A Novel Interpretation of *Bṛhaspatisūkta*

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**Abstract:** Vedas have been studied with great interest at all times, resulting in their multi-lingual translations across the globe. There have been attempts to understand the Vedic *devatās* with different perspectives. These *devatās* are mythically glorified in the later literature, especially in the *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas*. Among the earlier attempts made by scholars, we find detailed accounts of deities like Indra, Agni and a few others, but seldom do we find the same of Brhaspati. This paper presents a detailed novel interpretation with a perspective in light of *ādhyātmika* understanding of the *Bṛhaspatisūkta* (10.68) of the *Ṛgveda*. Here the author tried to follow the path of interpretative tradition expounded by the ācāryas like Udgītha, Sāyaṇa etc. and also the later commentators.

**Keywords:** *Ṛgveda*, *Ādhyātmika* Interpretation, *Saṃhitās*, Sāyaṇācārya, Sūkta, *Bṛhaspatisūkta*, *Aitihāsika*

1. Introduction

The Vedic tradition believes that the Vedas have different layers of meanings like *ādhiyājñika*, *ādhidaivika* and *ādhyātmika*. However, people mostly consider the *yājñika* interpretation of the Vedas and developed a narrative that *saṃhitās* are meant only for ritualistic purposes. (Wilson, 2016, p. xliii) It is necessary to see that the interpretations of the Vedic *saṃhitās* go way beyond the *yājñika* meaning, and a much deeper connection to *Vedānta* can be seen. When we examine Sāyaṇācārya’s commentary, he gave the applications of each *sūkta* in appropriate *yājñita* in the beginning. However, in the commentary, along with his objective or literal interpretation with possible alternative derivations, he gave *ādhyātmika* perspective too.1 (Rajwade, 1933, p. 110c) But the modern interpreters have overlooked these aspects. (Wilson, 2016, p. 431) Moreover, in order to understand a hymn, the reader has to understand the continuity and connection of each *mantra* with the other, along with the connection of one *sūkta* in relation to another. There is an onus to decipher the *Ṛgveda* in a genuine and well-informed way.

This paper presents a detailed novel interpretation with a perspective in light of *ādhyātmika* understanding of the *Bṛhaspatisūkta* (10.68) of the *Ṛgveda* in a way not hitherto acknowledged as prominent by following the hints given by the traditional Indian commentators. The interpretation of this *sūkta* contains an outlook at the beginning, followed by the novel commentary and a conclusion. The outlook includes the features of the *sūkta*, some pre-knowledge, and a summary of each *mantra*. In the commentary section, first, the *mantra* and its *padapātha* with *svara* are given. A detailed commentary in Sanskrit is provided right after the *padapātha*. Then an English translation of the same follows.

2. Pre-knowledge for the *sūkta*

The present *sūkta* is the 68th *sūkta* of the 10th *maṇḍala* or the 8th *sūkta* of the 5th *anuvāka* of the 10th *maṇḍala*. There are 12 *mantras* in this *sūkta*. The *ṛṣi* of this *sūkta* is Ayāśya of Aṅgirasas *gotra*. The *devatā* is Brhaspati, and the *sūkta* is composed in *Triśūlap* metre.

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1 Wilson, 2016, p. 110c
Before we look into the present sūkta, a certain understanding is needed. Sāyana, begins his commentary by introducing the background story of the present sūkta. Brhaspati is the son of Aṅgiras, and he is the puropita of Indra. Once, the demons Panis stole the cows of Indra and kept them in a dark hidden place in the city of Vala. Indra then sent his dog Saramā to find his cows. When Saramā was unable to complete the task, Indra approached Brhaspati to find them and bring them back.2 (Rajwade, 1933, p. 97)

3. The background story of the sūkta

This sūkta stands out amongst others as it has a fascinating mythological (aitihāsika) story in the foreground with a deeper understanding in the background.

As per the story, when Brhaspati heard the cows’ mooing from the caves of the mountain, he recognised them as Indra’s cows. When Brhaspati destroyed the weapons of Vala, covered by his soldiers from all sides, the cows hidden in the cave became visible. Consequently, Brhaspati brought out the cows from the caves and reunited the deities with their cows. The deities obliged by Brhaspati sang his praises.

4. Vedāntic approach to the sūkta

The following interpretation of this story tries to bring out a deeper insight in the light of Vedānta. Before we begin, all characters that were found in the story should be understood in the following way.

- The word ‘go’, which refers to a cow in the story, is referred to the Knowledge-light (ray of Knowledge) (jñānaraśmi)3
- the word parvata is referred to the intellect (buddhi)
- Antarikṣa to the mind (manas)
- Vala to the ignorance (ajñāna)
- Brhaspati to a Guru.

The abduction of the cows of the deities by Vala is interpreted as covering of the Knowledge by ignorance of a sādhaka, seeker of the ultimate Knowledge. Unable to access the Knowledge, the sādhaka seeks Brhaspati’s guidance. When he hears the inner call of his soul, jivātman, which is bound by ignorance, Brhaspati takes up the task of making the Knowledge accessible to the sādhaka. Then Brhaspati expels the ajñāna, ignorance, from his mind through ultimate Knowledge. And when Brhaspati destroyed the tormenting ignorance cloaked with lust, anger, greed and so on, by the powerful Upaniṣadic teachings, the Knowledge hidden within became accessible, just as the cows hidden in the cave became visible.

Consequently, Brhaspati brings the couple, i.e., paramātman and jivātman together, by shedding the ignorance of the jivātman who has forgotten his true identity of being one with the paramātman or the Ultimate. Then the sādhaka, obliged by Brhaspati sang his praises.

It can be seen here that Sāyana has interpreted the foreground story in the light of the Itiḥāsā, and Udgītha in the light of the ādhyātmika approach. In contrast, the present research intends to provide an interpretation with an ādhyātmika (Vedāntic) approach.

5. Features of this sūkta - Similes

This sūkta explains how Brhaspati takes up the task of finding the cows and freeing them from the demons. This whole process has been beautifully described with a series of similes which are presented in the interpretation. There are 18 similes cited in the 12 mantras. Almost every action of the story has been described with a simile or two. For example, in the first mantra, one can see three similes to describe the praise given by the deities in the story. The similes are as follows:

1. Saving themselves from drowning, as birds chirp in joy flying above water; the praying deities fondly sang praises of Brhaspati for the return of their cows.
2. As constantly thundering clouds roar filled with water; the praying deities fondly sang praises of Brhaspati for the return of their cows.

2 (भृगुस्तेत सामः सा रामाः 1.6.5, 1.8.8, 1.32.11 इत्यादि)
3 The derivations of the same will be discussed in detail in the next section.
3. As the sound of waves from rivers gushes out of the mountains, freed from them; the praying deities fondly sang praises of Bṛhaspati for the return of their cows.

Here, each simile expresses different emotions behind the praise, which shows how important the cows are to the deities.

1. The first simile expresses the feeling of ecstasy due to the return of the cows.
2. The second simile expresses the feeling of fulfillment.
3. The third simile expresses the feeling of freedom due to the return of the cows.

Thus, the present sūkta is adorned with suitable and meaningful similes that have precisely expressed every action of this story.

6. Features of this sūkta – Puzzling order of the mantras

Another interesting thing that can be seen in this sūkta is the puzzling order of the mantras to convey the story. Usually, a sūkta presents a story through the mantras in an orderly manner. However, that is not the case here. For instance, the first mantra of this sūkta presents the story’s conclusion, whereas the tenth mantra commences the story. In the initial period of this study, it was felt that the mantras conveyed the story in descending order. But, after proper understanding of the theme of the story, having consulted other related sūktas and investigating mythical legends, the present sequence of the mantras has been arrived, which is as follows: mantra no. 10, 11, 9, 7, 5, 6, 4, 3, 2, 1, and 12. Here, the 12th mantra depicts the benefits (phalaśruti), which will be blessed upon the reciter by the deity of the sūkta. Below is an attempt to present the story by following the new sequence of the mantras.

- The story begins with the abduction of the cows of the deities by Vala. Unable to find their cows, the deities seek Bṛhaspati’s aid. Bṛhaspati takes up the task of finding the cows. (Mantra no. 10)
- The ancestors of Bṛhaspati who assisted him in this task, established the constellations in the dyuloka to provide him with light. They arranged the light of day and the darkness of night. (Mantra no. 11)
- Bṛhaspati also took Uṣas, Āditya and Agni with him to find the cows. (Mantra no. 9)
- On his way, when he heard the cows’ mooing from inside the mountain, Bṛhaspati recognised them as his cows. (Mantra no. 7)
- He expelled darkness from antarikṣa through his light and confirmed the presence of the cows there. (Mantra no. 5)
- He saw cows covered by rocks from all sides. (Mantra no. 8)
- When Bṛhaspati destroyed Vala’s weapons covered by his soldiers from all sides, then the cows hidden in the cave became visible. (Mantra no.6)
- Consequently, Bṛhaspati brought out the cows from the caves. (Mantra no. 4)
- The cows were brought out from the mountain and taken to the deities. (Mantra no. 3)
- Thus, Bṛhaspati, the son of Aṅgiras reunited the deities with their cows. (Mantra no. 2)
- The deities obliged by Bṛhaspati sung his praises. (Mantra no. 1)
- Thus, we offer our obeisance to the antarikṣa deva, Bṛhaspati. (Mantra no. 12)

7. An Alternative Interpretation of the sūkta

As we see above, the new arrangement of the mantras suit the storyline is quite a unique feature of this sūkta. However, in this attempt of providing the ādhyātmika quintessence constructed on the story, the original order of the mantras of the sūkta is retained.

10.68.1 उद्धृते न वयोऽर्संभाणाः वार्दवतो भृस्यस्यश्व घोषाः।
गिरिभ्रजः नार्मद्यन्त्यृहस्तविनियम्यश्च अनावन्॥

उद्धृते।। न।। वयोऽर्संभाणाः।। वार्दवतो।। भृस्यस्यश्व घोषाः।।
गिरिभ्रजः।। न।। अर्मद्यन्त्यृहस्तविनियम्य।।
अस्मि।। अर्कोः।। अनावन्॥

स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।
स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।
स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।
स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।
स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।
स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।
स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।
स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।
स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।
स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।
स्वात्मानम्।। उद्धृते।। नमोऽद्माण्नात्य।।

As the sound of waves from rivers gushes out of the mountains, freed from them; the praying deities fondly sang praises of Bṛhaspati for the return of their cows.
As birds fly above water thus saving themselves from drowning, chirping with joy; as constantly thundering clouds filled with water roar, as the sound of waves from rivers gushing out of the mountains, freed from their source, the praying seekers, feeling elevated, fulfilled and freed from worldly cycles, fondly sang praises to Brhaspati.

- **उद्योगः** - [पृ. 5] उद्योग करते निःस्वाध्यत जगाद्युद्यम् यतः | नस्य: | नतः। ५ उद्योग करते निःस्वाध्यतात जगाद्युद्यम् यतः | जगाद्युद्यम् | नस्यः।
- **अधिक्यः** - [पृ. 5, 7, 11] (अधयते निःस्वाध्यते) नस्यः। | नस्यः। | नस्यः। अधयते निःस्वाध्यते। अधयते निःस्वाध्यते। अधयते निःस्वाध्यते।
- **निःस्वाध्यः** - [पृ. 5] निःस्वाध्यत चतुर्वेदवन्त निःस्वाध्यः।
- **उम्मः** - [पृ. 5] उम्म चतुर्वेदवन्त निःस्वाध्यः।

4 This type of etymological explanation which includes possible derivations of most of the words with references is provided only once here as an example. The author did the same effort for all the mantras. However, sticking to the word limit, he did not provide such explanations for the rest of the mantras.
Hence, Brhaspati pervading by his tejas-like Knowledge, unites the worshippers with Knowledge-light. As the sun brings its light to people engulfed in darkness, similarly Brhaspati brings the couple (paramātman and jīvātman) together by shedding the ignorance of jīvātman who has forgotten his true identity of being one with the paramātman or ultimate. Oh, Brhaspati! As a warrior engages fast running horses on the battlefield, you engage the misguided senses (indriyas) of the seeker towards its inner journey.

Brhaspati immediately extracted the light of Knowledge from the mind-cave absorbed in ignorance. The light of Knowledge that was held by the supreme, which is in constant motion, which will never stop, is sought by the mumukṣus, deserved by a worthy adhikārin, flawless and praiseworthy. It should be extracted how: as grain is obtained from a debtor.

By saturating the mind with the nectar of Knowledge, by sowing the seeds of ātmatāv a i.e., the source of the ultimate truth, by releasing the Knowledge from the bondage of ignorance, like the sun releases
shooting stars from the dyuloka, the revered Bṛhaspati cleaves the sheaths of mind covered in ignorant passions and desires like water penetrating the earth’s crust and entering into it.

10.68.5 अपि ज्योतिषिः तमं अन्तरिक्षादादुतः शीतास्मिनि वाते आज्ञत।
बूह्स्तिनुस्माय वृसत्सागर्भिः वाते आ चक्कु आ गा।

अं ज्योति। तमं। अन्तरिक्षात। उदन। शीतालम। वातं। आज्ञत। बूह्स्तिः। अनुमृः। वृसत्स्य।
अनुमृः। वात। आ। चक्कु। आ। गा।

वातः वायुः उदनः उदकतः शीताल इव शीताल यथा अयस्यार्थोऽति तथा, बूह्स्तिः आसत्सुन्मवम् अवगतस्यातुजुम आह्वानः आनुमृृथ नितिपथाः, ज्योतिः जाताकाशारणाम् अन्तरिक्षादादुतः॥

मन: ॥ २० अन्तः-करणात तमः अन्ति वक्राब्ध्रम्म अप आज्ञ। अपागमश्वः। वातः
वायुः वायूः विकारिन्म् अस्माः इव वायुः एकात्मोऽति तथा, वायुः आवरणात्मकः अस्माः आवरणात्मकः गृहीतान् आ
वायुः जाताकाशारणाम् अनुमृः। आच्छादः आसमातः एकात्मकोऽति॥

As the wind clears out algae from water, so Bṛhaspati clears out the tamas from mind, having determined the seeker’s resoluteness to gain the ultimate truth. As the wind brings together rain-bearing clouds, so Bṛhaspati unveils ignorance that covers the all-pervading Knowledge.

10.68.6 यदा वृस्तिः पीयंतो जसू श्रेष्ठश्रुतिन्ततदिग्यमिर्यात।
दुर्मत्ये ज्ञिवार परिवेशितोऽदनि।
यदा क्षति ज्ञानाद्यमाणां वायुः क्षति।
अन्तः अन्तः। अन्तः। अर्कः। अर्कः। अर्कः। अर्कः।
आतः। आतः। आतः।

दद्वः परिभ्रतः भक्तः ज्ञिवार न यथा आदत्त अखित्ता तथा, शोकमोक्षार्थान्ते पीयः
पीडायाय वस्त्राः वस्त्राः अवस्त्राः कामक्षाधिकाः। परिभ्रतः परिभ्रतः जसुः
स्मृतवस्त्राः स्मृतवस्त्राः। यदा अयतिपालिः। अयतिआर्या आर्याः। अर्कः।
स्थानः।

When Bṛhaspati destroyed the body clothed by lust, anger, greed and so on, of tormenting ignorance caused by sorrow and delusion, by powerful prayers as the tongue consumes food covered by teeth, then, he made the ātmatvā which is the base of the Knowledge-light accessible.

10.68.7 बूह्स्तिन्तमुः हि लयसास्य नाभिः स्वरीयाः सदतो गुरूः यत।
अण्डे स्त्रिया शुकुनस्य सम्मुद्दियाः। पर्वतस्य त्यानज्जात॥

बूह्स्तिः। अमतः। हि। चेताः। आसमा। नाम। चेताः। सदतो। गुरूः। यत। आण्डाः।
स्त्रियाः। शुकुनस्य। गर्भम।
उत्त। स्त्रियाः। पर्वतस्य। त्यान। आज्ञात॥

साधकः गुरूः सदतो बुद्धुहारः।

30 इददः। वा स्थाने स्वरीयाः स्वर्गानां स्वर्गानां स्वर्गानां वा आसा
Jाताकाशारणां त्वत् अवयक्तकम्
नाम आह्वानम् यत्

अमतः अवागङ्कतः तदा हि,
शुकुनस्य परिष्ठाः। ताप।
अण्डा। श्रवणम। गर्भम।
अण्डः।

27 अन्तः। आनुमृः। श्रवणम।
28 मनः। अपः। अपः। अपः।
29 साधारणः शुष्कः। शुष्कः।
30 शुष्कः]|।
31 “सभिद्वै मुहाद्वदम” (सभिद्वै ११.२.४.९)
When Brhaspati heard the implicit invocation of the self-illuminating Knowledge-light in the mind-cave of the seeker, then he inspired the seeker to lead the veiled Knowledge out of the covers of ignorance in the mind-cave by himself, through prayers, like a bird’s incubation inspires a hatch to break an egg and come out of it.

As a fish wriggles in a dry lake, so Brhaspati found the Knowledge-light agitated and enveloped by the body which is the abode of enjoyment. As a chalice already existent in a tree is extracted from it, so divine Knowledge is extracted from ignorance, spellbinding the ignorance with special prayers.

Bhraspati accompanied Uṣā in order to remove the darkness. In order to reveal the truth, he took Sūrya as his companion and to guide the seeker towards the right path, he took Agni with him. That Brhaspati dispelled the darkness by prayers. As marrow is extracted from joints, similarly, he extracted and manifested the knowledge-light from the mind-cave, the playing-field of ignorance.
As leaves appear to be robbed by a blanket of snow, so the revered Knowledge-light appears to be covered by ignorance. Now, with the power of prayers, Bhraspati has overpowered ignorance and unveiled Knowledge. Thus, he performed a task which cannot be replicated by anyone else and which does not leave any scope for doing it again as long as both sun and moon rise, i.e., till the world-cycle exists. Here, the task is uniting the paramātman and jīvātman together by shedding the ignorance of jīvātman, who has forgotten his true identity being one with the paramātman or the ultimate, with the upaniṣadic teachings. This task of a Guru cannot be replicated by anyone because only the Guru can guide us in this path. The task should not be repeated because, through the upaniṣadic teaching, all worldly sorrows will be castigated entirely, i.e., after this castigation, nothing will be left than the Knowledge.

10.68.11
अभिषेका श्यावं स कृश्यामें न नाते: स्तितो द्योपन्यायम्।
राज्यां तमो अद्धुं क्षुद्रतेन बुधस्तिमिन्ददिविद्वन्नाम्।
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अभिषेका श्यावं स कृश्यामें न नाते: स्तितो द्योपन्यायम्।
राज्यां तमो अद्धुं क्षुद्रतेन बुधस्तिमिन्ददिविद्वन्नाम्।

When Bhraspati destroyed the ignorance and made accessible the Knowledge-light, the admirers of Bhraspati have adorned and brightened the antarikṣa with constellations, as people adorn a dark horse with golden ornaments. Moreover, they placed darkness in night and light in day.

10.68.12
इद्वमें कुलम् नारी अभिशयाय यु: पूर्वस्वावन्नोत्तरवीती।
बुधस्तिमां स हि गोवसिः: सो अस्वसः: स वीरेतिः; स नृविन्तिः वर्षां धारथाः।

इद्वमं अकर्षम् नारी अभिशयाय यु: पूर्वस्वावन्नोत्तरवीती।
बुधस्तिमां स हि गोवसिः: सो अस्वसः: स वीरेतिः; स नृविन्तिः धारथाः।

Let us offer this homage to Bhraspati, who resides in antarikṣa. He who is recited with above-said praise; may bestow to us an elevated life with intellect full of Knowledge, well-receiving senses, enthusiastic vitality/energy and strong vein.
8. Conclusion

It can be seen that Sāyaṇa has interpreted the foreground story in the light of the Itihāsa, and Udgītha in the light of the ādhyātmika (Vedāntic) approach.

In this novel interpretation, the author tried to follow the path of interpretative tradition expounded by ācāryas like Udgītha, Sāyaṇa etc. and the later commentators. Sāyaṇācārya presents the possibility for a vivid interpretation of this sūkta by interpreting certain words like 'go', 'vala', 'parvata' etc. For example, initially, he interprets 'go' as cow, and in an alternative scheme of interpretation, he has explained the same term as rainwater.

One of the later commentators, Brahmamuni, who follows the philosophy of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, also interprets the sūkta in spiritual light. He translates the phrase 'aśnā apinaddha mādhū pari-apāsyat' in the eighth mantra as 'he sees the soul firmly bound by the body, the place of worldly enjoyment'. Here the meaning of the word 'aśnā' is taken as 'by the body'. This interpretation is very contextual and meaningful in the Vedāntic line of thought.

Such instances in the interpretation provide a fertile ground for possible alternative interpretations. These frequent hints are an inspiration, and they paved the way for the present sūkta, expounded under a novel idea.

These paths, which are laid by our ancestors, can also guide the way for other sūktas, which can also give an ādhyātmika (Vedāntic) view. There is plenty of scope for such an interpretation, majorly for sūktas that are related to the deity Bṛhaspati and Brahmanaspati.

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