
10. Modak, B. R., Makers of Indian literature, Sayana, Sahitya Academi, New Delhi, pg. 62.
Sayana was born in a Brahmin family which had settled at Hampi on the bank of the river Tungabhadra in Karnataka. The name of his father was Mayana and the name of his mother was Shrimayi. His elder brother was Madhava and younger brother was Bhoganatha (also known as Somanatha). He belonged to the Taittiriya Shakhä of Krïṣṇa Yajurveda. His gotra was Bharadvaja and Sutra was Baudhâyana.11 Reflecting on his life, Modak states that Sayana had his earlier study under the great preceptor Vidyäiritha of Shringeri.12 Besides Vidyäiritha and Bharatitirtha, Sayana is said to have another teacher viz. Śrīkātha. In the Epigraphica Indica, Vol. 3, as quoted by Modak13 this information is beautifully laid down as such—

\[
\text{srimayi janani pita lava menir baudhâyana mâyano} \\
\text{iyestho mādhavabhittabhūṣanayoranyajah sribhoganāthah kavih} \\
\text{svāmī saṅgamabhūpatiḥ kavivaraḥ śrīkāthanātho guruh} \\
\text{bhūrādva[jakulesa sāyaṇa gunaistvattastvāmevadhikāh} \\
\text{Epigraphica Indica, Vol. 3, pg. 118}
\]

His Work: In the history of Vedic interpretation Sayana will be remembered ever for his major contributions. As many as sixteen commentaries on Vedic texts, besides a good number of original works are proved to be sign of his genuine scholarship. During the reign of king Bukka the following commentaries were written.

1. Taittiriya Samhitā
2. Taittiriya Brahmana
3. Taittiriya Aranyaka
4. Rgveda Samhitā

11. Modak B. R., ibid., pg. 4
12. Loc. cit
13. Loc. cit
Besides, he wrote a number of important works in Sanskrit literature. Among these, the following are noteworthy.

1. *Subhāṣita Sudhāṇidhi*
2. *Prāyaścitta Sudhāṇidhi*
3. *Āyurveda Sudhāṇidhi*
4. *Alamkāra Sudhāṇidhi*
5. *Puruṣārtha Sudhāṇidhi*
6. *Yajñāntra Sudhāṇidhi*
7. *Mādhaviya Dhatuvrtti*
8. *Satapathā Brāhmanabhasya*
9. *Aṭhārvavedabhasya*
Some of these works are lost while some are found in different parts of India published by reputed publishers.

**Characteristics of Śāyāna's Commentaries:** Almost all the commentaries made by Ācārya Śāyāna are characterised as Madhaviya Vediṣṭhāpaprakāśa i.e. light on the meanings of Vedas, dedicated to the name of his elder brother Ācārya Madhava. In the prelude to his commentary on the Sat. Br. Śrīdharā Sarma states that from the expression made by Madhava himself it is learnt that Śāyāna out of his great regard for elder brother Madhava named his commentary after his elder brother Madhava i.e. Madhaviyāni.\(^{14}\)

It may be said that Śāyāna as an exponent on Vedas was well versed in all branches of Vedic as well as Sanskrit literature. In his process of explanation Śāyāna used extensively the explanations of scholars of ancient India. Specially he took help of Yāska's Nirukta. He was a man of vast knowledge. Introductions to commentaries on various Vedic text made by Śāyāna are in reality prove his versatile genius. Another feature of his writing seems to be his treatment of elaborate Vedic myths. Generally scholars speak of his Vedic interpretation as ritual explanations. Śāyāna explained Vedas from the point of view of sacrifices. Even then he never failed to refer to the views of historians, Atmavid and etymologists and so on so forth.

---

\(^{14}\) Srivājasanacili-madhyaṇdasatapatha Brāhmaṇam, upodghāta, pg. 27
Sañāṇa gives the etymological derivation of different words. He quotes the explanation of Yāśka. He narrates many legends in the midst of his commentary. He mentions the views of various scholars also. No other Indian commentator except Sañāṇa has explained the four Vedas at length. For the proper understanding of scripture traditional learning has been considered as an important factor. Yāśka too speaks of three types of interpretation of the Vedic poetry viz. Yājñā, Daivata and Ādhyāma. The ritualistic tradition of Sañāṇa too includes both Yājñā and Daivata type of interpretation. Sañāṇa's work was influenced by the work of his predecessors Sañāṇa is as it were a repository of the Rgvedic interpretations of his predecessors viz. Skandasvāmin, Udgīha and Venkaṭamādhava. He made extensive use of the work of Venkaṭamādhava. Sañāṇa's interpretation of a single verse is based partly on Skandasvāmin and partly on Venkaṭamādhava. He has followed Udgīha also. European scholars appreciated his materialistic interpretation and they preferred Sañāṇa's commentary as their starting point. But Śri Aurovinda's interpretation may be said as based on spiritualism. Yāśka's Nirukta seems to be the first effort after the Brāhmaṇas at interpreting the Vedas. Its basis was grammar and it tried to indicate the origin of Vedic words. In his bhāṣya Sañāṇa shows his acquaintances with various schools of Vedic interpretation that prevailed in his time. Sañāṇa has made extensive use of Nighanta as well as of Yāśka's Nirukta. He very often quotes Yāśka's interpretation of a verse in support of his own explanation. Sañāṇa has dealt with the grammatical forms of various Vedic words by making extensive use of Panini's Astadhyāyī. Reflecting on the contributions of Sañāṇa, B.R. Modak says, "Sañāṇa must have found out great scholars

15. Durgacārya on Nirukta. 1.20

daiivata hi yajñāṁ antarbhūtameva /
on different fields of learning, he must have invited them to Vijaynagara and made arrangement for their stay as well as maintenance, he must have had intelligent discussions with them and must have improve upon their writing and must have engaged himself sincerely in writing important works. All this was possible because Sāyāna had the strong support and help of king Bukka andharihara II. H. H. Wilson, Professor of Sanskrit in Oxford University says, "although the interpretation of Sāyāna may be occasionally questioned, he undoubtedly had a knowledge of text far beyond the pretension of any European scholar and must have been in possession, either through his own learning or that of his assistants, of all the interpretations which had been perpetuated by traditional teaching from the early time." 17

There are some discrepancies in his commentary on the Atharvaveda. So some scholars say that the commentator of the Atharvaveda may be different from Sāyāna, the commentator of the Rgveda. But it is said that the so called discrepancy can be explained as due to the different context and different application of the mantras.

Sāyāna served as a minister in the Vijaynagara Kingdom for more than forty years. He worked about twenty years for the development of Vedic literature. Vijaynagara was in its formative period when Sāyāna became the minister. But due to Sāyāna's hardwork, the establishment of Vijayagara empire led to the renaissance of Hinduism. So Sāyāna will be remembered as long as Veda exists in this world. Perhaps owing to his great contribution in the field of Vedic exegesis, Prof. MaxMuller rightly states, "we ought to bear in mind that five and twenty years ago, we could not

have made our first steps, we could never at least have gained a firm footing without his leading strings."\textsuperscript{18} In reality Sāyana was the blind man's stick as remarked by Ācārya Baladeva Upādhyāya.\textsuperscript{19} This great scholar from Vijaynagar (modern Kanītak) will ever be remembered with reverence for his masterly Vedic expositions. His outstanding contribution lies on his ritualistic explanations that are featured with myths.

Here in this present context the myths in the \textit{Śat. Br.} as exposed by Sāyana is aimed at.

\textsuperscript{18} R̥gveda Samhitā with the commentary of Sāyana, Ed. By F. MaxMuller, Introduction.
\textsuperscript{19} Upādhyāya. Baladeva, ibid., pg. 89