

*Oxford don and self-proclaimed
Rishi profanes Vedic Hymn.*



*Abstract and train of thoughts*¹

Introductory Notes by H . P . Blavatsky.

Max Müller's "Matsya Sukta"

Criticism of the "Matsya Sukta" by H.P. Blavatsky.

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¹ Frontispiece by Arunava Biswas.

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CRITICISM OF MAX MÜLLER'S "MATSYA SUKTA"

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Introductory Notes by H.P. Blavatsky.

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. VII (41), January 1891, pp. 413-17. Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (A CRITICISM ON A CRITIC) XIII pp. 104-10.

Professor Max Müller¹ in the *New Review* and in the *Sanskrit Critical Journal*.
“Criticize criticism only.”

We are glad that Professor Max Müller has noticed us in the January [1891] number of the *New Review*, as we thus have the opportunity of returning the compliment to the learned philologist, for whose labours in the “Science of language” we have always had a profound respect, while at the same time reserving to ourselves our own opinion as to his competency to deal either with the records or matters of Āryan religions or philosophies. The article in question is entitled “Christianity and Buddhism,” and while we can congratulate neither religion on its treatment by the Professor, we sincerely sympathise with the former in that the championship of the well-known Orientalist has left her in so sorry a predicament. We shall perhaps at some later date have a few words to say on this subject, pointing out the utter ignorance of even elementary symbology displayed in the paper. At present, however, we have only to notice the first paragraph, and enter a slight protest in the name of the native pandits in general and of the Sanskrit and Pali scholars of the T.S.² in particular, who are by the way sufficiently numerous in India and Ceylon.

The paragraph runs as follows:

Who has not suffered lately from Theosophy and Esoteric Buddhism? Journals are full of it, novels overflow with it, and oh! the private and confidential letters to ask what it all really means. It is nearly as bad as the Anglo-Jewish craze and the Original Home of the Āryans. Esoteric [105] Buddhism has no sweet odour in the nostrils of Sanskrit and Pali scholars. They try to keep aloof from it, and to avoid all controversy with its prophets and prophetesses. But it seems hard on them that they should be blamed for not speaking out, when their silence says really all that is required.³

Émile Burnouf *did* speak out, however, and the readers of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* know what he said for Theosophy. Another eminent Orientalist also accepted the hospitality of *Lucifer's* pages lately, and Professor Max Müller must now pay the penalty of refusing to listen to Harpocrates, and of taking his finger from his lips.

¹ [Friedrich Max Müller, 1823–1900, German-born philologist and orientalist, who lived and studied in Britain for most of his life. He was one of the founders of the western academic disciplines of Indian and religious studies. Müller wrote both scholarly and popular works on Indology, and edited *The Sacred Books of the East*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879–1885, a 50-volume set of English translations by various Oriental scholars.]

² [Theosophical Society]

³ [p. 67]

From this introductory paragraph, we learn the interesting fact that the Professor's calm is being somewhat disturbed and that in order to overawe a questioning public, he is endeavouring to hide himself in the cloak of scholarship, with its ever-changing hues, and to step onto the lofty pedestal of patronising Western Orientalism.

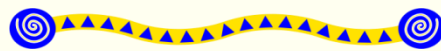
Now the English-speaking public is notorious for its love of fair-play, and is gradually waking up to the fact that it is systematically and studiously kept in ignorance of many things, which prevent it forming a just judgment, and thus is proportionately growing righteously indignant. We, therefore, consider it our duty to let the public see both sides of the picture, by giving further publicity to a criticism of our critic. This we do both on general principles, following that ideal of Justice which is the cardinal tenet of Theosophy; and also in particular, because one of the Objects of the Theosophical Society is to get learned native gentlemen to instruct the West on the Eastern systems of religion, philosophy and science, and so remove the misconceptions that Western scholars have, consciously or unconsciously, instilled into the minds of their less instructed fellow-countrymen. This criticism, on a Sanskrit poem written by the Professor, is reprinted by permission from the *Sanskrit Critical Journal*, and is instructive not only for the reasons given above, but also because of the information which it contains on the *Vedas*, and the manner in which the Hindus view these hoary relics of the past. [106]

The translation of the poem runs as follows:



Max Müller's "Matsya Sukta"

- 1 Oh friends, sing forth the praises of that wonderful great fish, whose name is Laksha, and who is beloved by many people.
- 2 After he had grown strong in the sea, and had been well preserved in the rivers, he came back to us a welcome guest.
- 3 May that fish [Laksha] who is to be praised by modern poets as well as by those of old, bring hither towards us the goddess of happiness, Lakshmi!
- 4 Come together and look at him, how red his flesh, how beautiful his shape, how he shines like silver!
- 5 When the fish has been well steeped in sauce such as emperors love, full of sweetness and delight.
- 6 Then indeed we long for him here at this congress, the lovely one, a joy to look at meant to be eaten by men and women.



Criticism of the "Matsya Sukta" by H.P. Blavatsky.

The Matsya Sūkta is a poem of six stanzas by Professor Max Müller in praise of a fish called Salmon, or in Germany Laksha.

1. How an Oxford Orientalist and chief defender of Hinduism makes fun of the First Avatara of Vishnu, for the sole purpose of amusing his friends.

After going through the above, it struck our mind at the first sight that our learned professor has made it a parody of a Vaidic¹ Sūkta, for the purpose of pleasing his friends. If your supposition be correct, we congratulate the professor on his success, but regret at the same time that the Vedas, the most sacred works of the Hindus, upon which the Hindu religion is chiefly and originally based, have been ridiculed in such a childish manner by a great and good man like Professor Max Müller, who is generally regarded as a great admirer of the Vedas, and [107] a chief defender of Hinduism: for a parody or mockery like this might lower the Vedas in the estimation of the Hindus, who have held the highest respect from times immemorial.

2. Max Müller's parody is clearly intended to corrupt the Vedas.

The Hindus consider the Vedas as ever existing with the Almighty himself, and as not composed by any being. The Hindu philosophers too, after long and earnest discussions, have established the same truth with regard to the Vedas. The ancient sages like Valmiki, Vasishtha and Vyasa, etc., who were Rishis in the true sense of the word, and probably much better acquainted with the Vedas than a Rishi of this iron age, used a new style of language called Laukika or the language of men, quite different from that of the Vedas, for the purpose of keeping the purity of the Vedas unalloyed. By doing this they have strictly prohibited common men from corrupting the Vedas by interpolation of such parodies or joking poems of their own. It is evident that a parody like this lowers the Vedas, the original spring of the Hindu religion — an unbearable thing for a Hindu.

3. There is nothing more ridiculous than a self-proclaimed Rishi.

On the other hand if the professor has seriously intended by this to show how vast is his command of the Vaidic language, and how deserving he is of the title (Rishi) which he has assumed, then the whole thing is quite absurd as well as highly inappropriate, and his whole attempt in this is an entire failure.

4. Though the Vedic Mantras are not creations of any existing being, Müller had the audacity to call his ludicrous poem a Sukta.

For instance, we first take the name of the poem, Matsya Sūkta. The word Sūkta is a purely Vaidic technical term, meaning a collection of Mantras, generally used in addressing a particular deity, so that it is quite absurd to use this very word in the sense of a common poem, though it might be a collection of stanzas treating of the same subject. The stanzas written by Professor Max Müller cannot in any way be considered Vaidic Mantras, for as we have already said, according to the Hindu Sastras, the Vaidic Mantras are not creations of any existing being. Professor Max

¹ [Vedic]

Müller is of course well acquainted with the fact, but still he calls his poem a Sūkta. What greater absurdity can there be than this?

5. Bereft of Viniyoga, Müller's grossly irreverent little poem serves no other purpose than insolent self-conceit.

A Vaidic Sūkta has, first a deity or the subject matter of which it treats; second, the metre in which it is written; third, the Rishi by whom it was first seen; and fourth, Viniyoga, or its use in a particular religious ceremony. Our professor following this, also heads his poem with his deity the fish Laksha, its metre Gāyatrī, and its Rishi the professor himself; but he forgets to mention the last and most important thing, the Viniyoga, which is without a doubt a great defect, for without knowledge of the Viniyoga a Sūkta is thoroughly useless. [108]

6. And his poking infantine fun to deity cast an indelible stain on his legacy.

In fact the deity, metre, Rishi, etc., belonging to a Sūkta, are all Vaidic technicalities. The deity never means a subject matter treated of in a common poem, but only what has been treated of in a genuine Vaidic Sūkta. Does the poem under review belong to an original Veda, Ric, Yajus or Saman? If not, then what right has its author to call its subject matter by a name of a deity? We shall be highly obliged if the author will kindly satisfy us with any authority.

7. The great Vedic scholar of his day not only used the Vedic form of the Gayatri Metre in his poem, he also failed to mark his words with their proper accents.

Metres are of two kinds, Vaidic and Laukika. The Vaidic Metres are chiefly confined to the Vedas while the Laukikas are only for use in common poetry. So each of the Metres, Gāyatrī, etc., has duplicate forms entirely differing from each other. The chief characteristic of the Vaidic form of a Metre is the accent mark of its words, *i.e.*, each word in it must be marked with its proper accent, for it is said in the Bhāshya of Pānini that a word without proper accentuation kills the utterer just like *Indra Satru*. It is evident from the above that a Vaidic Metre cannot be used in common poetry, and even in the Vedas every word in it must be marked with its proper accent marks. But we are sorry to see that Professor Max Müller, the great Vaidic scholar of the day, has violated this rule by using the Vaidic form of the Gāyatrī Metre in his own poem, and moreover has not marked his words with their proper accent marks. Wonderful inappropriateness, indeed!

8. Since, in every creation, the Vedas are revealed to the same men only, there is no room for new Rishis; and Müller, as his travesty of the first Avatara of Vishnu shows, is most unwise if not actually foolish.

Now regarding the Rishi, the Rishi of a Sūkta means the first seer of a Sūkta, or one to whom the Sūkta was first revealed in its complete form. For according to the Hindu Sastras, though the Vedas are ever existing, they have occasionally disappeared at the time of Pralaya or deluge. And at the beginning of the new creation they were again partly revealed by the will of God to the internal eyes of some particular men who were called Rishis. There are a good many Rishis in the Vedas. It must however

be understood here that in every creation the Vedas are revealed to the same men only. So no new Rishi can occupy a place in the Vedas. Now we may ask the favour of the professor's supplying us with his authority for calling himself a Rishi, while already knowing that his poem can never be reckoned as an original part of the Vedas?

9. His "Matsya Sukta" exposes an undistinguished scholarship in Sanskrit learning, and a marked deficiency in Sanskrit grammar.

Moreover the poem indicates neither any extraordinary skill on the author's part, nor any uncommon scholarship in Sanskrit learning; but on the other hand it shows his deficiency in modern Sanskrit grammar. The author has written not only in the Vaidic style, but has kept throughout the Vaidic grammatical construction of words, which is not only strictly prohibited to a modern poet, but is also considered *asādhu* or incorrect. So the words Purbhebhiih, etc., though they might be correct according to Vaidic grammar, cannot be used by a modern poet, for [109] none but the Rishis had the privileges of using such forms of words. The Rishis, according to the Hindu Sastras, are of two kinds:

- 7 Those to whom the Mantras of the Vedas were originally revealed;
- 8 Those who, being Brahman by caste, are remarkable for learning, asceticism, truthfulness and profound scholarship in the Vedas.

As no Vaidic Mantra has even been revealed to the Professor, the poem under review is of course, not a Vaidic Mantra, neither is he a Brahman by caste. Thus it is evident that he has no right to use such forms of words in his composition. The famous poet Bhavabhuti, it is true, followed occasionally the Vaidic style in his writing, but be carefully kept to the modern grammatical construction throughout. So the modern poets are bound to observe always the rules of modern grammar, otherwise their writings cannot be considered *sādhu* or correct.

10. The poem consists of eight lines only, but even in these few lines, passages from the Rigveda have been plagiarised.

In conclusion we may point out that no extraordinary scholarship is to be found in the poem, for the poem consists of six stanzas or eight lines only, but even in these few lines, passages from the Rigveda are borrowed without the slightest alteration, as would appear from the passages quoted below from the poem as well as from the Rigveda, placed side by side for comparison.¹

11. For a Sanskrit poet nothing is more disreputable than to "borrow" passages from another's works.

For a Sanskrit poet nothing is more discreditable than to borrow passages from another's works. Besides such words as *adbhuta purupriya*, etc., are repeated in Mantras of the same metre (Gāyatrī) in the Rigveda. see the *Rics: sahasamputro adbhuta*, so nobody feels the least difficulty in picking them up. Thus we see in the poem the author's own words are very few and these too do not indicate any capital security in the author. In our opinion a poem like this is not a creditable performance, even if it comes from the pen of an ordinary Sanskrit scholar.

¹ For instance stanza three, [p. 106] the gem of the whole poem, is word for word the same as the verse cited from the Rigveda. — [EDS.]

12. Lakshmi, the Hindu Venus-Aphrodite, is the goddess of wealth, not of happiness.¹

Lastly it struck us very much to see that the word Lakshmi² is translated as goddess of happiness. Anyone having the least acquaintance with Sanskrit literature knows very well that Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth or fortune, and not of happiness.

13. More! Neither the Rishis of modern nor of ancient times were acquainted even with the name of the fish. How then could it be praised by them?

After all the poem is full of inconsistencies and absurdities, which the readers will easily find out: for instance in the third stanza, the fish Laksha is said to be praised by modern poets, as well as by those of old times. Here Rishi is translated into a poet, which is absurd. Again in India neither the Rishis of modern nor of ancient times were acquainted even with the name of the fish. How then could it be praised by them? [110]

14. And now a query and a remark to conclude with.

Query: Supposing a prominent Hindu pandit had parodied one of the Psalms of David, and used it to describe a debauch; we wonder what the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the other associations of the Church Militant would have said. Yet this is but a feeble comparison, for the rhythm of the Davidic hymns of initiation is irretrievably lost, thanks to Masoretic desecration, whereas the *swara* of the Vedas is still preserved. This is the particular desecration that the Hindus have to complain of in the professor's poem; not to mention a hundred other things which can only be understood by the reverent mind of the student of esotericism.

Remark: We are content to leave our scholarship in the reliable hands of native gentlemen, and we prefer Bhatta Pulli to Oxford.³



¹ [Consult "'Happiness is but a dream," in our Living the Life Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² [Cf. *Note by Boris de Zirkoff:*

"From thee, O goddess, from thee the winds flee away, the clouds of heaven from thee and thy coming; for thee the wonder-working earth puts forth sweet flowers; for thee the vast stretches of the ocean laugh, and heaven, grown peaceful, pours torrents of light."

Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, lib. I, 6-9, in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE HISTORY OF A PLANET), VIII p. 19 *fn.* Full text under the title "Lucifer is Christos, Inner Light," in our Secret Doctrine's Third Proposition Series. — ED. PHIL.]

³ [At the last moment of going to press we learn that paragraph 7 is founded on a mistake of the European copyist, who forwarded a copy of the pamphlet to the writer of the criticism. The accent marks are found in the original. — EDS.]

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