

Indian Scriptures Part-1



Sanskrit

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A Short Note on Sanskrit Literature

Sanskrit literature can be classified under six orthodox heads and four secular heads. The six orthodox sections form the authoritative scriptures of the Hindus. The four secular sections embody the latter developments in classical Sanskrit literature.

The six scriptures are:

1. Srutis
2. Smritis
3. Itihasas
4. Puranas
5. Agamas
6. Darsanas

The four secular writings are:

1. Subhashitas
2. Kavyas
3. Natakas
4. Alankaras

The Scriptures

1. The Srutis

The Srutis are called the Vedas, or the Amnaya. The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. These are direct intuitional revelations and are held to be Apaurusheya or entirely superhuman, without any author in particular.

The Veda is the glorious pride of the Hindus, nay, of the whole world! **The term Veda comes from the root Vid, to know.** The word Veda means knowledge. When it is applied to scripture, it signifies a book of knowledge. The Vedas are the foundational scriptures of the Hindus. The Veda is the source of the other five sets of scriptures, why, even of the secular and the materialistic. The Veda is the storehouse of Indian wisdom and is a memorable glory which man can never forget till eternity.

Revealed Truth Without Beginning Or End

"Mantradrashtaaraha na thu kartharaha munayaha" The Vedas are the eternal truths revealed by God to the great Rishis of India. The word Rishi means a seer, (from the Root-DRIS, to see). The Rishi is the Mantra-Drashta, a seer of Mantra or thought. The thought was not his own. The Rishis saw the truths or heard them. Therefore, the Vedas are what are heard (Sruti). The Rishi did not write. He did not create it out of his mind. He was the seer of thought which existed already. He was only the spiritual discoverer of the thought. He is not the inventor of the Veda.

"Risheenam punaraadyaanaam vaachamarthonudhaavathi" The Vedas represent the spiritual experiences of the Rishis. The Rishi is only a medium or an agent to transmit to people the intuitional experiences which he received. The truths of the Vedas are revelations. All the other religions of the world claim their authority as being delivered by special messengers of God to certain persons, but the Vedas do not owe their authority to any one. They are themselves the authority as they are eternal, as they are the Knowledge of the Lord.

Lord Brahma, the Creator, imparted the divine knowledge to the Rishis or seers. The Rishis disseminated the knowledge. The Vedic Rishis were great realised persons (souls) who had direct intuitive perception of Brahma or the Truth. They were inspired teachers. They built a simple, grand and perfect system of religion and philosophy from which the founders and teachers of all other religions have drawn their inspiration. The Vedas are the oldest books in the library of man. The truths contained in all re-

ligions are derived from the Vedas and are ultimately traceable to the Vedas. The Vedas are the fountain-head of religion. The Vedas are the ultimate source to which all religious knowledge can be traced. Religion is of divine origin. It was revealed by God to man in the earliest times. It is embodied in the Vedas.

The Vedas are eternal. They are without beginning and end. An ignorant man may say how a book can be without beginning or end. By the Vedas, no books are meant. Vedas came out of the breath of the Lord. They are the words of God. The Vedas are not the utterances of persons. They are not the composition of any human mind. They were never written, never created. They are eternal and impersonal. The date of the Vedas has never been fixed. It can never be fixed. Vedas are eternal spiritual Truths. Vedas are an embodiment of divine knowledge. The books may be destroyed, but the knowledge cannot be destroyed. Knowledge is eternal. In that sense, the Vedas are eternal.

2. The Four Vedas And Their Sub Divisions

The Veda is divided into four great books:

1. The Rig-Veda
2. The Yajur-Veda
3. The Sama-Veda
4. The Atharva-Veda

The Yajur-Veda is again divided into two parts:

1. The Sukla Yajur-Veda
2. The Krishna Yajur-Veda.

The Krishna or the Tattiriya is the older book and the Sukla or Vajasaneya is a later revelation to Sage Yajnavalkya from the resplendent Sun-God. The Rig-Veda is divided into twenty-one sections, the Yajur-Veda into one hundred and nine sections, the Sama-Veda into one thousand sections and Atharva-Veda into fifty sections. In all, the whole Veda is thus divided into one thousand one hundred and eighty recessions.

Each Veda consists of four parts:

1. The Mantra-Samhitas or hymns.
2. The Brahmanas or explanations of Mantras or rituals.
3. The Aranyakas (philosophical interpretations of the rituals).
4. The Upanishads (The essence or the knowledge portion of the Vedas).

The division of the Vedas into four parts is to suit the four stages in a man's life.

The Mantra-Samhitas are hymns in praise of the Vedic God for attaining material prosperity here and happiness hereafter. They are metrical poems comprising prayers, hymns and incantations addressed to various deities, both subjective and objective. The Mantra portion of the Vedas is useful for the Brahmacharins (celibate; one who belongs to the first of the four Asramas or orders of life; one who lives in purity and studies the Veda; the first 25 years of life).

The Brahmana portions guide people to perform sacrificial rites. They are prose explanations of the method of using the Mantras in the Yajna or the sacrifice. The Brahmana portion is suitable for the householder (Grihastha; one who belongs to the second of the four Asramas or orders of life; from 25 to 50 years of age).

The Aranyakas are the forest books, the mystical sylvan texts which give philosophical interpretations of the Rituals. The Ara-

nyakas are intended for the Vanaprasthas or hermits who prepare themselves for taking Sannyasa. (Vanaprastha = one who leads the third stage of life; from 50 to 75 years of age).

The Upanishads are the most important portion of the Vedas. The Upanishads contain the essence or the knowledge portion of the Vedas. The philosophy of the Upanishads is sublime, profound, lofty an soul-stirring. The Upanishads speak of the identity of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul. They reveal the most subtle and deep spiritual truths. The Upanishads are useful for the Sannyasins. (Sannyasi or Sannyasin = a monk; one who has embraced the life of complete renunciation ; one belonging to the fourth or the highest stage of life; from 75 to 100 years of age).

[Note: Although the division of the Vedas into four parts is to suit the four stages in a man's life, the study of the four Vedas is done by Brahmacharins or celibate students and the knowledge thus acquired serves as the basis of the goal of life through all the four stages of life. The studies of the Vedas continue throughout one's life. (Refer also to Dharma, Artha, Kama & Moksha). Thus the knowledge of the Upanishads is not to be confined to the last stage of life. The mind of the Sannyasin is intensely focussed upon the teachings of the Upanishads.]

The subject matter of the whole Veda is divided into

1. Karma-Kanda
2. Upasana-Kanda
3. Jnana-Kanda.

The Karma-Kanda or Ritualistic Section deals with various sacrifices and rituals.

The Upasana-Kanda or Worship-Section deals with various kinds of worship or meditation.

The Jana-Kanda or Knowledge-Section deals with the highest knowledge of Nirguna Brahman. (Nirguna = without attributes or forms. Brahman = the Supreme Reality).

The Mantras and the Brahmanas constitute Karma-Kanda (rituals).

The Aranyakas constitute Upasana-Kanda (worship).

The Upanishads constitute Jnana-Kanda (knowledge).

3.The Mantra Samhitas

The Rig-Veda Samhita is the grandest book of the Hindus, the oldest and the best. It is the great Indian scripture, which no Hindu would forget to adore from the core of his heart. Its style, the language and the tone are most beautiful and mysterious. Its immortal Mantras embody the greatest truths of existence, and it is perhaps the greatest treasure in all the scriptural literature of the world. Its priest is called the Hotri.

The Yajur-Veda Samhita is mostly in prose and is meant to be used by the Adhvaryu, the Yajur-Vedic priest, for superfluous explanations of the rites in sacrifices, supplementing the

Rig-Vedic Mantras.

The Sama-Veda Samhita is mostly borrowed from the Rig-Vedic Samhita, and is meant to be sung by the Udgatri, the Sama-Vedic priest, in sacrifice. The Atharva-Veda Samhita is meant to be used by the Brahma, the Atharva-Vedic priest, to correct the mispronunciations and wrong performances that may accidentally be committed by the other three priests of the sacrifice.

4.The Brahmanas and The Aranyakas

There are two Brahmanas to the Rig-Veda:

1. The Aitareya
2. The Sankhayana

The Satapatha Brahmana belongs to the **Sukla Yajur-Veda**. The **Krishna Yajur-Veda** has the Taittiriya and the Maitrayana

Brahmanas. The Tandya or Panchavimsa, the Shadvimsa, the Chhandogya, the Adbhuta, the Arsheya and the Upanishad Brahmanas belong to the **Sama-Veda**. The Brahmana of the **Atharva-Veda** is called the Gopatha. Each of the Brahmana has got an Aranyaka.

5.The Upanishads

The Upanishads are the concluding portions of the Vedas or the end of the Vedas. The teaching based on them is called Vedanta. The Upanishads are the gist and the goal of the Vedas. They form the very foundation of Hinduism.

There are as many Upanishads to each Veda as there are Sakhas, branches or recensions, i.e., 21, 109, 1000 and 50 respectively to the four Vedas (The Rig-Veda, The Yajur-Veda, The Sama-Veda and the Atharva-Veda). The different philosophers of India belonging to different schools such as Monism, Qualified Monism, Dualism, Pure Monism, Difference-cum non-difference, etc., have acknowledged the supreme authority of the Upanishads. They have given their own interpretations, but they have obeyed the authority. They have built their philosophy on the foundation of the Upanishads. Even the Western scholars have paid their tribute to the seers of the upanishads. At a time when Westerners were clad in barks and were sunk in deep ignorance, the Upanishadic seers were enjoying the eternal bliss of the Absolute (God), and had the highest culture and civilisation.

The most important Upanishads are :

Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Aitareya, Taittiriya, Chhandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Kaushitaki, and Svetasvatara and Maitrayani. These are supremely authoritative. May the fundamental truths of the Vedas be revealed unto you all, like the Amalaka fruit in the palm of your hand. May Gayatri, the blessed Mother of the Vedas, impart to you the milk of Knowledge, the ancient wisdom of the Upanishads.

6.Upa-Vedas

There are four Upa-Vedas or subsidiary Vedas:

1. The Ayurveda (science of life and health)
2. The Dhanurveda (science of war)
3. The Gandharva Veda (science of music)
4. The Arthashastra (science of polity)

7.The Vedangas

There are six Angas or explanatory limbs, to the Vedas:

1. The Siksha of Maharshi Panini (Phonetics)
2. Vyakarana of Maharshi Panini (Sanskrit Grammar)
3. The Chhandas of Pingalacharya (Prosody metre)
4. The Nirukta of Yaska (Philosophy or etymology)
5. The Jyotisha of Garga (Astronomy and astrology)
6. The Kalpas (Srauta, Grihya, Dharma and Sulba) belonging to the authorship of various Rishis.]

Siksha is the knowledge of phonetics. Siksha deals with pronunciation and accent. The text of the Vedas is arranged in various forms or Pathas. The Pada-patha gives each word its separate form. The Krama-patha connects the word in pairs.

Vyakarana is Sanskrit Grammar. Panini's books are most famous. Without knowledge of Vyakarana, you cannot understand the Vedas.

Chhandas is metre dealing with prosody.

Nirukta is philosophy or etymology.

Jyotisha is astronomy and astrology. It deals with the movements of the heavenly bodies, planets, etc., and their influence on human affairs.

Kalpa is the method or ritual. The Srauta Sutras which explain the ritual of sacrifices belong to Kalpa. The Sulba, which treat of the measurements which are necessary for laying out the sacrificial area, also belong to Kalpa. The Grihya Sutras which concern domestic life, and the Dharma Sutras which deal with ethics, customs and laws, also belong to Kalpa.

The Pratishakhyas, Padapathas, Kramapathas, Upalekhas, Anukramanis, Daivatsamhitas, Parisishtas, Prayogas, Paddhatis, Karikas, Khilas, and Vyuhās are further elaborations in the rituals of the Kalpa Sutras.

Among the Kalpa Sutras, the Asvalayana, Sankhayana and the Sambhavya belong to the Rig-Veda. The Mashaka, Latyayana,

Drahyayana, Gobhila and Khadira belong to the Sama-Veda. The Katyayana and Paraskara belong to the Sukla Yajur Veda. The Apastamba, Hiranyakesi, Bodhayana, Bharadvaja, Manava, Vaidikhanasa and the Kathaka belong to the Krishna Yajur-Veda. The Vaitana and the Kaushika belong to the Atharva-Veda.

REFERENCE

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