



SNS COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY
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DEPARTMENT OF ELECTRONICS & COMMUNICATION ENGINEERING

III YEAR/ VI SEMESTER

19HST105 ESSENCE OF INDIAN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

UNIT 2 INDIAN LITERATURE, CULTURE, TRADITION, AND PRACTICES
The Vedas.



THE VEDAS

Considered as the earliest literary records of Sanskrit Literature, the **Vedas** compiled by Rishi Vyasa are believed to be the oldest holy books in Hinduism (*Sanatana Dharma*). The Vedas are the large body of vast knowledge and text; the religious and spiritual teachings of which encompasses all aspects of life.

Definition

Veda simply means –Knowledge|. It is a Sanskrit word from the root –Vid|, which means finding, knowing, acquiring, or understanding. What you acquire or understand is knowledge. The term Veda as a common noun means –knowledge|.

The ideas, teachings, and practices described in the Vedas formed the basis for the six major schools of Hindu philosophy – *Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta*.

The 4 Vedas

There are four Vedas: **Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda**, and all of them together are attributed to as **_Chaturveda_**. The Rig Veda serves as the principal one and all three but the Arthaveda agree with one another in form, language, and content.

Each Veda has been subclassified into four major text types – **The Samhitas**, the most ancient layer of text in the Vedas, consisting of mantras, hymns, prayers, and benedictions which has in literary terms put together or joined the other three texts; the Aranyakas which constitute the philosophy behind the ritual sacrifice, the Brahmanas which in turn has the commentary on hymns of four Vedas and the **Upasanas**, the one that focuses on worship.



The Rig Veda

Rig Veda, one of the oldest texts of the Indo-Aryan Civilization still extant, is an ancient Indian collection of Vedic hymns. Two Sanskrit words Rig and Veda constituting it translates to „praise or shine’ and ‘_knowledge’ respectively. A collection of 1,028 hymns and 10,600 verses in all, organized into ten different Mandalas (or the books; Sanskrit), **it is the principal and oldest of the four Vedas.**

The cultural-linguistic records; mainly the variation in form of Sanskrit used (from present-day) point out the origin of the **Rig Veda to have been around 1600 BCE, though a wider approximation of 1700 – 1100 BCE** has also been given by experts. **The initial written Rig Veda dates back to 1st millennium BCE** although the extant ones today date back only to somewhere between 11th and 14th centuries.

Rig Veda has been **sub-classified into four major text types – the Samhitas** or the hymns that sing the praises of the Rig Vedic deities, some of whom are **Indra**, a heroic deity and the king of the highest heaven called Saudharmakalpa who slain his enemy Vatra, **Agni**- the sacrificial fire, **Soma**, the sacred portion or the plant which was a fundamental offering of the Vedic sacrifices and Ishwara, the supreme god-just to mention a few; the Aranyakas which constitute the philosophy behind the ritual sacrifice, the Brahmanas which in-turn has the commentary of the ancient sacred rituals and the Upasanas, the one that focuses on worship.



The Mandalas of the Rig Veda which are ten in number and were composed by poets from different priestly groups over a period of several centuries is structured based on clear principles – the Veda begins with a small book addressed to Agni, Indra, and other gods, singing the praises of the Lord.

Rigveda, in contemporary Hinduism, has been a reminder of the ancient cultural heritage and point of pride for Hindus, with some hymns still in use in major rites of passage ceremonies, but to some experts, the

literal acceptance of most of the textual essence is long gone. Louis Renou wrote that the text is a distant object, and –even in the most orthodox domains, the reverence to the Vedas has come to be a simple raising of the hat. Musicians and dance groups celebrate the text as a mark of Hindu heritage, and these have remained popular among the Hindus for a long time. However, the contemporary Hindu beliefs are distant from the precepts in the ancient layer of Rigveda Samhitas.



The Sama Veda

The words of Rig Veda put to music, and are to be sung rather than to just be read or recited. Sama Veda, also the **Veda of Melodies and Chants**, is the third in the series of the four principle scriptures of Hinduism – Four Vedas. The Sama Veda, divided into two major parts, first to include the four melody collections, or the Saman, the songs and the latter the Arcika, or the verse books a collection (Samhita) of hymns, portions of hymns, and detached verses. A liturgical text, relating to public worship, all but 75 verses of the total 1875 is derived from the Rig Veda.

Widely referred to as the **_Book of Songs_**, it is derived from two words, Saman, of Sanskrit, meaning Song and Veda, meaning Knowledge. The Sama Veda has served as the principal roots of the classical Indian music and dance tradition, and proudly the tradition boasts itself as the oldest in the world. The verses of Sama Veda, as the tradition had followed, is sung using specifically indicated melodies called Samagana by Udgatar priests at rituals dedicated to different deities.

As it is the words of Rig Veda put to music, no wonder, alike the Rigveda, the early sections of Samaveda typically begin with singing the hymns of Rig Vedic deities, Indra, a heroic deity and the king of the highest heaven called Saudharmakalpa who slain his enemy Vatra, Agni- the sacrificial fire, Soma, the sacred potion or the plant which was a fundamental offering of the Vedic sacrifices and Ishwara, the supreme god-just to mention a few; but in the latter part shifts to abstract speculations and philosophy, the nature and existence of the universe and God himself are questioned and so are the social and religious duties of a man in the society.



Such has been the influence of Sama-veda on Indian classical music and dance. The essence of classical Indian music and dance tradition is rooted in the sonic and musical dimensions of the Sama-Veda itself. The Samaveda, in addition to singing and chanting, mentions instruments and also the specific rules and regulations of playing them, so as to preserve the sanctity of those ancient instruments. If one were to summarize the significance of the Sama Veda in a single line, Sama Veda, in contemporary Hinduism, has been a reminder of the majestic ancient cultural heritage and a point of pride for Hindus; not to mention that it still finds its usage in today's society.



The Yajur Veda

Yajur Veda, of Sanskrit origin, is composed of Yajus and Veda; the two words translate to 'prose mantras dedicated to religious reverence or veneration' and knowledge respectively. Third of the four canonical texts of the Hindu dharma, this liturgical collection is famous as the '**book of rituals**'. Of the ancient Vedic text, it is a compilation of ritual offering formulas or the prose mantras to be chanted or muttered repeatedly by a priest while an individual performs the ascertained ritual actions before the sacrificial fire or the Yajna. It has been, since the Vedic times, the primary source of information about sacrifices and associated rituals, more importantly, it has served as a practical guidebook for the priest, or the Purohita, as referred to as in Hindu dharma who execute the acts of ceremonial religion.

The scholarly consensus points out the bulk of Yajur Veda dating to 1200 or 1000 BCE, which when analyzed is younger than Rig Veda, whose origin has been approximated around 1700 BCE, but is contemporaneous to the hymns of Sama deva and Atharva Veda.



Also, common to the other three Vedas and as the tales tell, humans did not compose the revered compositions of the Vedas, but that God taught the Vedic hymns to the sages, who then handed them down through generations by word of mouth. Also, the followers of the Hindu dharma regard the Vedas as *apauruṣeya*; meaning not of a man or impersonal and also, according to some traditions in Hindu dharma such as the Vedanta and Mimamsa schools of philosophy the Vedas are considered as **Svatah Pramana** (*Sanskrit, meaning —self-evident means of knowledge*). Some schools of thought even assert that the Vedas as of eternal creation, mainly in the Mimosa tradition. In the Mahabharata, the creation of Vedas is credited to Brahma, the Supreme Creator. However, the Vedic hymns themselves assert that they were skillfully created by Rishis (sages), after inspired creativity.

The Yajurveda is broadly grouped into **Krishna Yajurveda** and **Shukla Yajurveda**, also referred to as the Black Yajurveda and the latter as the White. In reference to the verses of the Krishna Yajurveda being unarranged, unclear, and disparate or dissimilar, the collection is too often referred to as **Black Yajurveda**. In contrast, the well-arranged and imparting a particular meaning, the Shukla Yajurveda is known as the **White Yajurveda**.



The earliest and most ancient layer of Yajur Veda, Samhita includes about 1,875 verses, that are distinct yet borrowed from and built upon the foundation of verses in Rigveda. The middle layer includes the Satapatha Brahmana, one of the largest Brahmana texts in the Vedic collection and The youngest layer of Yajur Veda text includes the largest collection of primary Upanishads six in number, influential to various schools of Hindu philosophy. These include the **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the Isha Upanishad, the Taittiriya Upanishad**, just to name a few.

Yajurveda, in contemporary Hinduism, has been a reminder of the ancient cultural heritage and point of pride for Hindus. The text is a useful source of information about agriculture, economic, and social life during the Vedic era. The verse, translated from the Shukla Yajurveda, for example, lists the types of crops considered important in ancient India.



The Atharva Veda

The fourth and final of the revered text of the Hindu dharma, the Vedas, the Atharva Veda, in short, is depicted as “**knowledge storehouse of Atharvaṇas**! Atharvaṇas meaning, formulas, and spells intended to counteract diseases and calamities, or -the procedures for everyday life!. A late addition to the Vedic scriptures, the word owes its roots to Sanskrit and the widely used epithet for the scripture is **‘the Veda of Magic formulas’**. As it sides with popular culture and tradition of the day rather than preaching religious and spiritual teachings, it is more often viewed not in connection with the three other Vedas, but as a discrete scripture.

In popular context with being widely popular as the Veda of Magic formulas, Atharva Veda is a mixture of hymns, chants, spells, and prayers; and involves issues such as healing of illnesses, prolonging life, and as some claim also the black magic and rituals for removing maladies and anxieties.

However, many books of the Atharva Veda are dedicated to rituals without magic and to theosophy, a philosophy in itself asserting that the knowledge of God can be achieved through spiritual practice or intuition.



The Samhitas in the Atharva Veda have written accounts of **Surgical and medical speculations**, it includes mantras and verses for treating a variety of ailments. For instance, the verses in hymn 4.15 of the recently discovered Paippalada version of the Atharvaveda, it discusses how to deal with an open fracture, and how to wrap the wound with Rohini plant (*Ficus Infectoria*, native to India). And so have speculations been made about remedy from herbal medicines, on the nature of man, life, good and evil and even spells and prayers to gain a lover. And some hymns were even about peaceful prayers and philosophical speculations, the origin of the universe, and the existence of God himself. It is indeed a collection of all sort of speculations that quite often leaves us bewildered.

As mentioned earlier, the contents of the Atharvaveda quite contrast with the other Vedas and is often viewed as a discrete scripture rather than in connection with the three Vedas. The 19th century German Indologist and historian Albrecht Weber has best put it as, -The spirit of the two collections [Rigveda, Atharvaveda] is indeed widely different. In the Rigveda there breathes a lively natural feeling, a warm love for nature; while in the Atharva there prevails, on the contrary, only an anxious dread of her evil spirits and their magical powers. In the Rigveda we find the people in a state of free activity and independence; in the Atharva we see it bound in the fetters of the hierarchy and superstition.]

The Atharva Veda still finds its relevance in today's contemporary society as it has been a pioneer in influencing modern medicine and healthcare, culture and religious celebrations, and even literary tradition in the Indian sub-continent as it contains the oldest known mention of the Indic literary genre. The fourth and final of four Vedas still is one of the most cherished books for any Vedic scholar today.



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