

Component-I (A) – Personal details:




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Subject: **Indian Culture**

Production of Courseware

 - Content for Post Graduate Courses



Paper : **Vedic, Epic and Puranic culture of India**
Module : **Overview of Vedas**



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये



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Component-I (B) – Description of module:

Subject Name	Indian Culture
Paper Name	Vedic, Epic and Puranic culture of India
Module Name/Title	Overview of Vedas
Module Id	IC / VEPC / 01
Pre requisites	Knowledge about Vedas and Sanskrit literature
Objectives	To know about Vedas, Classification, Branches, allied literature and significance
Keywords	Veda / Sruti / Vedic literature / Vedavyasa

E-text (Quadrant-I) :

1. Introduction:

In Indian tradition there are fourteen or eighteen Vidyāsthānas (abodes of knowledge/ cognition).

पुराणन्यायमीमांसाधर्मशास्त्राङ्गमिश्रिताः।

वेदाः स्थानानि विद्यानां धर्मस्य च चतुर्दश॥ (याज्ञवल्क्यस्मृतिः , 1-3)

अङ्गानि वेदाश्चत्वारः मीमांसा न्यायविस्तरः।

धर्मशास्त्रं पुराणं च विद्याह्येताश्चतुर्दश ॥

आयुर्वेदो धनुर्वेदो गान्धर्वश्चेति ते त्रयः।

अर्थशास्त्रं चतुर्थं च विद्याह्यष्टादशैव ताः॥ (विष्णुपुराणम्)

R̥gveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda, Atharvaveda (four Vedas), Śikṣā, Vyākaraṇam, Chandas, Niruktam, Jyotiṣam, Kalpa (six Vedāṅgas), Purāṇam, Nyāyadarśanam, Mīmāṃsā, Dharmaśāstram, Āyurveda, Dhanurveda, Gāndharvaveda, Arthaśāstram (four Upavedas) - are the eighteen Vidyas or abodes of Vidyā.

Veda means ‘a mass of knowledge’. Vedic literature is considered as the earliest. Initially Veda was just like a heap and it was Vedavyāsa, who, as the name suggests, divided it into four – ऋग्वेद, यजुर्वेद, सामवेद and अथर्ववेद ।

बृहदारण्यकोपनिषत् clearly says that all the above said four Vedas had emanated from Brahman in one go as an exhalation, i.e. without an effort - Maitreyī, wife of Yāgnavalkya, asked the latter to show the path for Mokṣa. In that context Yājñavalkya said this –

अस्य महतो भूतस्य निःश्वसितमेतत् यद् ऋग्वेदः यजुर्वेदः सामवेदः
अथर्वङ्गिरसः पुराणं विद्या उपनिषद् ... ।

This ऋग्वेद, यजुर्वेद, सामवेद and अथर्ववेद, पुराणं, शास्त्रs, उपनिषत् etc. are the exhalation of परमात्मा ।

Since Veda had emanated from परमात्मा or परब्रह्मन् and not authored or written by any human being it is called अपौरुषेय । It is also clear that all the four Vedas were available at a single point of time and there is no different time for different Veda. This concept is substantiated in different systems of Indian Philosophy such as Mīmāṃsā , Vedānta, Vyākaraṇa etc.

Śruti is another name of Veda – literally Śruti means the one that is learnt thru hearing (not thru reading).

2. Svāra or accent:

Sanskrit language can be put under two headings - Vaidika and Laukika. There is Svāra or accent in Sanskrit language per se . But during the course of time Svāra lost its significance in Laukika (secular or non-Vedic) literature.

But Svāra plays an important role in Vedic literature. Any change of Svāra would lead to change of meaning. There are mainly three Svāras, viz. Udātta, Anudātta and Svarita.

3. Dichotomy of Veda:

Following the result, Veda can be divided into two parts - Mantrabrāhmaṇabhāga and Upaniṣadbhāga. The former is useful in performing Yāgas (Yajñas) that lead to Svarga, whereas the latter is useful in attaining Mokṣa (arresting the cycle of birth and death and merging the Jīvātma with Paramātma).

In other words the Mantrabrāhmaṇabhāga deals with Dharma / Karma whereas the Upaniṣadbhāga deals with Jñānam.

4. A different classification of Vedas:

Veda can be put under four headings - Mantra, Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka and Upaniṣad.

The Mantra portion is called Samhita. Mantras are commending texts of different deities and literally mean - those, which protect if recited with concentration.

Brāhmaṇas comment on Mantras and explain the procedure of a rite.

Both the above portions are useful for a person during Brahmacharyam (celibacy) and Gārhāsthya (married life) - the first two Āśramas (stages of life) and also in the performance of different rites.

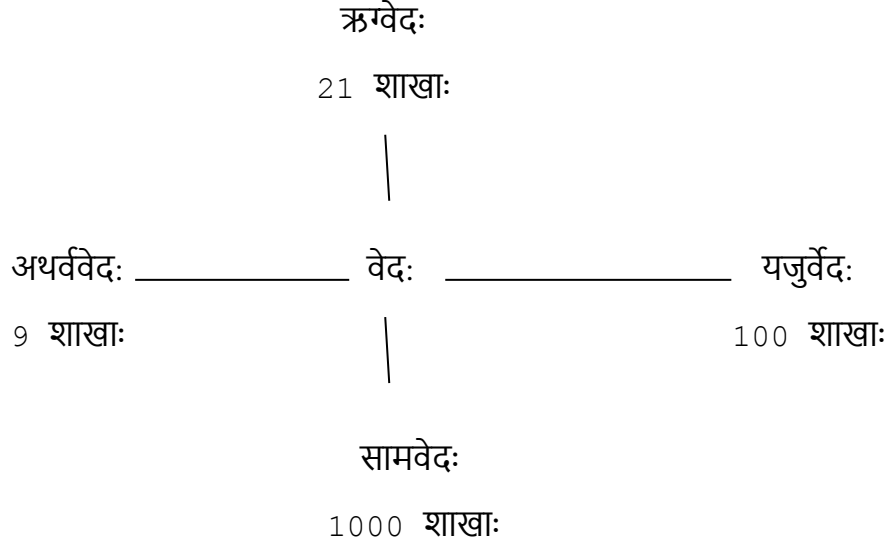
The Āraṇyaka portion, which should be recited in a forest, as the name suggests, is useful for a person during the third Āśrama called Vānaprastha (living in a forest).

Upaniṣads are useful during the fourth Āśrama called Samnyāsa (giving up all Kāmyakarmas such as Yāga etc. but still performing the Nityakarmas like Sandhyāvandanam and Naimittikakarmas such as death ceremony of parents).

One may directly go to Samnyāsa from Brahmacharya.

5. Branches(Śākhās) of Vedas:

Ṛgveda has got 21 branches but only two are available. Yajurveda has 100 branches. It is divided into two - Kṛṣṇayajurveda and Śuklayajurveda. Four branches of Kṛṣṇayajurveda and two branches of Śuklayajurveda are available. Sāmaveda has got 1000 branches of which only three are available. Atharvaveda has got nine branches of which only two are available. Total we have 13 branches of Veda out of 1130.



6. A Brief account of Vedas:

Ṛgveda:

‘Ṛk’ literally means a text of praise of a deity. Some Ṛks make a Sūkta, some Sūktas make a Maṇḍala. There are ten Maṇḍalas in Ṛgveda consisting of 1017 Sūktas and the total number of Ṛks is 10,472. Āyurveda is the Upaveda of Kṛsnayajurveda.

Kṛṣṇayajurveda:

Yajus means ‘vākyam’ (sentence). Since the Yajus are found to be clustered for most of the part, it is called Samhitā. The sentences are to be divided with the help of Pūrvamīmāṃsā.

In Kṛṣṇayajussamhitā all the three kinds of texts, viz. Mantra (which praises the deity), Arthavāda (sentences of commendation and condemnation) and Brāhamaṇa (which explains the procedure) are seen in an amalgamated form and therefore the word ‘Kṛṣṇa’ (literally ‘black’) is prefixed .

Some Ṛks are supplied by Ṛgveda,

The procedural details of Yāga (sacrifice) are stated in Kṛṣṇayajurveda, which is also called Taittirīyasamhitā.

There are seven Kāṇḍas, forty four Prapāṭhakas (or Adhyāyas) and 635 Anuvākas (or Praśnas) in Taittirīyasamhitā.

Dhanurveda is the Upaveda of Kṛṣṇayajurveda.

Śuklayajurveda:

Also called Śuklayajussamhitā and it is useful in the performance of Yāga (sacrifice). In this Samhitā there are Mantras and Arthavādas. Since the concepts are clear the term 'Śukla' (white) is prefixed.

Yājñavalkya was the disciple of Vaiśampāyana and learnt Yajurveda. There was some clash between them and Yājñavalkya returned the Veda to his Guru, worshipped Āditya (Sun) , got the Vidyā and the same is called Śuklayajurveda. Other sages, following the order of Guru, in the form of Tittiri birds took the Vidyā, returned by Yājñavalkya and therefore it is called Taittirīyasmahitā or Kṛṣṇayajurveda.

Śuklayajurveda has got two versions called Mādhyandinapāṭha and Kāṇvapāṭha but without much difference.

Dhanurveda is an Upaveda of Śuklayajurveda.

Sāmaveda:

Most of the Mantras are borrowed from 8th and 9th Maṇḍalas of Ṛgveda, 'Sāma' literally means 'to sing'. If the Ṛks are assigned some music they would become Sāmas.

Sāmasamhitā is divided into two parts - Pūrvārcikam and Uttarārcikam. A group of Ṛks is called Ārcikam.

There are six Prapāṭhakas in Pūrvārcika whereas Uttarārcika has got nine Prapāṭhakas.

Gāndharvaveda is an Upaveda of Sāmasamhitā.

Atharvaveda:

Atharvasamhitā is divided into twenty Kāṇḍas. There are 736 Sūktas and 5918 Mantras in this Samhitā (Śaunakaśākhā). 1200 Mantras of this Samhitā are borrowed from Ṛgveda. In this Samhitā we come across a blend of prose and poetry.

Atharva is the name of a Ṛṣi .

Arthaveda / Arthaśāstra (polity) is an Upaveda of Atharvaveda.

7. General Points:

‘Trayī’ is a term that is often used to refer to the combine of Ṛgveda, Yajurveda and Sāmaveda.

In a Yāga, Ṛgveda is represented by Hotā. Sāmaveda by Udgātā, Yajurveda by Adhvaryu and Atharvaveda by Brahmā. In fact, Brahmā, being the supervisor of Yāga, should know all the four Vedas (sarvaiḥ brahmā).

The first three Vedas produce only half of the Yāga, that is in the form of speech (Vāgrūpa) whereas the rest in the form of mind (Manorūpa) is by Atharvaveda.

Puruṣasūktam, that is there in all five Vedas (Ṛgveda, Kṛṣṇayajurveda, Śuklayajurveda, Sāmaveda and Atharvaveda) clearly states that all the four Vedas were available at a single point of time -

ṛcassāmāni jajīre

chandamasi jajīre tasmāt

yajustasmādayāyata.

There are certain branches of Vedas named after Ṛṣis - Kāṭhaka, Kālāpaka, Vāsiṣṭha etc. by which some scholars got confused and said that those Śākhas were authored by the respective sages. But the fact is that they are propagators / specialists of those Mantras and are called Mantradrāṣṭārah / Mantrakṛtaḥ etc.

As has already been stated in the Introduction, Vedas are Apauruṣeya (not written by human beings). They have emanated from Brahman. At the end of every Pralaya (the great destruction) the Vedas also disappear. Then, after the new creation has started, the Ṛṣis (sages) perform Tapas (an ascetic life) and perceive the Mantras and therefore the same are named after them - Vāsiṣṭham sāmā etc. We come across dozens of such Ṛṣis across all the Vedasamhitas.

The Mantras in Samhitas are assigned to different deities such as Agni, Indra, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Varuṇa, Sūrya, Vāyu, Soma, Bṛhaspati, Pṛthvī, Gāyatrī etc.

Vedas are the origin of different Vedāṅgas, Darśanas, Upavedas etc.

Śruti, Anuśarava, Trayī, Āmmāya, Samāmnāya, Chandas, Svādhyāya, Āgama and Nigama are synonyms of Veda.

Caraṇam is a name of Vedic text before it was divided into branches.

Prātiśākhyā is the name of Vedic grammar and there are five Prātiśākhyas for five Vedas.

Bṛhaddevatā is a treatise that explains the details of each Mantra and presently it is available for Ṛgveda only.

Anukramaṇikas are just guides of Vedas and are useful in protecting the original form of Vedas.

A number of scholars had authored commentaries on Vedas.

The Vedasamhitā would have Padapāṭha (splitting Samhitā into words) and Kramapāṭha (putting the words in an order).

Kramapāṭha is recited in eight different forms and these are called Vikṛtipāṭhas - Jaṭā, Mālā, Śikhā, Rekhā, Dhvaja, Daṇḍa, Ratha and Ghana.

Ghanapāṭhī (one who knows Ghana) is a popular term.

All the above stated ten formations are Pauruṣeya, i.e. artificial or man-made, unlike the Samhitā, which is Apauruṣeya.

Prāṭisākhya are the works that deal with grammar of each Veda.

One has to take the help of Vedāṅgas and Darśanas to understand the Vedic literature.

8. Summary:

Among the 14/18 Vidyāsthānams, Vedas occupy the first place and out of 1130 branches only 12/13 are available. Vedas are Apauruṣeya and are the original source of all other Vidyas.

At the end of each Pralaya all the Vedas disappear and the Ṛṣis, with their Tapas, perceive / hear the Vedic Mantras and propagate them and therefore are called Mantradraṣṭāraḥ / Mantrakṛtaḥ. The Mantras / Vedic texts perceived by Ṛṣis are named after them - Kāṭhaka, Kālāpaka, Paippaladā etc.

Sāmaveda is a musical form of Ṛgveda.

Mantrabrāhmaṇa part deals with Karma (rite) whereas Upanisad deals with Jñānam.