

EARLY VEDIC LITERATURE

Vedas are the oldest scriptures of the Sanatana Dharma. According to Bhagavatam Lord Brahma produced them 155.521972 trillion years ago at the beginning of the creation of the Universe. All these were reproduced by Bhagawan Vedavyasa. Vedavyasa means in Sanskrit one who adjusts or arranges Vedas. Vedas comprise of Samhitas, Brahmanas and Aranyakas. Vedavyasa later added 18 Puranas, Mahabharata and Brahmasutra, which were supplemented by other sages. There existed already the great epic Ramayana reproduced by Valmiki as given to him by Sage Narada. This was also reproduced by Vedavyasa. Brahma received the knowledge of scriptures from God. He introduced them to sages. The sages conceived them in their divine intellect and reproduced them. Brahma did not verbally teach sages but introduced the knowledge to their divine intellect. We are aware of how Kalidasa, an illiterate, suddenly blessed with divine intellect wrote several dramas, poetic compositions etc., and became famous. These are literary masterpieces today. Vedavyasa reproduced all Vedic literature before 3102 B.C. before the dawn of Kaliyuga. Western historians including some Indian historians like Tilak tried to fix the age of the Rigveda arbitrarily around 4000 B.C., and even much later. Bhagawan Vyasa reveals in Bhagavatam that 155.521972 trillion years have been passed since Brahma initially created this planetary system, which incidentally is the age of Brahma. It is universally recognized that Rig Veda is the earliest literature known to mankind. Viswa Panchanga published regularly by the Benares Hindu University indicates that the present Kaliyuga is 5102 years old in 2000 A.D. That indicates the age of the Rig Veda as conceived by Vedavyasa prior to 5000 B.C.

Veda derives its name from three Sanskrit roots, 'vetti' to know, 'vidyate' to exist and 'vindate' to give or enlighten. 'Eternally existing Vedas give or enlighten souls with the knowledge of the Supreme. It is popularly associated with the root, meaning knowledge, that is, Veda is the knowledge and the knowledge of God is through Veda. The first meaning is, Vedas give knowledge. The second meaning is, Vedas exist eternally. The third meaning is 'Vedas give the divine bliss to the souls'.

Muktikopnishad mentions that Vedas contained 100000 verses in 1180 branches-21 in Rig Veda, 109 branches in Yajur Veda, 1000 branches in Sama Veda and 50 in Atharva

Veda. Only 20379 verses of the 100000 are currently available as per the details given below .

1. Rig veda-10552 verses in 10 sections called mandalas.
2. Sama veda-1875 verses in 21 chapters.
3. Yajur veda-1975 verses in 40 chapters.
4. Atharva veda-5977 verses in 20 chapters.

RIGVEDA-The word 'rik' in Sanskrit means 'hymn'. Rigveda verses are in praise of the Supreme and the Vedic deities, used in yagnyas or sacrifices. Of the 21 branches currently only 2 are available--a major part of Shakal branch and brahmana and aranyaka part of Shankhayana branch. These verses are in glorification of Indra in 250 verses and Agni in 200 verses, the celestial deities. They further deal with Surya and three other forms of his--savita, mitra and pooshan. They also deal with other deities in general--dyausu, varuna, the deity of water and sea, soma and maruta, the deity of wind and air. There are also other deities of celestial world. Rudra and Vishnu are the only two trinitic forms of God besides the Supreme personality of Purusha who are glorified and prayed in hymns. It also contains religious stories of Vamana, Dadheechi and the king Mandhata.

YAJURVEDA-The root 'yaj' means to worship in Sanskrit. Out of the 109 branches only seven branches are now available. 'Vaajasaneyi' also called 'Madhyanandini' branch is important. Yajurveda is intended for the guidance of the priests who conduct yagnyas. It deals with the procedures to create fire altars, praises and prayers related to deities besides dealing with specific yagnyas like Aswamedha, Rajasuya etc. Yajurveda is both in poetic and prosaic forms. It repeats good number of verses from Rigveda. 40th chapter of Yajurveda is Isavasyopanishad.

SAMAVEDA-The root 'sama' means peace or tranquility. Out of 1000 branches only 3 branches are now available. Samaveda chanting is in the musical form. The important ones are Kauthumeeya and Jaimaneeya. Many verses of Rigveda are musically rendered in Samaveda with correct intonations. Samaveda like Yajurveda deals with the practical aspects of performing the yagnyas.

ATHARVAVEDA-The word 'atharva' in Sanskrit language means 'priest'. Out of the 50 branches only one Shaunak branch is now available. Atharvaveda is mostly in prosaic

form and also contains some verses from Rigveda. Atharvaveda contains mantras and rituals for the fulfillment of material needs of human beings or general welfare of the family. It also deals with the philosophical description of soul and God, His divine greatness and generosity. It further contains a small portion of Rigvedic verses. It provides the initial training for one to lead to vedic principles. It allures rajasic and tamasic minds to satvic minds. The theme of the mantras in the Atharvaveda cover wide variety of subjects: Peace for the family; elimination of sin; cure for certain diseases with the application of herbs; cure for snake poisoning; warding off evil spirits from the possessed. It also contains mantras for receiving blessings of the God for one's own prosperity in business, yagnyas for the fulfillment of one's desires etc.

BRAHMANAS-They deal with minute details for the guidance of priests to conduct yagnyas. Every branch of Vedas has its own Brahmana. Of the 1180 only few are available. Aitreya, Shakhayana, Satapatha, Taittareya Brahmanas are the important ones. Broadly they describe vedic karmas and performance.

ARANYAKAS-These are forest books for deeper study in the tranquility of the forest. They explain the inner meaning of the Vedas. They tell more about God and prescribe some form of worship to God. They deal with procedural aspects of devotion to God, appropriateness of mantras to suit the occasion like how to sit, what mantras to repeat before and after devotion etc. Upanishads form the main section of the Aranyakas. Samhita and Aranyaka portion of Vedas relate more to yagnyas, rituals, performance of good karma than worship of the Supreme although they tell about God in Purushasookta and Isavasopnishad. Only a few of the 1180 branches of Aranyakas are available now in full. Upanishad portion of Aranyakas are available in good numbers, around 200.

SAMHITAS-Samhita means the process of collection and arrangement. It brings about the purport of the Veda in the form of mantras. These are verses in the praise of celestial male and female deities and some of them are also for the divine forms of the Supreme. Readers are often confused because both 'deva' and 'devata' are translated as God in English and other languages and sometimes even in Sanskrit in modern writings . Devatas generally refer to celestial deities like Indra, Agni, Varuna, vVayu etc. Deva refers to the Supreme. Individual divine forms of the Supreme are also translated as Gods. This has given raise to the criticism that there are too many Gods. Samhitas, Brahmanas

and non upanishadic portion of the Aranyakas are collectively called Vedas. It may be noted that Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads are all 1180 in number as delivered by Brahma.

UPANISHADS-Upanishad means annihilating the ignorance. Only around 200 are now available of the 1180. Upanishads are meant for deeper study and have their own characteristics. They are directly related to the God and show path to God's realization, whereas Samhita and Brahmanas are related to the attainment of celestial luxuries. Upanishad's subject matter is presented often in the form of dialogues between the teacher and the disciple. Upanishads have their own independent Divine status. These are philosophical track books and are foundation for systematic philosophy. The Upanishads are the basis of the shad-darshanas, the six major systems of Hindu philosophy--'dvaitadvaita vada' of Nimbakacharya, 'advaita vada' of Sankaracharya, 'vishitadvaita' of Ramanuja charya, 'dvaita' of Madhvacharya, 'shuddha advaita vada' of Vallabhacharya and 'achintya bhedabhed vada' of Jeeva Goswami. Most of the stories of Upanishads revolve around the nature of Reality and the concept of single Supreme Being. The equation of the Atman, the self with Brahman, the ultimate reality is summed up in the phrase 'tat tvam asi' in the Chandogya Upanishad. They are called the Gyanakhanda, the true knowledge part of the Vedas, while Samhita, Brahmana and non upanishadic part of Aranyakas are known as Karmakhanda, the ritualistic part. A major portion of the Vedas deal with yagnyas and rituals as contained in the Samhitas, Brahmanas and Aranyakas. Only Around 6 percent of it deals with Jnaanakanda, that is Upanishads. Muktakopanishad has referred to 108 Upanishads which contain philosophies of God's realization and basic facts of divine world or divinity. Upanishads glorify God, teach to renounce worldly attachments and surrender to the Supreme to receive His grace.

ANUKRAMANIKI-These are descriptions of the contents of Vedas mentioning the list of all forms of God and deities indicating all mantras and indicating the sages who conceived them. There were 1180 books for the 1180 branches of Vedas.

UPAVEDAS-Atharvaveda known as Arthasastra, science of sociology and economics is related to Rigveda. Dhanurveda, the science of defence, weaponry, missiles and warfare is related to Yajurveda. Gandharvaveda, science of music including instrumental music, art and dance is related to Samaveda. Aayurveda, the science related to life science and

medicine is related to Atharvaveda. The first three upavedas are almost extinct. The last one is still in existence. Sages wrote a number of books on the science of preparation and use of herbs, roots, gems, metals, pearls etc., for curing all kinds of diseases but only some of them are available. However the basic theory of the science of Ayurveda is available in full.

VEDANGAS-Vedangas are auxiliaries to Vedas which are essential to learn and understand Vedas and to induce into vedic action. These are Siksha, phonetics and pronunciation; Vyaakarana, grammar; Chandas, metric composition; Nirukta,vedic dictionary; Jyotisha, Astronomy and astrology; Kalpa, what induces one to vedic action.

SHIKSHA-Shiksha means phonetics-- training or teaching correctly to pronounce vedic mantras. It is a complete science. Every letter has four vocal attainments--Pitch, high, low or medium voice; Duration, short or long; Position, nasal cerebral or palatal etc.; Stress, how much stress should be used in pronouncing the word or letter.

VYAAKARANA-Vyaakarana means grammar. It is explained in Sanskrit as ‘vyaakriyate iti vyaakaranaha’, which means that by which sentences are formed, examined and understood. Ancient grammars by 12 ancient sages including Kapila and Bharadwaja as mentioned by Panini are not available. Sivasutras, 14 in number, came out of the 14 sounds produced by the drum, Damaru of Siva, during the cosmic dance, Shivatandava nritya. Panini got the divine inspiration from these sutras and produced his first grammar Ashtadhyayi. It has 4000 sutras which forms the dictionary for the root words of Sanskrit. He also produced ‘Unadi Sutra’. With the help of Ashtadhyayi, Nirukta and Unadi sutra only one can get into the true meaning of the vedic mantras. Trying to translate vedic mantras with the help of Ashtadhyayi alone, western philosophers and even many Hindu Sanskrit scholars failed to get the true meanings. They sometimes make no sense with literal translation word to word. The absence of earlier vedic grammars was a big handicap.

CHANDAS- Chandas means prosody or poetic stanza. These are of different kinds. The book of Chandas teaches as to how to create a chandas, how to sing a chandas and includes correct pronunciation of vedic mantras. Gayatri, Trishtup, Jagati, Ushnik, Anushtup, Bruhati, Pankti are some of the meters used in the Rigveda of which Trishtup meter is used in more than 4000 mantras.

NIRUKTA- Nirukta means etymology. Only one book by sage Yask is now available. It has different sections to describe the meaning of the vedic mantras. 1. Nighant is the collection of vedic words with simple meaning of the words. 2. Nirukt deals with complete meaning of the words. It is a complete work on vedic words – details about the vedic words explaining their applied and implied meanings and synonyms of the vedic words. Vedas have sometimes very unusual and entirely different meanings than what is commonly understood even with the help of Panini’s grammar. For example, Indra could mean Vishnu besides Indra. Vruka meaning wolf could also mean sun, moon, and many more.

JYOTISHA- It comprises two parts-- astrology and astronomy. It has two sections; a) Calculating the positions of the stars at a particular time. b) Determining their effects on a person’s life. Very few books on jyotisha are available; most of them are extinct. The calculation part of the astrology is distinct, but the other part is indistinct. Garg samhita which is a voluminous work on person’s life is fully extinct.

KALPA- Kalpa means totality that induces one to vedic action. The usefulness of the knowledge of phonetics, grammar, prosody, etymology, astrology and astronomy is in the performance of rituals as given in the Kalpa. Kalpa is that which impels one to action and is considered to be combination of all vedangas. They are in the form of sutras-- Shrauta sutra, Gruhya sutra, Dharma sutra, Shulba sutra etc. Shulba sutra gives details for the creation of altar, its exact geometric shape etc. There were 1180 branches of Shulba sastra with their own specifications.

DARSANA SASTRAS-They are the vision to Vedanta. There are six schools of thought of philosophy--Poorva Mimamsa by Jaimini; Nyaya sastra by Gautama; Vaiseshika by Kanada; Sankhya by Kapila; Yoga by Patanjali; Uttara Mimamsa by Badarayana. Poorva Mimamsa is for attaining celestial luxuries and not for the realization of God. Uttara Mimamsa by Vedavyasa is popularly known as Brahmasutra. It deals with the theme of the Upanishads and forms the basis for the development of modern philosophies mentioned earlier. Nyaya and Vaisheshik introduce the science of logical thinking of right and wrong and determine that God should be desired, and the attachment from the realm of the entire mayic manifestation should be removed. Sankhya and Yoga Darshan emphasize on the practice of meditation and samadhi to attain the desired limit of

renunciation and the elimination of worldly attachments. Yoga describes the eight steps of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dhaarana, dhyana and samadhi.

SMRITIS-These are books of codes related to the social living, customary law, traditional learning etc. Eg. Manu Smriti

PURANAS-There are 18 major puranas, all attributed to have been conceived by Vedavyasa. There are also subsidiary Puranas written by other authors. Puranas are usually in poetic form though some of them are prosaic. The Puranas reflect the social, religious and artistic culture of India since creation. The universal truths of devotion and generosity portrayed by the role models in the ancient Indian content, hold the same significance even today. Puranas throw light on the history of Hindu civilization, creation of the world and the development of life, the chronology of the entire history of Bharat Varsha, the description of Brahmanda, the origin of Geeta, origin of devanagari script and the Sanskrit language, its development, various incarnations, the spirit and message of Sanatana Dharma, the Hindu calendar, Time measurement etc. The eighteen major Puranas are--1. Vishnu Purana ; 2. Bhagavata Purana; 3. Narada Purana; 4. Garuda Purana 5. Padma Purana; 6. Varaha Purana; 7. Brahma Purana; 8. Brahmanda Purana; 9. Brahmavaivarta Purana; 10. Maarkandeya Purana; 11. Bhavishya Purana; 12. Vaamana Purana; 13. Vaayu Purana; 14. Linga Purana; 15. Skanda Purana; 16. Agni Purana 17. Matsya Purana; 18. Koorma Purana. Purana in Sanskrit means 'though old it is new'. History as is understood today was not known earlier. Everything had a spiritual aspect and so Puranas included history, mythology, parables, stories and divine aspects. Valmiki Ramayana and Mahabharata are the two great epics and are called Itihaasas, meaning, 'it happened so'. Many scholars later wrote Ramayana in their own style as poems, prose and drama. Valmiki Ramayana and Tulisidasa Ramayana are exclusively used in Parayana (Holy recitation) and are considered to be most sacred.

Western historians and their followers in India consider the above as Hindu mythologies and ignore the historical aspects.

The process of evolution and the dissolution of the Universe is indicated in the Upanishads. Its complete history is in the Puranas.

Devibhagavata says that at the end of every Dwaparayuga God Vishnu descends as Vedavyasa and reproduces Vedas in four names--Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. Uptill

now there have been 27 Vedavyasas in twentyseven Dwapara yugas of the existing Manvantara, which is called Vaivaswata Manvantara. He is believed to be in a state of samadhi in a cave in Himalayan glaciers unapproachable to normal human beings. There are references in the Puranas that both Sankaracharya and Vallabhacharya with their divine powers had a chance to meet him and had discussions with him to enrich their knowledge. The subject matter of Vedanta is analyzed by Badarayana in his sutra as indicated earlier. Badarayana is identified as Vedavyasa and got his nickname for having spent some time in Badrikasram. Atharva Veda is also believed to derive its name from its author, Atharva. This name could also mean Vedavyasa only as it is believed that all Vedas are reproduced by Vedavyasa.

The Upanishads, Brahmasutra and Bhagavadgita together are known as Prasthanaya. Gita is given the status of Upanishads since it has the same subject matter as the Upanishads. The Prasthanaya enjoy the thorough commentary called Bhashya by Adi Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhwa and others and form an integral part of the Vedanta literature. These are supported by Tika, Varttika, Karika, Vritti, Tippani etc.* The vast body of Vedanta literature also includes a number of independent works called Prakarnas. Vedanta Prakarnas are also presented in the form of hymns--Lord Dakshinamurthi Stotram. Prakarnas include Vedantasara of Sri Sadananda, Panchadasi of Sri Vidyananda, Ramakrishna Tika, Naishkarma siddhi of Sri Surasaiva, Manollasa of Sri Sureswara(vritti). With the stress on Bhaktimarga in Kaliyuga innumerable number of stotras(hymns) in praise of the celestial deities and the Supreme have been written by sages and saints and scholars for prayers and bhajans. Stotras existed from earlier days: for e.g. Aditya Hridayam in Ramayana, Vishnu Sahasranamam in Mahabharata, Soundarya Lahari etc.

*TIKA=Book of explanatory note on Bhashya

VARTTIKA=A critique on original work

KARIKA=Composition in verse form explaining an original work

VRITTI = A brief explanation on original work

TIPPANI = This is a gloss, a footnote on a topic in the body of work needing an explanation.

PRAKARANAS = Independent works-introductory and advanced. These are presented in the form of hymns, stotras(Ashtasloki, Satasloki, Ekasloki, Dakshinamoorti stotra etc.)

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