

# An Introduction to the Vedas.



## 1. Meaning and Importance of ‘Veda’

The word ‘Veda’ is often derived from 5 roots:

- *Vid — jñāne*: To know
- *Vid — sattāyām*: To be, to endure
- *Vid — labhe*: To obtain
- *Vid — vicārane*: To consider
- *Vid — cetana-ākhyāna-niveśeṣu*: To feel, to tell, to dwell

Accordingly, the word Veda means:— ‘the means by which, or in which all persons know, acquire mastery in, deliberate over the various branches of knowledge or live or subsist upon them.’

Traditionally, the Vedic literature as such signifies a vast body of sacred and esoteric knowledge concerning eternal spiritual truths cognized by sages (Rishis) during intense meditation. They have been accorded the position of revealed scriptures and are revered in Hindu religious tradition. Over the millennia the Vedas have been handed down by oral tradition and hence the name “**śruti**” or “that which is heard”. According to tradition they are un-authored (*apauruṣeya*) and eternal.

The Vedic literature is also called by several other names –

- **Nigama**: Traditional wisdom transmitted from generation to generation. It also means mankind’s attempts to reach the Divine. It is contrasted with *Āgama* which is the descent of the Divine into the Human Realm.
- **Amnāya**: The root texts or primordial texts of (Hindu) tradition
- **Trayi**: The Vedic texts comprising of Versified mantras, prose mantras, and melodies.

Theoretically, the Vedic corpus is held in deep reverence in the Hindu society. It constitutes the most authoritative genre of Hindu scriptures. Any other Hindu scripture must agree with the Vedas in order to be considered an authority.<sup>1</sup>

Schools of philosophy which reject the authority of the Vedas (Buddhists and Jains) are considered *nāstika* or heretical, while schools which accept Vedic authority, even if nominally, are considered ‘*āstika*’ or orthodox, from a Hindu perspective.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Purāṇas and the itihāsas i.e. Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata are ‘commentaries’ upon the Vedas and elucidate the Vedic teaching. If there is a discrepancy between the secondary literature and the Vedas it is always the Vedas which have the final say.

Vedas are considered an infallible guide for humans in their quest of the four goals of life – *Dharma*, (ethics and morals) *Artha* (material welfare), *Kama* (pleasure and happiness) and *Moksha* (Liberation).

The Vedas are the ultimate source of all wisdom concerning the Ultimate Reality and of all values — Dharma.

## 2. Extent and Classification of the Vedic Literature:

There are four Vedas:

1. Rig-veda
2. Yajur-veda
3. Sāma-veda
4. Atharva-veda.



Each Veda can be divided into two main parts – **Mantras** and **Brāhmaṇas**.<sup>2</sup> A collection of Mantras is called a Samhita. Currently, and often in ancient Hindu tradition as well, it is often the Samhita portion alone which is referred to as the Veda. For instance, the word ‘Rig-veda’ would typically mean the Rigveda Samhita.

The Brāhmaṇas are the theological treatises of the Vedas. Many Brāhmaṇas contain texts with a more esoteric content, called the ‘**Araṇyakas**’. Embedded in these Araṇyakas, or in their final chapters, are deeply spiritual treatises called the ‘**Upaniṣads**’. For several centuries now, Upaniṣads are the mainstay of Hindu spiritual traditions, and are held in the highest esteem.

In the case of the Rig-veda, Sāma-veda and the Atharva-veda, there is a clear-cut separation of the Mantra collection from the Brāhmaṇa portions.

In contrast, the Yajur-veda is of two types:

1. Shukla (or white) Yajur-veda
2. Krishna (or black) Yajur-veda.

In the former, the Mantra and Brāhmaṇa collections are separate from each other. In the latter, the Mantra and the Brāhmaṇa portions are intermixed. Thus, the Taittiriya ‘Samhita’ belonging to the Krishna Yajur-veda has Mantras interspersed with Brāhmaṇa portions. Even the Taittiriya ‘Brāhmaṇa’ has both Mantras and Brāhmaṇa passages mixed with each other.

Coming to the Brāhmaṇa texts, there is often no clear-cut distinction between the Brāhmaṇas proper and the Araṇyakas, or between the Araṇyakas and the Upaniṣads. The Brāhmaṇa text

<sup>2</sup> The term Brāhmaṇa has two meanings — the one used here refers to a section of the Vedas and used in a social context refers to the priestly caste (Brahmins).

proper often merges into the Araṇyakas and many old Upaniṣads are actually embedded in the Araṇyakas.

## 2:1. What are Mantras?

The mantras are basically hymns (sūktas) sung to the Gods - the devotional outpourings of the poets and their personal realizations when in deep states of enstatic meditation.

The hymns or sūktas from the Samhitas of the four Vedas were later adapted for use in yajñas or sacrifices.

Mantras are basically of 3 major types, when classified according to their metrical form:—

- *Riks* are versified mantras chanted on 3 notes.
- *Yajus* are prose mantras also chanted on 3 notes
- *Sāmans* are melodies set on Rik and sung on 7 notes.

The Samhita of the Rigveda constitutes the basis of other Samhitas. Not only is it the most ancient Vedic text, it also contributes hundreds of verses to the other Samhitas.

Theoretically, the Mantras have a higher authority than the Brāhmaṇas.

## 2:2. What are the Brāhmaṇas:-

Bhatta Bhaskara defines ‘Brāhmaṇas’ as texts which expound the Vedic mantras and Yajnas.<sup>3</sup> Rajasekhar<sup>4</sup> defines the Brāhmaṇas as texts which are characterized by statements of eulogy, censure, exposition and (ritual) application (of mantras).

Many scholars, modern and ancient, have tried to define the Brāhmaṇas by stating their characteristics. The reality however is that there is no sharp difference in the characteristics of the Mantras and the Brāhmaṇas. The only thing that we may state safely is this – Mantras are those portions of the Vedas that are designated as such traditionally. And the rest is Brāhmaṇa.

Unlike the mantras, which are mostly in verse, the Brāhmaṇa are predominantly prose. The Brāhmaṇas contain formulas for rituals, rules and regulations for rites and sacrifices and also outline other religious duties. The formulas and rules for conducting extremely complex rituals (yajñas) are explained to the minutest detail. And every ritual is performed for a specific purpose for which a specific effect/benefit is expected. It was felt through yajñas the practitioners were able to control the cosmic forces and the devas – even the sun could be stopped from rising and Indra, the king of gods, could be deposed from his throne! The duties of people of various occupations, popular customs, cosmogony, historical details, stories of ancient heroes are some other subjects dealt with in the Brāhmaṇas.

The symbolic and spiritual aspects of the sacrificial religion are meditated upon in the Araṇyakas while philosophical issues are discussed in the Upaniṣads.

---

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on Taittiriya Samhita 1.2.1,

<sup>4</sup> In chapter 2 of his Kavyamimansa,

### 3. Vedic Śākhās and their Geographical Distribution

The Vedic literature that has come down to our times is attached to various traditional schools of recitation and ritual called the ‘śākhās’ (branches).

All the four Vedas have more than one śākhā extant. In the past, the number of śākhās studied was many times more.

According to the Mahābhāṣya of Patanjali, there were 21 śākhās of Rig-veda, 9 of Atharva-veda, 101 of Yajur-veda (86 of Krishna Yajur-veda and 15 of Shukla Yajur-veda, according to later authorities) and a 1000 varieties of chanting of Sāma-veda. Maybe, the number 1000 for the Sāma-veda merely refers to ‘numerous’. Nevertheless, although only 20 or so Śākhās of the Vedas are now extant, we do possess names of most of the lost Śākhās of the Rigveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. Fragments of many of the lost śākhās are also available as quotations in ancient works. For the Sāmaveda, we do not have more than 40 names extant.

Two different Vedic śākhās might share one or more texts amongst themselves. Conversely, the distinction between two śākhās of the same Veda might result from the use of a different Samhita text, and/or a different Brāhmaṇa text, and/or different Kalpa-sutra text and so on.

e.g., the Baudhāyana and the Āpastamba śākhās use the same Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa, Taittiriya Samhita and Taittiriya Aranyaka but follow different Kalpa-sutras. On the other hand, the Shankhayana and the Kaushitaka śākhās use the same Samhita and Shrauta Sutra but their Brāhmaṇas have slightly different readings and their Grhya-sutras are quite different.

The various śākhās of the Vedas were, at one time, spread throughout South Asia. Their geographical location has not been constant down the ages, as communities of Brahmins professing a particular śākhā migrated from one part of India to the other, or adopted another śākhā when it became impossible for them to sustain the tradition of their own śākhās.

#### A Carāṇa

A group or a community of people who study a particular śākhā in its entirety (Samhita + Brāhmaṇa + Aranyaka + Kalpa-sutra + any additional texts ie. Grhya-sutras) and perform its ritual constitute a ‘carāṇa’. For instance, Brahmins who study the Taittiriya Samhita/Brāhmaṇa/Aranyaka together with the Kalpa-sutra of Apastamba say - “I follow the Apastamba carana’.

From various sources, we can determine the following geographical distribution of Vedic Śākhās at various intervals of times, and their present state of survival :-

- **Shakala RV:** Thrives in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu and to some extent in Uttar Pradesh. Nambudiris of Kerala recite even the Brāhmaṇa and Aranyaka with accents.
- **Shankhayana RV:** Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Oral tradition extinct, only manuscripts of Samhita are extant. Ritual lives in a very fragmentary condition
- **Bashkala RV:** Claims have been made about its existence in Kerala, Rajasthan, Bengal and Assam as a living tradition, but have never been verified. The Samhita exists in manuscript. Nambudiris of Kerala are said to follow this Śākhā of RV as

far as the Samhita is concerned but studies of their oral tradition do not seem to bear this out.

- **Ashvalayana RV:** Manuscripts of the Samhita have been found in Kashmir, Maharashtra and Patna. In parts of central and eastern India, Shakala RV texts are often attributed to Ashvalayana. For instance, the Aitareya Brahman is often called Ashvalayana Brāhmaṇa in West Bengal. Oral traditions extinct although the followers of Shakala Śākha in Maharashtra often term themselves as Ashvalayanans because they follow the Kalpasutra (Shrautasutra + Grhyasutra) of Ashvalayana.
- **Paingi RV:** Existed in Tamil Nadu, in and around Andavan. Oral traditions lost but Brāhmaṇa texts rumored to exist.
- **Mandukeya RV:** Magadha and eastern and central Uttar Pradesh. Possibly lower Himalayas in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. No text or oral tradition extant although the Brhaddevata and Rigvidhana might belong to it.
- **Shaunakiya AV:** Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Avadh region in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh. Only Gujarat has maintained the oral traditions, and the śākha has been resuscitated in recent times in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and in Andhra Pradesh.
- **Staudayana AV:** According to Majjhima Nikaya, followers of this śākha lived in Koshala (central and eastern Uttar Pradesh). The śākha is completely lost.
- **Paippalada AV:** Followers are currently found in parts of Orissa and adjacent areas of Bihar and West Bengal and recite the Samhita in *ekasruti* (monotone syllable). Epigraphic and literary evidence shows that they once thrived in Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, and parts of Gujarat, East Bengal and in Tamil Nadu as well.
- **Devadarshi AV:** According to literary evidence, followers of this Śākha once lived in coastal Andhra Pradesh. Other AV śākhās said to have been prevalent in that region were Shaulkayani and Munjakeshi. The śākha is completely lost.
- **Charanavaidya and Jajala AV:** Perhaps existed in Gujarat, Central India and adjacent parts of Rajasthan. According to the Vayu and Brahmanda Puranas, the Samhita of the Charanavaidya śākha had 6026 mantras.
- **Mauda AV:** According to some scholars, they existed in Kashmir
- **Madhyandina YV:** Currently found all over North India- Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and even Maharashtra (up to Nashik), West Bengal, Assam, Nepal. Along with Taittiriya Yajurveda, it is the most prevalent Vedic śākha. Followers of this school were found in Sindh (Pakistan) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but became extinct after Hindus were ethnically cleansed by the Muslim majority after 1947.
- **Kanva YV:** Currently found in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh. In Orissa, the followers of this śākha follow a slightly different text. Epigraphic evidence shows that they were once present all over India, as far as Himachal Pradesh and possibly in Nepal.
- **Charaka YV:** Interior Maharashtra, adjacent parts of Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh. Followers of this śākha now follow the Maitrayani YV śākha, having lost their own texts.

- ***Maitrayani YV***: In Morvi (Gujarat), parts of Maharashtra (Naskik/Bhadgaon, Nandurbar, Dhule). Earlier, they were spread all the way east up to Allahabad and extended into Rajasthan and possibly into Sindh.
- ***Kathaka YV***: The oral traditions became extinct possibly a few decades ago. They were found in central and eastern Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, possibly west Punjab and NWFP. In later times, they got restricted to Kashmir, where all their extant manuscripts have been unearthed. Recently, the entire Hindu minority was cleansed from the Kashmir valley by Islamists, and so the śākha might be deemed extinct completely now.
- ***Charayaniya Katha YV***: Existed in Kashmir.
- ***Kapisthala Katha YV***: Found in West Punjab around the time of the invasion of Alexander. Also in parts of Gujarat. Only a fragmentary Samhita and Grhyasutra text exist, and followers of this śākha are said to exist at the mouths of Narmada and Tapi rivers in Gujarat.
- ***Jabala YV***: Central India, around the Narmada region. In Maharashtra, there still exist Shukla-Yajurvedin Brahmins who call themselves ‘Jabala Brahmins’, but there is no knowledge of the existence of any texts of this śākha.
- ***Taittiriya YV***: Buddhist texts and some versions of Ramayana attest their presence in the Gangetic plains but currently they are found all over Southern India. The Taittiriyas are themselves divided into numerous sub-schools. Among these, the followers of Baudhayana and Apastamba were found all over South India (including Maharashtra), while the Hiranyakeshins were found mainly in Konkan and Western Maharashtra. The Vaikhanasas have a more eastern presence- around Tirupati and Chennai. The Vadhulas are present currently in Kerala and earlier in adjacent parts of Tamil Nadu. The Agniveshyas, a subdivision of the Vadhula immigrants from Malabar, are found around Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu. The Apastamba, Hiranyakeshin, Vaikhanasa and Baudhayana schools have survived with all their texts intact. The Vadhulas survive, with most of their texts while the Bharadvajas and Agniveshyas are practically extinct as a living tradition although their fragmentary/dilapidated texts survive.
- ***Kauthuma SV***: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu (tradition revived with the help of Brahmins from Poona), Kerala, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar (tradition revived a century ago), West Bengal (tradition has been revived recently). There are numerous varieties of Kauthuma chanting. This śākha is the most vibrant tradition of Sāmaveda.
- ***Ranayaniya SV***: Orissa (manuscripts available, status of oral tradition not known), Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh (till recently in Bahraich and Mathura), Rajasthan (till recently in Jaipur). The existence of this śākha was endangered till recently, but it has been strengthened with the help of institutions like the Kanchi Kamakoti Matha.
- ***Jaiminiya/Talavakara SV***: Two distinct sub streams- the Namudiri recitations in Central Kerala, and the recitations of Tamil Nadu Brahmins in districts adjacent to Kerala and in and around Srirangam. The survival of these schools is endangered.

- ***Shatyayaniya SV***: Said to have been prevalent in Tamil Nadu and parts of North India. The śākha is no longer extant.
- ***Gautama SV***: Said to have been prevalent in Tamil Nadu and in Andhra Pradesh till the 17<sup>th</sup> cent. C.E. Many followers of the Kauthuma school in Andhra Pradesh still call themselves ‘Gautamas’.
- ***Bhallavi SV***: Said to have been prevalent in Karnataka and parts of North India
- ***Other Śākhās of YV***: A text called ‘Yajur-veda-vriksha’ gives the geographical distribution of more than 100 Śākhās of Yajurveda. This description is being left out for brevity.

#### 4. Extant Vedic Texts

The Vedic texts were transmitted orally for thousands of years. This was essential because the texts were ‘accented’, or in other words the different words or letters therein were recited according to different pitch/tones. Very elaborate mnemonic devices were developed to preserve the texts with great fidelity, and harsh divine vengeance and evil repercussions were promised to those who deformed or mutilated the text in any manner. As a result, several Vedic texts were indeed transmitted over several millennia with utmost fidelity, together with accent. The texts that are used for aiding the memorization and recitation of the Vedas with utmost fidelity, are called ‘Lakshana Granthas’. These texts include Pāda-pathas, Ghana-pathas, Krama-patha and other Vikrtis or modifications of the root text, phonetic treatises like Sikshas and Pratisakhyas and so on.

In some cases however, the accents were lost with time and the texts had to be recited without the Vedic accents. For instance, the Brāhmaṇas of the Sāmaveda lost their accents even as early as the time of Kumarila Bhatta (7<sup>th</sup> century C.E.). Similarly, the Paippalada Samhita is recited by its followers today without the Vedic accents (i.e., in *ekasruti*). In the case of the Madhyandina Samhita, the oral intonations are not related to the accent of the written text.

It must be emphasized that the Vedic literature was several times its current extent, and most Vedic texts are lost. The extant literature however is a good and a comprehensive representative of the overall corpus.

#### 5. Contents of Samhitas and Brāhmaṇas: A Brief Survey

##### 5:1. The Rig-veda Samhita

This is the oldest and the largest of the Vedas. It comprises of 10552 verses (riks) making 1028 hymns (Suktas). The hymns are divided into 10 books called the ‘maṇḍalas’. Maṇḍalas 1 and 10 are considered later additions, for most part.

The Rig-veda Samhita is often also divided according to a later scheme into 8 parts called ‘Aṣṭakas’ which are further divided into 8 chapters each. Thus, there are 64 chapters according to this classification.

On the whole, the Rig-veda mostly consists of hymns to be sung to the various gods as manifestations of the One Supreme Godhead. Varuna, Mitra, Surya, Savitr, Vishnu, Pusan, the

Ashvin twins, Agni, Soma, Yama, Parjanya, Indra, Maruts, Rudra, Vishvakarman, Prajapati, Matarishvan, Ushas, Aditi are some of the Gods encountered in the Rg Veda. Varuna - the god of the sky, Indra - the god of rain and also the king of the gods and Agni - the god of fire, are more popular than the latter day Vishnu and Rudra (Shiva)<sup>5</sup>. Surya, Savitr and Pusan all refer to the solar deity and the Gayatri mantra is addressed to Savitr. Ushas and Aditi are goddesses. Almost a quarter of hymns each are addressed to Agni and to Indra. Maṇḍala X has several hymns pertaining to more popular topics, to spiritual topics, cosmogony and other miscellaneous matter.

The collection of sūktas are attributed to 407 Rishis, or Sages, of which 21 are women Sages (Rishikā). The Sages belong, in general, to 10 families, each of which has a special hymn (*Apri Sukta*) associated with them.

Maṇḍalas 2-8 are family maṇḍalas since each of these maṇḍalas contains hymns predominantly from 1 major family of Vedic seers. These families subsequently gave rise to most of the Brahmin communities of the Hindu society.

Maṇḍala 2 is associated with GrtSāmadas, Maṇḍala 3 is associated with Vishvamitra and his lineage, 4 with Vamadeva and related Rishis, 5 with Atris, 6 with Bharadvajas, 7 with Vasisthas. Maṇḍala 8 has numerous hymns by Kanva while Maṇḍala 9 has several hymns by Kashyapa.

## 5:2. Yajur-veda Samhitas:

Yajurveda has two main divisions – Shukla and Krishna.

The extant Shukla Yajur-veda Samhitas are Madhyandina and Kanva.

The extant Krishna Yajur-veda Samhitas are Kathaka, Maitrayaniya, Taittiriya (also called 'Apastambī' Samhita), Kāpishthala (fragmentary) and possibly Charaka.

The sage Yajnavalkya is said to have collected and edited the Shukla Yajur-veda Samhita, called the Vājasaneyī Samhita. The Madhyandina Samhita comprises of 1975 kandikas or 3988 mantras (the prose kandikas are split up into several mantras) arranged into 40 chapters according to the order of performance of Vedic sacrifices. All but the last chapter (which is called the Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad) are employed in the Vedic ritual.

The Yajur-veda is largely prose, with about 700 verse mantras, most of which are directly borrowed from the Rigveda some with minor alterations. The Yajur-veda therefore is a liturgical text, but also contains sacrificial formulas to serve the purpose of ceremonial religion (yajñas).

Very popular in South India, the Taittiriya Samhita deals with detailed descriptions of sacrifices like Agnishtoma, Jyotishtoma, Vajapeya, Rajasuya, etc It is divided into 7 kāṇḍas which are further divided into 5-8 Prapāṭhakas each.

In the Yajur Veda, Vishnu becomes more important. Shiva is also mentioned. Brahma comes to signify the creative principle of the world. In general, the contents of this Samhita parallel the Shukla Yajurveda Samhitas although exotic and special rites like the Purusha-medha are absent here.

---

<sup>5</sup> In the Rig Veda there are only 4 complete hymns to Vishnu and 3 hymns to both Vishnu and Indra who were considered the best of friends. Whereas there are 240 sūktas to Indra alone! And 208 to Agni.

### 5:3. The Sāma-veda Samhitas and Melodies:

Sāma-veda is purely a liturgical collection comprised of 1875 Riks, of which all but 75 Riks are traceable to the published Shakalya Samhita of the Rigveda. The rest are all said to occur in the Shankhayana Samhita of the Rigveda. All these verses are set to melodies, called the Sāmans. The origins of Indian classical music lies in the Sāma Veda.

The Samhita is divided into two broad divisions- *Purvarchika*, on which the *Gramageya* and the *Araṇyaka* Sāmans are set, and the *Uttararchika*, on which the *Uha* and the *Uhya* chants are set.

The root text of the Jaiminias, on which their melodies are based, is the Jaiminiya Archika Samhita. This text runs parallel to the Kauthuma Samhita of Sāmaveda, available in easily accessible editions. The Jaiminiya chants can be subdivided into 3 variations:

- The Nambudiri chants,
- Tanjavur/Tiruchi districts in Tamil Nadu
- Tirunalveli district and the area close to Palaghat (Kerala) in Tamil Nadu

### 5:4. Atharvaveda Samhita:

It is often said that the Atharva Angirasa was originally not given the status of a Veda, but seems to have been later elevated to the position. The main theme of the Atharva Veda is worldly — cures for diseases, rites for prolonging life and fulfillment of one's desires, statecraft, penances, magic, charms, spells and sorcery. While the Gods of the Rig Veda are approached with love, the Gods of the Atharva Veda are approached with fear and favor is carried to ward off their wrath. Homage is paid to them to abstain from doing harm. Sophisticated literary style and high metaphysical ideas mark this Veda.

The two extant Samhitas of Atharvaveda are Shaunakiya and Paippalada.

The former has 5977 mantras arranged in 20 books called 'kāṇḍas' while the latter has approximately 7950 mantras arranged in as many kāṇḍas.

This Veda offers a better insight into the actual culture and life of the Vedic society, because of its significant 'popular' content – hymns from this Veda are used in connection with weddings, agriculture, battles, medicine, domestic ceremonies, coronations and so on. Significantly, dozens of hymns are also devoted to Hindu spirituality, and are often at par with the Upaniṣads.

### 5:6. Brāhmaṇas of Rig-veda:

#### **Aitareya B.**

This Brāhmaṇa is common to the Shakala and Ashvalayana śākhās of Rigveda. It comprises of 8 groups (called 'Panchikas') of 5 chapters each. Hence, the text comprises of 40 chapters. Of these, the first 30 are presumably the composition of Rishi Mahidasa Aitareya, whereas the last 10 chapters were added by Rishi Shaunaka.

#### **Śāṅkhāyana B.**

This Brāhmaṇa text comprises of 30 chapters and is still studied in Gujarat and parts of Maharashtra. Its contents run parallel to the Aitareya Brāhmaṇam but its arrangement is more systematic.

### **Kausitaki B.**

This text differs from the Shankhayana Brāhmaṇa only in a few words and syllables here and there, it also constitutes an Upaniṣad. It is prevalent only in Kerala, where it is recited orally.

## **5:7. Brāhmaṇas of the Śukla Yajur-veda:**

### **Kanva and Madhyandina Shatapatha B.**

The Madhyandina Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa (SBM) is divided into 14 Kāṇḍas containing 100 adhyayas, 68 Prapāṭhakas, 436 Brāhmaṇas and 7179 Kandikas.

The Kanva (SBK) text is divided into 17 Kāṇḍas, 104 adhyayas, 435 Brāhmaṇas and 6806 Kandikas. Note that unlike the Madhyandina version, there is no division into Prapāṭhakas.

The Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa is perhaps the most important Brāhmaṇa text from the perspective of Vedic studies.

## **5:8. Brāhmaṇas of Krishna Yajurveda:**

### **Taittiriya B.**

The Brāhmaṇa comprises of 3 kāṇḍas (a total of 17480 sentences). The first kāṇḍa of the text deals with the Agnyadhana, Gavamayana, Vājapeya, Soma, Nakshatreshti and Rajasuya. The 2<sup>nd</sup> kāṇḍa deals with Agnihotra, Upahomas, Sautramani, Vaisysava and others. The 3<sup>rd</sup> kāṇḍa gives some additional details on the Nakshatreshti, the Ashvamedha and some parables like that of Bharadvaja, together with the Purushamedha Yajna.

### **Vadhula B. or the Anvakhyana .**

It is an anu-Brāhmaṇa or a minor Brāhmaṇa like work, embedded in the Vadhula Shrautasutra. The work has not been published so far and is in manuscript.

## **5:9. Brāhmaṇas of Sāmaveda:**

### **Panchavimsa B.**

This text derives its name from the fact that it has 25 chapters called Prapāṭhakas, which are further subdivided into 347 sections called 'khāṇḍas'. It is also called the 'Tandya Mahā-Brāhmaṇa' and is the principal Brāhmaṇa text of the Kauthuma and the Ranayaniya schools. This Brāhmaṇa deals with the employment of various Sāmans in different Vedic rituals, discusses Soma sacrifices in detail, and narrates legends about various Sages to whom different Sāmans were revealed.

### **Shadvimsa B.**

As the name suggests, it is an appendix to the Panchavimsa Brāhmaṇa, forming its 26<sup>th</sup> chapter as it were. The text deals with the Subrahmanya litanies and with one-day abhicāra (tāntrika) rites. This is a short text comprising 5 sections.

### **Sāmavidhana B.**

This text comprises of 3 Prapāṭhakas. It deals with the recitation of Sāmans with a view of obtaining specific fruit/results. It is paralleled in the Rigveda tradition by a text called Shaunakiya Rig-vidhana, and in the Yajurveda tradition by Katyayaniya Yajur-vidhana.

### **Arsheya B.**

The text is merely a kind of an Arshanukramani, or an index of Sages connected with the Gramageya and Aranya Sāmans. A particular Sāman might have more than one Rishi or Sage associated with it, and these might be different from the Sage linked to the underlying Rk on which the Sāman is sung. It is divided into 3 Prapāṭhakas.

### **Devatadhyaya B.**

It lays down the criterion for deciding the deity of the Sāmaganas.

### **Chhāṇḍogya B.**

The Chhāṇḍogya Brāhmaṇa has ten divisions called ‘Prapāṭhakas’ and comprises of two parts –

- Prapāṭhakas 1-2 form the Mantra Brāhmaṇa or the Mantra Parvan and contain mantras used in Grhya rites.
- Prapāṭhakas 3-10 constitute the famous Chhāṇḍogya Upaniṣad.

These mantras are pre-supposed by the Grhyasutras of Khadira and Gobhila, which prescribe them for various Grhya rites. In fact, the order of the mantras on the Mantra Brāhmaṇa parallels the corresponding rites in the Grhyasutras, in the same order. It is as if the Grhyasutras and the Mantra Brāhmaṇa complement each other.

### **Samhitopaniṣad B.**

This text deals with the ‘secret’ aspect of the Samhitas. The collections of verses are grouped together for various purposes. It emphasizes the responsibilities of the great tradition of the Sāmaveda and the correct doctrine reflected therein, through the chosen line of disciples. It also discusses the fee that ought to be given to one’s religious teachers.

### **Vamsa B.**

This is a very short Brāhmaṇa, containing lists of ancient Sāmavedic teachers.

### **Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa:**

After the Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa, this is perhaps the second most important Brāhmaṇa because it is a fairly long text and because it is a storehouse of several Vedic legends and stories. The text is divided into three main divisions called the ‘kāṇḍas’. The main

ritual sections of the text are – Agnihotra (1.1-1.65), Agnishtoma (1.65-1.364); Gavāyamāna (2.1-80); Ekāhas (2.81-234) or one day Soma sacrifices; Ahinas or sacrifices lasting upto 12 days (2.235-333); Sattras or longer sacrifices (2.334-370); Gavāyamāna (2.371-442), Dvadeshāha (kāṇḍa 3). The last kāṇḍa has very interesting geographical and historical information. The text as printed has several unclear words. Although it runs parallel to the Tandyā Mahā-Brāhmaṇa, it is more detailed in its treatment than the latter. The other two Brāhmaṇas of the Jaiminiya śākha are the Jaiminiya Arsheya Brāhmaṇa and the Jaiminiya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa.

### **Jaiminiya Arsheya B.**

Its contents are similar to the Arsheya Brāhmaṇa of the Kauthuma śākha, but the specific names of the two texts differ a lot. This text names only 1 Sage per Sāman, while the Kauthuma Arsheya Brāhmaṇa often lists more than one Sage.

## **5:10 Brāhmaṇa of the Atharva Veda**

### **Gopatha B.**

This is the only extant Brāhmaṇa of the Atharvaveda. It is divided into two major parts – Purvabhāga and Uttarahāga. These in turn are altogether divided into 11 sections called ‘Prapāṭhakas’. The Purvabhāga of the Gopatha Brahman exhibits more originality of content in that it glorifies the Athavan and its priests. In contrast, the Uttarahāga follows the other Brāhmaṇas in its content, although it introduces legends related to other Atharvan teachers. Embedded in the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa are Upaniṣad texts like the Pranava Upaniṣad. According to the Atharvana Charana-vyuha, the text originally had 100 Prapāṭhakas and was therefore much larger in extent. Significantly, Gopatha Brāhmaṇa 1.1.29 quotes Vyāsa to the effect that he who knows the Atharvaveda knows all.

## **5:11. Araṇyakas**

### **Aitareya Araṇyaka**

It comprises of 5 Araṇyakas further divided into 18 chapters. The first three Araṇyakas are ascribed to Mahidasa Aitareya, the 4<sup>th</sup> is merely a collection of Mahānāmni verses, and the fifth Araṇyaka is attributed to Ashvalayana (or sometimes, to Rishi Shaunaka).

### **Shankhayana Araṇyaka:**

The text is divided into 15 chapters, and its contents are similar to the Aitareya Araṇyaka. The famous Kaushitaki Upaniṣad is embedded in this text as sections III-VI.1-4.

### **Taittiriya Araṇyaka:**

This work comprises of 10 Prapāṭhakas. The first two are called ‘Kāṭhakam’ because they are said to have been borrowed from the Kāṭhaka śākha of Yajurveda.

Prapāṭhaka 5 deals with the Pravargya rite.

Prapāṭhakas 7-9 constitute the famous Taittiriya Upaniṣad.

Prapāṭhaka 10 is the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad, or the Yajnika Upaniṣad. This Prapāṭhaka is often considered an appendix because its extent and contents are unsettled and vary

from region to region. It is a compilation of Upaniṣadic matter together with miscellaneous mantras for recitation at various occasions and for various purposes.

### **Brihad Araṇyaka:**

This text forms the 17<sup>th</sup> book of the Kanva Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa, and the 14<sup>th</sup> book of the Madhyandina Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa. The initial 2 Prapāṭhakas in the Madhyandina version deal with the Pravargya rite, and the last 6 constitute the Brhad Araṇyaka Upaniṣad.

### **Maitrayaniya Araṇyaka:**

Since this text is identical with the Maitrayaniya Upaniṣad in 7 Prapāṭhakas.

### **Katha Araṇyaka:**

It comprises of 3 Prapāṭhakas, of which II and III largely deal with the Pravargya rite.

### **Jaiminiya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa:**

This text is also known as the Talavakara Araṇyaka and is the only extant Araṇyaka of Sāma-veda. In the introduction to his commentary on the Kena Upaniṣad, Shankaracharya states that the Upaniṣad forms the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Brāhmaṇa of that Sakha. In the extant manuscripts, the Kena Upaniṣad forms the 10<sup>th</sup> Anuvaka of the Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa section, which occurs in the 4<sup>th</sup> Adhyaya of the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa proper. This Araṇyaka deals with the esoteric meanings of various Sāmans, and also deals with concepts that are later found in the Tantras. It also gives spiritual interpretations of several Rigvedic mantras.

## **6. Age of the Samhitas and the Brāhmaṇas:**

It is difficult to date the various Samhitas and Brāhmaṇas of the Veda very precisely because of the following reasons –

- They are primarily liturgical, ritualistic and spiritual texts. Hence, any information on the material aspects of the culture that they belonged to would be incidental.
- They were composed and transmitted by an elitist class of Brahmin priests and therefore are not representative of the culture and civilizations of the periods to which they belong. This makes it difficult to correlate them with archaeological data.
- They appeared to have been compiled predominantly in modern Indian states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, and therefore, any corroborating information from other parts of India would be of limited utility.
- The texts, as available today, are quite heterogeneous and layered and it is often difficult to separate the layers chronologically.

- We are still in the dark about the precise chronological and cultural relationship between the archaeologically dated Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) and the culture pre-supposed by the Vedic texts.
- We do not know precisely the extent of transformation (in terms of content and language) that these texts underwent before they were finally frozen into their present forms. Thus, while the present forms of these texts might be dated on the basis of principles of Historical Linguistics, we would still not know when the texts were actually composed.
- The extant Vedic texts are a fraction of the original literature and it is known that at least some of the lost texts showed different linguistic features. Therefore, any conclusions drawn on the basis of linguistic studies could only be provisional.
- And last, the script of the IVC still remains un-deciphered. Most of the earlier failures of attempts (more than 50) were probably due to the unjustified assumption that the script represented a 'proto-Dravidian' language.

The whole issue has become extremely vitiated because of heavy politicization, and because the earlier chronologies proposed for these texts were often inspired by white supremacist views and Christian missionary biases.

The conventional views, first proposed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Western Indologists, who were often (but not always) constrained by Biblical biases ("the world was created in 4004 BCE") or influenced by the '*white man's burden*' mindset, were that the Rigveda was composed around 1200 BCE. The Rig-veda was then said to have been followed chronologically by all the other Vedic texts. The emerging studies of Comparative Linguistics and Philology, and the myth of the Aryan Invasion Theory were made to lend further credence to these views. (See [appendix for details on the Aryan Invasion theory and it's refutation](#))

## 7. Methods of Interpreting the Vedic texts:

Numerous methods have been used in ancient and modern times to interpret Vedic texts. Note that since the Vedic literature itself is heterogeneous, there isn't a single method that is best suited for interpreting the entire Vedic literature. For instance, if the hymn in question is merely a praise of an act of charity, it is futile to impart a spiritual meaning to it. So also, if the hymn reflects a spiritual method, it is inaccurate to force a 'nomadic culture' meaning on it. There is no sharp boundary between these different methods of interpretation, all the more because many of these are indispensable even for the other methods of interpretation. The various methods of interpretation of Vedic texts are as follows -

- **Yajnika School**: This is a ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas and is exemplified to a great extent in the Brāhmaṇa texts themselves. In certain cases, it is seen that the ritual employment of a mantra has no relationship to its actual meaning. Rather, the mantra seems to have been rubricated into the ritual merely on account of the presence of a word or two that have a phonemic similarity to a word that would correctly describe an object or an act connected with the ritual. It must be noted however that the employment of the Vedic Samhitas in rituals has actually contributed to their preservation down the ages.

Moreover, the details of the ritual acts in the Brāhmaṇas often give some measure of the cultural background and the material aspects of ancient India. Last, the Samhitas of Yajurveda and Sāmaveda are in reality liturgically arranged for aid in ritual performances. After the Samhitas and the Brāhmaṇas, we have another vast corpus of literature called the Kalpa-sutra, which describes the minutiae of Vedic rituals in a systematic and a comprehensive manner. Most of the extant commentaries of the Vedas follow this technique although they draw elements from other modes of interpretation as well.

- **Nairukta School:** This is the etymological method of interpretation of words or phrases occurring in the Vedic mantras and its origins can be traced to the Brāhmaṇa text themselves. The text par excellence of this mode of interpretation is the Nirukta of Yāska, which itself is a commentary on a collection (called Nighantu) of difficult words occurring in the Vedas. Nirukta is considered one of the 6 Vedangas of the Veda along with grammar, astronomy, phonetics, ritual and prosody.
- **Dharma-shastric School:** In his Nirukta, Yaska quotes the opinion of some who derive legal instructions from certain verses of the Rigveda. For instance, in Nirukta 3.3, he observes that some interpret Rig-veda 3.31.1 to mean that daughters can also inherit the property of their father whereas some state that only sons are eligible for inheritance.
- **Mimamsaka School:** The followers of this school believe that all the Vedic texts should be treated as a harmonious whole, that the correct import of the hymns can be understood if we consider the context, the relationship of various sentences and of words in those sentences; if we consider parallel passages in various texts; and if we interpret passages after determining their central import. Unfortunately, the method is mostly restricted to the interpretation of Brāhmaṇas, Araṇyakas and the Upaniṣads, as exemplified in the Purva and Uttara Mimamsa Sutras (and also numerous commentaries on them). The Vedas are considered eternal, uncreated Word, free of any references to temporal events and free of defects associated with human compositions.
- **Aitihāsika School:** The followers of this school of interpretation hold that each and every mantra or hymn is related to an Itihāsa i.e., a traditional account of ancient events, and accordingly they interpret the concerned hymn or verses in conjunction with that Itihāsa. For instance, Yaska narrates an Itihāsa connected with the Nadi Sukta (Rigveda III.33) wherein Sage Visvamitra is said to have addressed the rivers with the concerned mantras whereupon they allowed him to cross over. The Brāhmaṇa texts contain numerous such Itihasas and the now-lost Shatyaiani Brahman is often quoted by the commentators of Rigveda for these Itihasas.
- **Parivrajaka School:** This school seeks to highlight the spiritual import of mantras. While several hymns of the Vedic Samhitas indeed convey spiritual ideas very directly, followers of this school of thought hold that even the other hymns can be explained in a spiritualistic manner. Examples of this method of interpretation are the commentary on the first 40 hymns by Shri Madhvacharya (13<sup>th</sup> cent. C.E.) and the commentary of Atmananda on the Asya Vamasya Sukta (Rigveda I.164). Kapali Shastri has written a spiritual commentary on the

entire first Ashtaka of the Rigveda while Swami Brahmamuni has written a spiritual commentary on the entire Kauthuma Sāmaveda Samhita. This is not to say that this mode of interpretation is modern. Rather, the Brāhmaṇas, Aranyakas and the Upaniṣads themselves expound numerous verses in the spiritual mode. In his Nirukta, Yaska cites the views of several followers of this method of interpretation, as does Sayana in his commentaries on various Vedic texts.

- **Arya Sāmaj School of Interpretation:** This was found by Swami Dayanand Sarasvati (1824-1883) and is exemplified by his commentary on the Madhyandina Yajurveda Samhita and approximately 7.5 maṇḍalas of the Rigveda Samhita. After him, various scholars of the Arya Sāmaj have written numerous commentaries on the 4 major Vedic Samhitas in English, Hindi, Marathi and other Indian languages. These commentaries conform to the ideals regarding the Vedas propagated by the Arya Sāmaj: (1) the Vedas are held to preach pure monotheism and therefore Agni, Indra etc., are held to be merely names of the one God. (2) the Vedas are said to consist of the Samhitas only, not the Brāhmaṇas. (3) the Vedas are said to be the eternal word of God revealed at the beginning of creation, and as such, they are devoid completely of historical accounts or proper names. (4) since the Vedas are divine knowledge, they contain all the branches of knowledge (even modern ones like telegraphy, aeronautics and so on) in the root form. (5) all the modern commentaries on the Vedas are held to be spurious. Only the works composed by sages from Brahma to Jaimini (including the Brāhmaṇas, Aranyakas, Sutras and so on) are held to reliable commentaries on the Vedas. Even these are to be rejected in so far as they are in conflict with the intent of the Samhitas. (6) even amongst the Samhitas, only the following 4 were revealed by God- Shakalya, Madhyandina, Shaunaka and Kauthuma. All the other Samhitas are composed by men and are like glosses on these 5 Samhitas. (7) the method of Yaska and Vyakarana are to be relied upon heavily to interpret the Vedas and the later Hindu texts like Puranas etc., must be rejected completely. There are several other principles followed by this school of interpretation (in one of his own works, Swami Dayanand himself lists 16 such principles).
- **Shri Aurobindo's School of Interpretation:** This is a modern version of the ancient Parivrajaka school of interpretation and is discussed in numerous works of Sri Aurobindo like 'The Secret of the Veda' and of his followers like Kapali Shastri and David Frawley. Herein, the various gods in the Samhitas are said to represent different states of consciousness on the spiritual journey of men.
- **Pauranic School:** This is not really a school of interpretation, and refers to a few partial commentaries on the Vedic Samhitas that seek to discover the biographies of Hindu deities like Sri Rama and Sri Krishna in the hymns. This method is similar to the Aitihasika school, with the big difference that here that the 'Itihasa' does not pertain to the Seer of the hymn.
- **Indological Method:** This method is adopted currently by virtually all Vedic Scholars outside India and also by numerous scholars within India. It has the greatest internal diversity and we have lumped various methods of interpretation of the Vedas only for the sake of convenience. Several members of this school take the Rig-veda to be an Indo-European text that must be

interpreted with the help of parallel traditions in the other branches of the Indo-European language family. Linguistics and Philology are relied upon heavily. Some Indologists like Ludwig suggested wholesale emendations in the traditionally handed texts, whereas others, like Max Mueller, strongly advocated the accuracy of the traditionally handed text. Scholars like Oldenberg completely rejected the traditional commentaries like those of Sayana, while others like Pischel emphasized that the Vedas are Indian texts and ought to be interpreted keeping in mind Indian paradigms as reflected in the traditional commentaries. Indologists of course take into account the Vedic Vyakarana, Nirukta and the Brāhmaṇas and Kalpasutras into account, but are often also seen to reject their testimony on various grounds, some of which are highly conjectural. For instance, the AIT was taken as gospel truth in the past and accordingly a lot of hymns were interpreted as if they represented battles between tall, fair, long nosed Aryans and black, short native Indians. The most remarkable contributions of these scholars have been the creation of massive concordances, indices and scholarly exegetical notes on the Vedic texts (besides publishing critical editions of the same), correlation of ideas mentioned in the Vedic texts with parallel ideas in other literary traditions, analysis of the internal chronology of these texts and composition of exhaustive commentaries and translations in various languages. At times however, some of this work appears to be mere conjecture dressed up in jargon of the field, and too divorced from what the Vedic tradition has to say about itself. Nevertheless, an intensive study of both modern as well as old exegetical traditions is a must for comprehending the Vedic texts.

Polytheism, monotheism, monism have all been read into the Vedic hymns. Max Muller even coined the term “henotheism”, as the transitional stage between polytheism and monotheism in the hymns. It is the opinion of modern scholarship that the Vedic hymns reveal the gradual progress of philosophical thought i.e., from polytheism to monotheism to monism. This major flaw in interpretation is not surprising when it is understood that such an opinion springs from viewing Indian philosophy through a Western philosophical looking glass.

The fundamental difference between Western philosophy and Indian philosophy, especially the scriptures, is that while Western philosophy tries to uncover the real with the use of the intellect, Indian philosophy is basically an attempt to logically reconcile the world of experience with the spiritual experience of the sages. The sages – Yajñavalkya, the Buddha, Mahavīra, Śaṭakopan etc. – had experienced reality – unlike Western philosophers they’re not speculating, analyzing with the help of reason what reality may be – they know what it is. They have experienced it and using analogies they try to describe it. Indian scholarship is more interested in seeking the ‘fruit’ of Vedic studies, whereas the Western scholarship concerned primarily with the ‘roots’ of the Vedic texts and words.

The scriptures are not to be interpreted as progress in philosophical thought. What’s claimed as polytheism and monotheism is but the identification of the various manifestations of the One Supreme Being. Unity in the Divine is what the Vedic Sages have proclaimed as the highest teaching and numerous verses supporting this are spread across each Veda, from the first mantra portion to the last Upaniṣad portion: “the One real which the wise declare as many”; “Purusha is all this, all that was and all that will be”; “the real essence of the Gods is one”; “The same real is worshipped as Uktha in the Rg, Agni in the Yajus and Mahavrta in the

Sāman”; “the indescribable is the ground of all names and forms, the support of all the creation”; “He is immanent in all this creation and yet he transcends it”.

Likewise the different parts of the Veda – Mantras, Brāhmaṇas, Araṇyakas and the Upaṇiṣads – too don’t signify the progress of philosophical thought. The Veda is a whole package towards spiritual liberation. One cannot directly start with the Upaṇiṣads, which teach the highest truth. One must first develop the physical, mental and moral maturity to be eligible to learn such truth. The Mantras, Brāhmaṇas and parts of the Araṇyakas serve such a purpose.

The four parts of each Veda can also be mapped to the four stages of life (āśrama) of the twice born (dviija). As a student (brahmacārin) one is to chant the hymns and live a life of control and virtue. As a householder (grhastha) one is to observe the injunctions laid forth in the Brāhmaṇas. In the forest dweller stage (vānaprastha) one is to meditate upon the spiritual truths behind the rituals as explained in the Araṇyakas and practice austerity. With the mental and moral maturity developed during the three previous stages one can finally take up the life of a wandering mendicant (samnyāsin) and study the highest truth taught in the Upaṇiṣads. Such is the orthodox Indian view.



## The Sacred Literature of India - An Overview

### 1. Primary Vedic Scriptures

Śruti — *That which has been heard*

**Veda-Saṃhitas** — The 'Collections of Wisdom-Scriptures' (**saṃ-hita**— placed together; **veda**— wisdom). They are:

1. **ṛg-veda** —The foremost of Vedas: a Scripture of Illuminating Hymns of Wisdom called sūktas or Mantras composed of Riks (**ric**, **rik** or **rig**— verse) addressed to the Devas or Gods.
2. **sāma-veda** — Scripture of Harmonious Joyful Chants or Sāmans to be sung to certain melodies. A recast of the Rig-Veda broken up into parts and arranged for purposes of being chanted at the Soma sacrifice.
3. **yajur veda** — the Scripture of Sacrificial Rites or Yajus (yajur) or the right ordaining of action. It consists principally of prayers and invocations applicable to the consecration of the utensils and materials of sacrificial worship, but also symbolic of the means by which mankind attains divinity. This Veda is divided into two parts, 'The White - **Śukla**' and 'The Black - **Kṛṣṇa**'.
4. **atharva-veda** — Scripture of the ancient Atharvans composed chiefly of mystical formulas intended to counteract disease and evil.

## Divisions of the Vedas

Each of these Vedas consists of the following divisions:

1. **Sūktas** or **mantras** — Poetic hymns of praise (**su-ukta**— beautifully said). Words of Vibrant Powers (**man**— to think). These are the most authoritative texts.
2. **Brāhmaṇas** — Works in prose dealing with Vedic ritual along with myths and traditional matter (**brahman**— prayer).
3. **Āraṇyakas** — Philosophical prose treatises attached to the Brahmanas for study by ascetics of the forest (**araṇya**— forest).
4. **Upaniṣads** — Treatises in poetry and prose on spiritual and philosophical subjects (**upa-ni-ṣad**— sit down near).

## Ancillary Vedic Scriptures

### Upa-Vedas

**Āyur-Veda** — Scripture dealing with medicine and health maintenance (**āyus** = longevity ).

**Dhanur Veda** — Scripture dealing with archery (**dhanus** = bow).

**Śastra-Śāstra** — Scripture dealing with martial arts (**Śastra** = weapon).

**Gāndharva-Veda** — Scripture of music (**gandharva** = celestial musician).

**Sthāpatya-Veda** — Scripture of architecture (**sthāpatya** = establishment).

**Śilpa-Śāstra** — Scripture of fine arts (**Śilpa** = stone).

## Branches of the Vedas

### Vedāṅgas

The six Vedāṅgas or 'Limbs of the Vedas' are:

1. <b>Śikṣā</b>	Phonetics	4. <b>Nirukta</b>	Etymology of words
2. <b>Chandas</b>	Prosody	5. <b>Jyotiśa</b>	Astronomy/Astrology
3. <b>Vyākaraṇa</b>	Grammar	6. <b>Kalpa*</b>	Ritual treatises.

\***KALPA** — literature dealing with ceremonials is of two kinds:

1. **Śrauta-sūtra** based on the Vedas or Śruti and Kalpa- sūtra — Rules and procedures for all the Vedic yajñas.

2. **Smārta-sūtra** based on *Smṛti* or 'Remembered Tradition'.

**Grihya-sūtras**— Rules for domestic ceremonial.

**Dharma-sūtras/śāstras**— Rules for conventional and religious customs and laws.

## 2. Secondary Scriptures

### Smṛti - *That which has been remembered*

#### Dharma-Śāstra— Law Books

**Mānava dharma-Śāstra** (Manu-smṛti or the laws of Manu) — The traditional and most revered Canon of Law of ancient India. It is composed of 12 books. They deal with creation, transmigration, liberation and give detailed instructions to all classes of men concerning their duties in life.

**Yājñavalkya Dharma Śāstra** — This Law book is next in importance and is based on the 'Laws of Manu' but represents a more advanced stage in the definition and theory of its laws. This work deals with rules of conduct in regard to society or caste, with civil and criminal law and with penance.

**Parāśara & Nārada** — Two other famous law-givers and authors of Dharma-smṛtis or Law-books.

## 3. Tertiary Literature

### Purāṇa

(purāṇa, from verb-root **pur**— to precede) These mythological works are the repository of the modern popular religious creed of the Hindus. They are an amplification of the traditions found in the Epics of India. Every Purāṇa is supposed to have 5 *lakṣana* or characteristics, that is, they should deal with:—

- (1) Creation,
- (2) Projection and Transformation of the World,
- (3) Genealogy of Gods and Heroes,
- (4) Reigns of the Manus or the original law-givers at different stages of the social development of the Human Race,
- (5) The lives and works of their descendants.

However all the Purāṇas do not meet this qualification. These works are all written in verse, and their invariable form is that of a dialogue between a highly enlightened master and a disciple, interspersed with the dialogues and observations of other individuals.

### Tantras /Āgama

Treatises which are generally in the form of a dialogue between Śiva, the Divine Lord, and Śakti, the Divine Energy. They deal with temple construction, festivals, deity meditation, mantras, rituals and all other aspects of ceremonial life.

These Tantras are very numerous and their authority in many parts of India, especially in Kashmir and Bengal seems to have superseded the Veda. Some scholars argue that the Vedas were only ever the interest of the males of upper three castes, the majority of people being Sudras and women had little or no place in them. Therefore for the spiritual upliftment of these people and all others without access to the Vedas, the Sages revealed the Tantras/Āgamas. These texts were studied and practiced parallel to the Vedas and are in complete harmony with their fundamental teachings.

Tantra is said to treat of five subjects:

- (1) Creation,
- (2) Destruction of the World,
- (3) Worship of the Gods and Goddesses,
- (4) The attainment of the six superhuman faculties, and
- (5) The four modes of the union with the Supreme by meditation.

The āgamas are divided into three main branches according to the deity that is worshipped.

1. **Pañcarātra āgamas** — The Vaiṣṇava āgamas wherein Viṣṇu is worshipped.
2. **Śiva āgamas** — These worship and glorify Śiva.
3. **Śakta āgamas** — treat of the worship of the Divine Mother Goddess.

## 4. Bhakti-Śāstra

### Scriptures of Religious Devotion.

**Itihāsa** — The two great epic-poems of India. (**itihāsa**— iti+ha+asa— so it was, ie., history.)

**Rāmāyaṇa** — The great epic written by Vālmiki which narrates the adventures of Rama, an Avatara or incarnation of Viṣṇu. It is composed of 48,000 lines of sixteen syllables, divided into seven books. The famed characters of this epic are Sītā, Rāma's wife, Hanuman, the great Monkey King who aids Rama in his battle against Rāvaṇa, the Demon King of Laṅkā, who abducted Sītā. The poem is often called the 'Illiad of the East', because of its rich poetic beauty and ethical idealism. Because of its spirit of large and tender humanity it has an absolute and all-commanding sway and influence in the entire South-East Asia region. Of the two epics and Rāmāyana is considered to have primacy.

**Mahābhārata** — The great epic of the Bharatas written by Vyāsa. It consists of 220,000 lines divided into 12 books. It is a great collection of poetry consisting of legendary philosophical material worked into and around a central narrative which portrays the political struggles between the two branches of the Bharata family: the evil-minded sons of Kurus (kauravas) and the virtuous Pāṇḍavas. The glorious purpose of this epic is to unite one with Truth and hence it is said to be "sin-clearing and virtue-increasing".

**Bhagavad Gītā** — A small portion of this epic is: The 'Lord's or Holy Song. It is the immortal Scripture containing in 18 chapters the spiritual law of action as revealed by Kṛṣṇa, an Avatāra or incarnation of Viṣṇu, to Arjuna, the best of Bhāratas. It has been called the 'universal spiritual song of humanity'. It has the unique status of being both a **śruti** because it was revealed by Lord Krishna Himself and a **smṛti** because it was told by Sanjaya who saw it all by clairvoyance.

## The Division of Vedic Literature

	RIG-VEDA		YAJUR-VEDA		SĀMA-VEDA	ATHARVA
		&	Kṛṣṇa	Śukla		VEDA
<b>Śākhās</b> <i>Schools</i>	Sakala		Taittiriya Kāthaka, Maitrāyaṇi	Madhyāṃdina, Kanva	Kauthuma- ranayaniya, Jaimini/ Tālavakara	Śaunaka, Paippalāda
<b>Samhitā</b> <i>Root Texts</i>	ṛk		Taittiriya Kāthaka, Maitrāyaṇi	Vājasaneyi	Sāma	Atharva
<b>Brāhmaṇa</b> <i>Interpretive texts</i>	Aitareya, Kauśitaki, Śankhāyana		Taittiriya Kāthā	Śatapatha	Pañcaviṃśa, Ṣaḍviṃśa Jaiminiya Sāma- vidhānam Chāṇḍogya	Gopatha
<b>Araṇyaka</b> <i>Anchorite texts</i>	Aitareya, Kauśitaki, Śankhāyana		Taittiriya, Kāthā	Bṛhadaraṇyaka	Tālavakra	
<b>Upaniṣad</b> <i>Philosophical texts</i>	Aitareya, Kauśitaki		Taittiriya, Kāthā, Maitri	Bṛhadaraṇyaka Śvetāśvatara Īśa	Chāṇḍogya, Keṇa Tālavakra	Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍukya Praśna
<b>Minor Upaniṣad</b>	Ātma-bodha Nāda-bindu		Nārāyaṇa Sarva-sāra Amṛta-bindu Tejo-bindu Skanda Śārīrikā Garbha Kali-santarana Yoga-tattva Amṛta-nāda Varāha Yoga-kuṇḍali	Muktika, Nirālamba Paingala Adhyātma Subala Tāra-sāra Bhikṣuka Haṃsa Maṇḍala-brahmaṇa	Maitreya Vajra-sūci Dhyāna-bindu	Nārada- parivrājaka Śaṇḍilya
<b>Gṛhya sūtra</b> <i>Manuals of Domestic rituals and social rules.</i>	Aśvalayana, Kauśitaki, Śankhāyana,		Baudhāyana, Āpastamba, Hiraṇyakeśin, Bhāradvāja, Satyasadha, Vaikhānasa	Parāśkara	Gobhila, Khadira, Jaimini	Kauśika

## 8. An Anthology.

The literature being surveyed in this section is indeed vast — about 8 times the length of the Bible. Therefore, we can only incorporate a small fraction of passages for the reader. The translations have been adapted from various published popular and scholarly works.

### *A. From Rigveda Samhita*

#### **1. Hymn to Agni RV 1.1.1-9**

I praise Agni, put at the head of the sacrifice, God, priest, Hotr, distributing great riches. ||1||  
 Agni is fit to be praised by former and also by present seers; he shall bring the gods here. ||2||  
 Through Agni one expects to gain day by day, wealth, indeed prosperity, which is honorable,  
 most abundant in heroes. ||3||  
 Agni, the ritualistic sacrificial worship which you are pervading everywhere, assuredly goes to  
 the gods. ||4||  
 Agni, Hotr, wise, truthful, having most wonderful fame, God, may he come with the gods. ||5||  
 Indeed O Agni! When you intend to bestow good fortune to the worshipper, that Angiras is  
 surely your truth. ||6||  
 Daily, O Agni! The lighter of darkness, we approach you with prayer, bearing obeisance. ||7||  
 We come to you, who are ruler of sacrificial rites, guardian of cosmic law, bright, growing in  
 your home. ||8||  
 Agni, be easily accessible to us, like father to son, accompany us for good fortune. ||9||

#### **2. Hymn to Indra (Rigveda VIII.45.1-3)**

Let those who come here light the fire and spread the grass in unbroken line, who have Indra,  
 ever young, for a friend. ||1||  
 Large the fuel, great is the chant, and high is the sacrificial pole of those who have Indra, ever  
 young, for a friend. ||2||  
 Irresistible in war, the hero drives the foe with warriors, who have Indra, ever young, for a  
 friend. ||3||

#### **3. Jnana Sukta (Rigveda X.71.1-11)**

When, Lord of our Prayer! The First of the sacred Speech, and the Foremost,  
 The sages uttered, giving the Un-named a name.  
 Which was their best, and their most stainless,  
 Then they, with love, revealed the Divine secret in their souls. ||1||

When the sages formed the Speech with their mind,  
 Straining it, as they strain flour with the sieve,  
 Therein have friends discovered the bonds of friendship,  
 Whose holy beauty lies hidden in that Speech. ||2||

With worship they followed the steps of the Speech,  
 And found it installed in the hearts of sages.  
 They acquired it and gave it at many places,  
 And seven singers intone it together. ||3||

There is the man who sees but has not seen the Speech!  
 There is the man who hears but has not heard her!  
 But to another, Lady Speech reveals her lovely form,  
 Like a loving wife, finely robed, to her husband. ||4||

There is a man who, they say, is firm and secure in friendship,  
 None should urge him to contests.  
 But he wanders, with an illusion that is barren,  
 And the speech he hears bears no fruit or flower! ||5||

For one deserting a friend who knows the truth,  
 There is no grace even in the holy Speech.  
 What he hears, he hears amiss,  
 Aye, to be sure, he does not know the path of righteousness! ||6||

Friends who are well endowed with sight and hearing,  
 Are unequal in the quickness of their mind.  
 Some look like pools that reach to the mouth or the armpit,  
 And some like lakes on which a man can bathe. ||7||

When, with the mental impulse shaped by the Spirit,  
 Friends who know the Speech perform rituals together,  
 Some are left back with much they still need to know,  
 While others move onward, regarded as adepts. ||8||

Those, who go neither backward nor forward,  
 Are no men of knowledge!  
 Nor performs of the sacred rites, they, the inept ones,  
 sinfully seize the Speech,  
 And spread it out as weavers weave the thread. ||9||

All a delighted when a friend comes,  
 Crowned with fame, a victor in the Assembly.  
 He wards off their sins, wins for them nurture,  
 And is always prepared for the tribulations of life. ||10||

One is strong with the power of the verses,  
 The second sings the song in the Sakvari measure.  
 The third, an adept, speaks of the knowledge of the Spirit,  
 And the last lays down the rules of the sacred rites. ||11||

#### **4. Purusha Sukta (Rigveda X.90.1-16)**

Purusha is 1000 headed, 1000 eyed, 1000 footed;

And, pervading the earth on all sides  
 He exists beyond the 10 directions. ||1||  
 (Purusha = Immanent, Creator God)

Purusha indeed is all this,  
 What has been and what will be,  
 And the Lord of immortality  
 Transcending by mortal nurture. ||2||

Such is his magnificence, but  
 Purusha is greater than this;  
 All beings are a fourth of him,  
 Three fourths- his immortality-lie in heaven. ||3||

Three-fourths of Purusha ascended,  
 The fourth part was here again and again,  
 And, diversified in form, it moved  
 To the animate and the inanimate world. ||4||

From him was Viraj born, and  
 From Viraj was born Purusha;  
 And, as soon as born, he spread over  
 The earth from behind and front. ||5||

When with Purusha as offering  
 The Devas performed a sacrifice,  
 Spring was the molten butter, summer  
 The fuel, and autumn the oblation. ||6||

On the grass they besprinkled him,  
 The Sacrifice Purusha, the first born,  
 With Him the gods sacrificed,  
 And those Sadhyas and the Rishis. ||7||

From that sacrifice, fully offered,  
 Was gathered the mixed milk and butter.  
 And animals ruled by Vayu arose  
 The sylvan and the domestic. ||8||

From that sacrifice, fully offered,  
 The Rik and the Sāman were born,  
 The Chhandas was born of that,  
 And from that was the Yajus born. ||9||

From that were born horses, and the  
 Animals with two rows of teeth;  
 Yea, kine were born of that, and  
 Of that were born the goat and the sheep. ||10||

When they divided the Purusha,  
 Into how many parts did they arrange him?  
 What was his mouth? What were his two arms?  
 What are his thighs and feet called? ||11||

The Brāhmaṇa (priest) was his mouth,  
 If his two arms were made the rAjanya (kshatriya - warrior),  
 His two thighs the vaishya (merchant and agriculturist),  
 From his feet the shudra (laborer class) was born. ||12||

From his mind was born the moon, and  
 From his eye the sun. From his mouth  
 Were Indra and Agni born,  
 And Vayu was born from his breath. ||13||

From his navel came the mid-air,  
 From his head the sky was fashioned,  
 From his feet the earth, and from his ear,  
 The quarters. Thus they formed the worlds. ||14||

Seven were the sticks of the enclosure  
 Thrice seven the logs of wood prepared,  
 When the gods, performing the rite,  
 Bound, as their victim, Purusha. ||15||

With sacrifices the gods worshipped the Sacrifice,  
 Those were the earliest holy ordinances.  
 The mighty Ones attained the height of heaven  
 Where the ancient Devas, the Sadhyas, abide. ||16||

### **5. The Nasadiya Hymn (Rigveda X.129-1-7)**

Neither Being nor non-Being existed then;  
 There was no sky, nor the heaven, which is beyond.  
 What covered? Where was it and in whose shelter?  
 Was the water the deep abyss in which it lay? ||1||

There was no death, hence neither was anything immortal;  
 There was no distinction between night and day.  
 By its inherent force the One breathed windless;  
 Nothing other than that existed. ||2||

Darkness there was,  
 In the beginning all this was a sea without light;  
 That which, becoming, by the void was covered,  
 That One by the force of heat came into being. ||3||

Desire entered the One in the beginning,  
 It was the earliest seed, the product of thought.

The Sages searching in their hearts with wisdom  
 Found the bond of Being in non-Being.  
 Their ray extended light across the darkness;  
 But was the One below or was it above?  
 Creative force and fertile power was there;  
 Below was energy and will, above. ||4-5||

Who knows for certain? Who shall declare it here?  
 When was it born and when came the creation?  
 The Gods came later,  
 Who then knows when it arose? ||6||

None know when creation has arisen;  
 Whether he made it or did not make it,  
 He who surveys it in the highest heaven,  
 Only He knows, or maybe even he knows not! ||7||

#### **6. Samjnana Sukta (Rigveda X.191.2-4)**

Walk together in harmony, speak in harmony  
 Let your minds be of one accord,  
 As the gods of old, being of one mind,  
 Accepted the share of sacrifice  
 (so may you share your belongings). ||2||

May your counsel be common, your assembly united,  
 Common the mind, and the thoughts of these- united.  
 A common purpose do I lay before you,  
 And worship with your common oblation. ||3||

Let your aims be common,  
 And your hearts of one accord,  
 And all of you be of one mind,  
 As you may live well together. ||4||

### *B. From Atharvaveda Samhita (Shaunaka Śākha)*

#### **1. Abhaya Sukta (freedom from fear)- XIX.15.1-6**

Free us Indra, from the fear of all that we are afraid of,  
 May Thou, with thy saving power,  
 Turn away the hater and the enemy. ||1||

We beseech Indra, the bounteous Giver,  
 We will be prosperous on men and cattle.  
 Let not the evil powers approach us;  
 Turn the hostiles who surround us, away. ||2||

Adorable Indra, our Savior,  
The slayer of Vritra, fulfiller of our highest ambitions;  
May he be our protector from yonder,  
From the middle, from behind and from the front. ||3||

Lead us to a free world, Wise One!  
Where lie the divine luster, sunlight and security.  
Valiant are Thy arms of Thee, the Almighty,  
And we seek shelter in them. ||4||

May the mid regions free us from all fear,  
And both the Heaven and Earth make us secure.  
Let there be for us, no fear from the west,  
No fear from the east, no fear from the north and no fear from the south. ||5||

Let there be no fear from friend, no fear from foe,  
No fear from the known, no fear from that which lies before us unknown.  
Let there be no fear for us from night, no fear from day,  
May all the directions be my friends! ||6||

## **2. Sabha Sukta VII.12.1-4**

May the Assembly and the Council  
the two daughters of Prajapati, be in concord and protect me!  
May every one I meet guide me;  
Fathers, may I speak finely in the meetings. ||1||

I know thy name, O Assembly,  
“The Desired of Men” is the name thou hast;  
May all those who are thy members  
Agree with me in my opinion. ||2||

Let us receive the brilliance  
And the wisdom of those seated here together;  
And among those people assembled here  
Make me the illustrious, Indra! ||3||

Whether your thoughts are turned away  
Or are bound fast here and here,  
I turn those thoughts of yours around,  
In me may your thoughts delight. ||4||

## *C. Paippalada Atharvaveda Samhita*

### **1. Brahmasukta (AVP VIII.8.1-12)**

“(It is) The Supreme Being (Who) first spread out the mighty powers collected in Him  
(It is) The Supreme Being (Who) first spread out the heavenly lights everywhere

Verily, The Supreme Being was born as first Lord of all that exists  
Who, then is fit to be this Supreme Being's rival" ||1||

"These Heaven and Earth are Supreme Being,  
The seven currents are The Supreme Being  
All the Adityas are Supreme Being  
(Verily) All the divine beings contemplate upon the Supreme Being." ||2||

"The Brāhmaṇas speak of (the glories of) the Supreme Being (during the day)  
(But) The Supreme Being verily is present (also) in the night.  
From The Supreme Being is born the {light} (of the Sun that brightens the day),  
By the Supreme Being does fire shine with great splendour (at night). ||3||

"The Supreme Being abides in food producing plants  
And it is He who causes the rains (which give life to these plants) to descend.  
(Indeed) The Supreme Being is inner animating Soul of all this  
As long as the sun shines bright. " ||4||

" The Supreme Being is the priest who recites the chants during the ritual,  
The Supreme Being is (also) the ritual  
As well as the chants being recited with great precision.  
From the Supreme Being arises the priest who pours the oblation into the fire  
{Within} the Supreme Being {is present} the oblation." ||5||

"The Supreme Being is the fire altar, brimming with clarified butter,  
The Supreme Being are the bulls possessing the beneficent seed,  
The Supreme Being are the cows, that yield the oblation going into the ritual fire,  
The Supreme Being is he who, seated in the divine chariot, attains the well performed  
magnificent ritual." ||6||

"By the (will of the) Supreme Being the inert (thing) moves (and thus becomes dynamic)  
By the (will of the) Supreme Being does the body unite (with life).  
By the (will of) Supreme Being does the outward breath return to the man with great  
trembling." ||7||

"From the Supreme Being arise the Holy Seers  
From the Supreme Being (arise) these Kshatriyas  
From the very same Supreme Being are born the Brāhmaṇas  
From the Supreme Being (arise) the {food producing third caste (vaishyas). }"  
"{The Supreme Being are indeed these Shudras serving the Kshatriyas,  
The Supreme Being are all they who perceive.}  
The Supreme Being are all these benevolent officials  
{The Supreme Being are all these members of the assembly.}" ||8-9||

"The Supreme Being are the fishermen,  
The Supreme Being are the servants,  
The Supreme Being indeed are these gamblers.  
Man as well as woman originate from the Supreme Being  
Women are God and so are men." ||10||

“ The Supreme Being is in the highlands, the Supreme Being is in the lowlands, (indeed) the Supreme Being envelops from all directions.  
 Trees, mountains and in shrubs or creepers,  
 (Verily) The Supreme Being abides in these all.  
 The Earth and the Heavens  
 The Supreme Being abides in both” ||11||

### *D. Madhyandina Yajurveda Samhita*

I take refuge in the Rik, the word;  
 I take refuge in the Yaju, the mind;  
 I take refuge in the Sāman; the breath;  
 I take refuge in sight and hearing.  
 Energy of speech with strength and my in-breath and outbreath! 36.1

Whatever defect I have of eye, of heart, of mind,  
 Or whatever excess there is,  
 May Brihaspati remedy it.  
 Gracious to us be the Lord of the Universe! 36.2

Indra is King over all;  
 May there be grace on the biped, grace on the quadruped. 36.8

May the wind blow us health,  
 And the sun shine cheer on us,  
 And may the clouds with loud thunder  
 Rain their grace on us. 36.10

The peace in the sky, the peace in the mid-air,  
 The peace on the earth, the peace in waters,  
 The peace in plants, the peace in forest trees,  
 The peace in All Devas, the peace in Brahman,  
 The peace in all things,  
 The peace in peace-  
 May that peace come to me! 36.17

Strong One! Make me strong!  
 May all beings look on me with the eye of friend!  
 May I look on all beings with the eye of friend!  
 May we look on one another with the eye of friend! 36.18

That eye of the sky, divinely placed, rising bright before us-  
 May we see for a hundred autums!  
 And may we live for a hundred autums,  
 And may we hear for a hundred autums,  
 May we hold our heads high for a hundred autums,

Yea, even more than a hundred autums. 36.24

### *E. Taittiriya Samhita*

“Yonder sun was in this world. The gods seizing it on all sides with the Prishtha (lauds) made it go to the world of heaven. They seized it with Para (Sāmans) from below. And with Divakirtya (Sāman), they placed it in the world of heaven. With Para (Sāman), they seized it from above, and with the Prishtha (lauds), they descended from heaven. Yonder sun, indeed, in this world of heaven is seized on all sides by the Para (Sāmans).” 7.3.10

### *F. Kathaka Samhita*

“Apah (waters) certainly were such in which everything was dissolved. He, Prajapati, assuming an air like form moved to and fro on a lotus leaf. He did not find a resting place. He saw his net or nest of waters. He arranged this Agni in the midst of water. It became this earth. Then he took its seat. This earth is Agnih”. 22.9

### *G. From the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*

“Some ask- ‘If a man establishes the sacrificial fire and then dies while touring abroad, then how does one do his Agnihotra. To this, we reply that it is to be performed by offering the oblation of the milk of a cow which has been suckled by a calf that is not its own. This is because the milk of such a cow is akin in nature to the Agnihotra of such a dead man. Alternately, perform the Agnihotra with the milk of any cow. Others state the relatives of the dead man should keep the alters of that man fired up without offering sacrificial oblations till the bones of the dead man have been collected after cremation of his corpse. And if the corpse is not traceable, then twigs from 360 ‘flame of the forest’ trees should be cut and fashioned into a human figure. This should then be cremated with full ceremony and at that time, the fires from the altar established by the dead man should be extinguished by a transfer to his funeral pyre. The likeness of the corpse should be created in this manner- 150 twigs for the torso, 140 for the twigs for the two thighs. 50 for the legs and the rest should be placed above its head. Thus ends the procedure for the atonement performed for a man who establishes a sacrificial fire in the altar but dies while touring abroad.” XXXII.1-2

### *I. Tandya Brāhmaṇa*

“Prajapati certainly was alone before this Universe. The word certainly was his only possession. Therefore, the word was the second. He desired: ‘Let me emit this very word, it will pervade this whole (space). He emitted the word and it pervaded the whole (space). It rose upwards and spread, as a continuous (well joined) stream of water.” 20.14.2

### *J. Shankhayana Aranyaka*

Chapter XIII: Thereafter, when the body is made fit for a state of desirelessness, he should be bent over the offering to Brahman. In this way, he will drive repeated deaths away. “The Soul is to be envisioned, to be heard, to be thought of and to be meditated upon.” “Him (the Soul)

they aspire to know by reciting the Vedas, by practicing the rigors of studentship (including celibacy), by asceticism, by faith, by ritual sacrifices and by fasting” says Sage Mandukeya. “Therefore, he who knows this should, becoming tranquil, restrained (in senses), still in meditation, enduring of the opposites and immersed in faith, perceive the Soul in his own soul,” thus says Sage Madavya. That Purusha, who lives in the midst of life forces, and is a repository of consciousness, is incomprehensible and ought to be distinguished (from the animate and inanimate creation) as ‘Not this, Not this’ this.” “This Soul alone is the Kshatriya, it is the Brahminhood, it is all the divine beings, the Vedas, all the worlds, it is all beings, indeed it is all! This Soul is that is designated by ‘Tat tvam asi’ (That Thou are). This Soul is to be comprehended in ‘I am Brahman’. This Brahman (the Supreme Soul), without any predecessor, without any superior, without another equivalent, immanent in all, without an exterior (i.e. all pervading), is this Soul- the Brahman (the Supreme Being), the entity that experiences everything in the Universe- such is the doctrine”- says Sage Yajnavalkya.

Chapter XIV: The best of the Riks, the best of the Yaju mantras, pinnacle of the Sāman chants, the crown of the head of the Atharvans- he who studies not the Veda is indeed called ignorant. He (as if) cleaving is head himself, becomes a corpse.” (And) he is but a (lifeless) pillar that bears a burden, who recites the Veda without knowing the meaning of his chants. (But) he who knows the meaning along wins prosperity. He rises to Heaven, shaking off his sin through Spiritual Knowledge.”

### *K. From the Taittiriya Aranyaka*

1. “He by Whom all this Universe is pervaded- the earth and the mid region, the heaven and the quarters and the sub-quarters, that Purusha is fivefold and is constituted of 5 elements. He who has attained the Supreme Knowledge through Samnyasa (renunciation) is indeed this Purusha. He is all that is perceptible in the present, was perceptible in the past and will be perceptible in the future. Though apparently human, His true nature is that which is settled by the Vedas and what is attained by his new birth is in right knowledge. He is firmly established in the richness of knowledge imparted by His teacher, as also in his faith and in Truth. He has become the self resplendent. Being such a one, He remains beyond/separate the darkness of ignorance. O Aruni! Having become one possessed of knowledge by realizing Him, the Supreme, through Samnyasa, and with your mind fixed in your heart, do not again fall a prey to death. Because Samnyasa is this the supreme means of spiritual realization, therefore wise men declare that to be above all the means of salvation.” X.79.16

“O Supreme Being! You are the bestower of the wealth of supreme saving knowledge to us. You have become this entire Universe. You unite with the individual soul as the Sutratman (the inner pervading Soul of all individual souls). You pervade the entire Universe. You impart luster to fire. You impart heat and light to the sun. You impart the treasure of light to the moon. You are taken in the Upayama vessel as Soma Juice for oblation. We worship Thee, the Supreme, who are such for manifestation of light.” X.79.17

### *2. Narayana Sukta (Prapāthaka X, Anuvaka 13)*

“This universe is the Eternal Being (Narayana), the imperishable, the supreme, the goal, multi-headed and multi-eyed (i.e., omnipresent and omniscient), the resplendent, the source of delight for the whole universe. This universe is the Supreme Being (Purusha) alone; hence it subsists

on That, the Eternal which transcends it (in every way), -the omnipresent Absolute which destroys all sins. The protector of the universe, the Lord of all Souls (or Lord over Self), the perpetual, the auspicious, the indestructible, the Goal of all creation, the Supreme object worthy of being known, the Soul of all beings, the Refuge unfailing (is He). The Lord Narayana is the Supreme Absolute; Narayana is the Supreme Reality; Narayana is the Supreme Light; Narayana is the Supreme Self; Narayana is the Supreme Meditator; Narayana is the Supreme Meditation. Whatever all this universe is, -seen or heard of, -pervading all this from inside and outside alike, stands supreme the Eternal Divine Being (Narayana). He is the Limitless, Imperishable, Omniscient, residing in the ocean of his heart, the Cause of the happiness of the universe, the Supreme end of all striving, (manifesting Himself) in the ether of the heart which is comparable to an inverted bud of the lotus flower. Below the Adams apple, at a distance of a span, and above the navel (i.e., the heart which is the relative seat of the manifestation of Pure Consciousness in the human being), effulges the Great Abode of the universe, as if adorned with garlands of flames. Surrounded on all sides by nerve-currents (or arteries), suspends the lotus-bud of the heart in an inverted position. It is in a subtle space (a narrow aperture, the Sushumna-Nadi), and therein is to be found the Substratum of all things. In that space within the heart resides the Great Flaming Fire, undecaying, all-knowing, with tongues spread out in all directions, with faces turned everywhere, consuming food presented before it, and assimilating it unto itself. His rays, spreading all around, side ways as well as above and below, warm up the whole body from head to foot. In the center of That (Flame) abides the Tongue of Fire as the topmost of all subtle things. (Note: Due to the attachments and entanglements of the Jiva in worldly enjoyment and suffering, the Consciousness is enshrouded in potential as well as expressed objectivity, and hence it appears like a tiny streak of flame within the dark clouds of ignorance. But when the Jiva rises above worldliness the Consciousness is realized as he Infinite.) Brilliant like a streak of lightning set in the midst of the blue rain-bearing clouds, slender like the awn of a paddy grain, yellow (like gold) in colour, in subtlety comparable to the minute atom, (this Tongue of Fire) grows splendid. In the Middle of That Flame, the Supreme Self dwells. This (Self) is Brahma (the Creator), Siva (the Destroyer), Hari (the Protector), Indra (the Ruler), the Imperishable, the Absolute, the Autonomous Being. Prostrations again and again to the Omni-Formed Being, the Truth, the Law, the Supreme Absolute, the Purusha of blue-decked yellow hue, the Centralised-Force, Power, the All-Seeing One. Prostrations again and again to the Omni-Formed Being,

The Truth, the Law, the Supreme Absolute, the Purusha of blue-decked yellow hue, the Centralised-Force, Power, the All-Seeing One. We commune ourselves with Narayana, and meditate on Vasudeva, may that Vishnu direct us (to the Great Goal).

Om. May there be Peace, Peace, Peace!"

### *L. Maitrayani Aranyaka*

“They said: ‘Revered one, you are the teacher, you are the teacher. What has been said has been duly fixed in mind by us. Now answer a further question. Fore, air, sun, time, whatever it is, breath, food, Brahma, Rudra, Vishnu- some meditate upon one, some meditate upon another. Tell us- which one is the best for us?’ Then he replied to them: “All these are merely the manifest/frontal forms of Brahman, the Immortal, the Formless. To whichever form each man is devoted here, in the realm of that deity does that man rejoice. For it has been said- ‘Verily, this whole is Brahman. Verily, these, which are its manifest forms that one meditates

on, worships and discards. For by meditation upon these forms, one moves into higher and higher realms. And when all things perish, he attains unity with the Purusha!" IV.5-6

## APPENDIX

### The Aryan Invasion Theory

With the archeological discovery of a pre 1500 BCE civilization in the Indus basin (and subsequently in Gujarat and as far east as the Ganges and as far south as the Godavari river) it was assumed that this newly found civilization was non-Vedic. The composers of the Vedas were then said to have destroyed the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) with the help of horses and chariots and iron weapons (later on) and pushed the original inhabitants of the IVC area into peninsular India. This is called the *Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT)*.

The theory further states that the Vedic people (called 'Aryans') were fair and tall like Nordic Europeans, in contrast to the inhabitants of the IVC area, who were presumably short and dark. The verses of Rig-veda were twisted to see massacres of these dark 'Dasyus' perpetrated by the invading white 'Aryans', as a result of which the 'Dasyus' then fled to south. The 'Aryans' were said to have invaded in several massive waves, so much so that they came to dominate modern Pakistan, northern India and Afghanistan completely in a few centuries, and obliterated all the traces of a non-Aryan past. The descendants of the 'Dasyus', who were supposedly pushed to South India, were equated with modern Tamils and even certain words said to be 'borrowed' from Dravidian languages were found in the Rig-veda, despite the fact that the earliest literature in any Dravidian language (Tamil to be specific) post-dates Rigveda by at least 1200 years. The AIT was also initially promoted by certain influential archaeologists like Mortimer Wheeler. No primary evidence was really adduced to support the AIT. The theory was rather based on the fact that the Vedic language was determined to belong to the same family as Greek, Latin etc. This language family was called the 'Indo-European' family or the IE family. Secondly, several arguments of silence were used. For instance, the AIT'ers pointed out that the unearthed motifs of the IVC culture do not show the horse or the spoke wheeled chariot at all whereas these play an important role in the Vedas and also in other IE cultures.

Conversely, the supposed absence of mention of items like tigers and rice which were indeed attested at IVC sites in the Rig-veda was taken as another proof that the Aryans were not linked with the IVC. Certain other curious arguments were also cited. For instance, the AIT'ers pointed that the word for the elephant in the RV was 'Mrga-hastin' (or 'the animal with a hand'), indicating that the Aryans found this creature novel after they entered South Asia from Central Asia. Such arguments actually fall flat when it is pointed out that the 'snake' is often referred to as 'toothed rope' in the Vedas.

Many Indian scholars strenuously objected to this theory right from the start, but the AIT was accepted as the correct view by Western and most Indian Academics till recently. In fact, it is still **the** view stated as a fact in works on World History and other related fields due to academic inertia.

Opponents to the AIT were often termed as 'Hindu chauvinists', 'Indian Nationalists' and so on (and these terms are still used by proponents of the new Avatar of the AIT which is the AMT- see below). In recent decades however, opposition to the AIT has mounted considerably and no respective Indologist will publicly uphold the AIT in its crass form any longer. The following were the objections of the opponents:—

- There is absolutely no archaeological evidence of any invasion of the IVC area by Aryans. No burnt cities, no massive destructive migration trails. There is also no proof of migration of Dravidian speakers from the IVC area to South India.
- The Vedas themselves are completely silent about any migration or invasion. They pre-suppose the geography, flora and fauna of North India and have no traces of any extra-Indian features. (Some scholars still continue to see the rivers and animals of Central Asia, Afghanistan and even Europe in Rig-vedic hymns. We can ignore them as being quite farfetched).
- From very early times, Indians have had no memory of having come from outside to settle down in North India. In fact, the area pre-supposed by the Rig-veda and even other Samhitas actually corresponds with the area that the IVC occupied. Any invading race likes to write about its victories and its advent from a foreign land — things which are rather absent in the RV or other Vedic literature. Similarly, the Dravidian speakers themselves have no memory of being pushed south from the IVC area. Rather, their traditions speak of a migration from more southern areas, which were submerged by the encroaching sea!
- The verses of Rig-veda that supposedly describe the massacres of inhabitants of IVC are grossly misinterpreted. There more credible as well as traditional interpretations do not see any ethnic genocide mentioned therein. Rather then are referring to a cosmic/psychological struggle between higher and lower forces.
- The Anthropologists further said that there is no break in skeletal continuity in NW India from 2800 BCE to around 800 BCE. Therefore, skeletal remains do not support any invasion or even a migration.
- Archaeologists point out that if an urban and a literate people like the IVC area inhabitants were pushed to South India, they could have easily set up urban centers there. However, Dravidian culture was clearly Neolithic till the middle of the first millennium BCE. How can a literate and an urban civilization lose its character so fast?
- Archaeologists have pointed out that the IVC did not really die out suddenly as would have happened had Aryan invaders or migrants overwhelmed IVC residents. Rather, it moved to new areas like Gujarat, and subsequently to the Gangetic plains. In other words, they see a clear continuity in culture and civilization from IVC to later Ganges based culture.
- The Rig-veda and even later texts extol the river Sarasvati as the ‘mother of all rivers’. The river is said in the texts to have flowed across Haryana, Rajasthan before joining the sea/disappear into the sands. As we come to later texts, the river diminishes in importance (and size) and then, it is replaced by the Ganges. In fact, satellite imagery in recent decades conclusively established that such a might river did flow in that area and interestingly, the archaeologists have discovered 100’s of new sites around (and even on) the dried bed of the river. The evidence is very clear then- that the maximum concentration of IVC sites was indeed on the Sarasvati river and that the culture moved to other areas when the river dried out. Now, the river seems to have dried out by 1500 BCE, and therefore it follows that the Aryan culture becomes contemporary in time and space with the IVC. The

‘Sarasvati paradigm’ is something, which the modern proponents of AIT (now AMT) have not been able to explain away satisfactorily. In fact, even late Vedic texts mention the performance of rituals on the banks of Sarasvati and Drishdvati, which would be anachronistic if these texts were composed around 600 BCE (which is when the AIT’ers and even most modern Indologists date them).

- Frawley’s Paradox: In the case of Aryans, we are left with a massive literature that is several times the length of the Bible. We further know that the extant literature is merely a fraction of what existed once. Yet, we have very little material traces from the period 1400 BCE to 600 BCE in the area and the period when these texts were apparently composed. In contrast, we have in IVC a sprawling civilization covering 1.5 million square km. with more than a 1000 urban sites identified. And yet, there is no literature extant, only a few thousand seals with a few writing symbols.
- Genetic evidence also does not lend support to the AIT and is inconclusive at best.
- Oceanic Imagery: The internal evidence of texts is also adduced to counter the AIT. It is pointed out that if the Aryans were a pastoral society, their texts would not refer to boats, ships and oceans. In fact, there are more than a 100 references to oceans and ships, which is consistent with the fact that the IVC had archaeologically attested trade relations with the Sumerian culture.
- Arguments based on technology are also advanced. It is pointed out that the geometry pre-supposed by the IVC architectural remains is actually reflected in the ritualistic Vedic texts.
- A very problematic fact for the proponents of AIT is the fact that the Vedic texts contain certain astronomical information (positions of constellations etc.), which takes us well into the IVC period (and even beyond that) and area. This could not have been the case if the Aryans were a pastoral society and were resident in Central Asia. In fact, the original location of proto-IE speakers has still not been traced and from the perspective of archaeology, proto-Indo-Europeans remain an enigma. So is it even justified to talk of Aryans as a race? The issue is compounded by the fact that there is no archaeologically attested trail of Aryans even outside India!
- The arguments of silence proposed by proponents of AIT are also explained. For instance, although rice is not mentioned in the Rig-veda, rice dishes certainly are. And tiger might have been subsumed in the word for lion (as still is the case in modern times to some extent). Alternately, since the tiger was actually present all the way to Central Asia, its non-mention in the Rig-veda is merely by chance. Also, the use of the word ‘Mrgahastin’ or ‘Hastin’ for the elephant does not indicate novelty because although snakes occur everywhere in the world except in the Polar region, they are called ‘toothed ropes’ in even a late text like the Atharvaveda. And yet nobody can state that the Aryans saw the snake for the first time when they entered South Asia. In other words, the elephant has been given that name because the Vedic language as such is picturesque.
- The notion that the IVC drew a lot from the Sumerian culture and that the Aryans were themselves invaders from Central Asia takes an ‘Iranocentric’ view of Indian civilization. Such a view is now being questioned by archaeologists. They point

that most developments in the IVC area were indigenous to India. For instance, it is now believed that Iron was introduced into India from peninsular India. A site called Mehrgarh has been discovered in Baluchistan. At this site, organized agriculture is attested up to 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE. This is the time around which agriculture started in the Middle East as well. Excavations have shown that writing originated in the IVC area around 3300 BCE, which is around the time it started in Sumer as well. Very early domestication of animals is now attested archaeologically in IVC area. And in the case of many IVC sites, it now appears that there was a gradual transformation from a pre-historic Neolithic culture to the urban, literate IVC culture, which had a significant interaction with the Neolithic cultures in Vindhya and also in the east.

- The cultural continuity of the IVC culture with much later culture in north India is also stressed to conclude that there was no AIT which led to a break in the cultural continuity of north India. For instance, it is now known that the weights and the ratios of bricks used in India later on are virtually identical to the corresponding artifacts found in the IVC area.
- It is also pointed out that supposed points of distinction between the IVC and the Aryans (viz. the horse, the chariot and iron) should start appearing archaeologically around the time of the supposed invasions/migrations. This is not really the case. Thus, chariots are not attested archaeologically in India till the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE (although they are mentioned by Greeks around 323 BCE) and likewise, horse remains do not start appearing suddenly around 1200-1400 BCE everywhere in north India. In fact, horse remains have been now found in IVC sites as early as 1700 BCE and even earlier in the non-IVC areas.
- All the Indian traditions (Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Atheist) clearly pre-suppose several millennia of development of their philosophical, religious, theological systems. This runs counter to the idea that the Aryans entered India around 1500 BCE and came to dominate only in the course of subsequent centuries.
- Cattle breeds in the middle show an ingression of Indian breeds genetically. In murals etc., we see that the Indian humped cattle started appearing in the Middle East around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. This is around the same time that the Aryans moved into India from Central Asia. So did the cattle move out of India while men moved into India, at the same time?

The results of the objections such as those listed above have led the proponents of the AIT to reformulate their views in several ways. Some Indologists in the West (who are predominantly philologists and linguists) have tried to adduce reasons why the invading Aryans have not left behind any material traces. Thus, they have redefined certain terms in the Vedas to mean something different from their earlier definitions. For instance, the Rig-vedic word '*pur*' which was earlier taken to mean a city or a fortress is now said to denote mud dwellings with palisades and so on. The word '*grama*' which earlier denoted 'village' or a settlement in general is now taken to mean a 'cart-wagon' (like that of gypsies). In other words, it is postulated that since the Vedic Aryans were a gypsy-like community, they could hardly be expected to leave any material trace!

Most Indologists, having abandoned the idea of large-scale invasions are now proposing other models. For instance, some subscribe to the 'elite dominance' model according to which a small number of Indo-Aryan (IA) speakers entered the IVC area to dominate the collapsing

IVC and soon came to dominate the natives with the help of horses and chariots (termed as 'Vedic Tanks.'). These invasions are being re-christened as 'migrations' and 'acculturation'. Some others are proposing a continuous process of interaction of IVC inhabitants with IA speakers of Afghanistan and Bactria accompanied by small-scale migrations (but large scale transfer of language). Needless to say, at this stage, all these models that are being proposed to explain the lack of evidence of invasions are often really invasions described in a euphemistic way, or are completely chaotic and unsatisfactory.

However, the proponents of this Aryan Migration Theory (AMT) have advanced sophisticated arguments based on linguistics to emphasize that at least the horse, the chariot and the language of Vedic Aryans was imported from Central Asia in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. They highlight the fact that in the language tree, Vedic Sanskrit appears a rather late language. They emphasize the supposed cultural dichotomy between IVC (no horse, no chariot, bath, bricks) and the Aryan culture (horse and chariots are important, no public bath, no bricks). They have tried to explain away the astronomical evidence as misinterpretations of Vedic passages and have made (totally unsuccessful) attempts to see a Dravidian language in IVC seal inscriptions. Moreover, they see a 'Dravidian' or an 'Austro-Asiatic' or even a 'Language X' substratum in Rig-veda as a proof that when the Aryans came to North India, it already had speakers of proto-Dravidian, para-Munda or of hypothetical languages like the language X. They also suggest that the so-called horse bones unearthed in the IVC area and also in peninsular area actually came from poorly documented excavations. Therefore, they cannot be stratified, and therefore dated perfectly. In other words, they stick to the old paradigm that horse was indeed brought from outside by the Aryans into South Asia. AIT/AMT proponents also seek to malign opponents by branding them as 'dangerous people', 'chauvinists', 'Hindutva fanatics', 'theologians' and so on.

To counter these views, the AIT opponents point out that –

- It is possible that while the RV was indeed composed in the same period as the IVC or even earlier, it was redacted several times and given its present form around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE so that linguistically its language is close to Greek, Avestan and Latin.
- Recent researches have actually shown that when the various books of the RV are arranged chronologically, we have to deduce a movement from east to west (i.e. from Uttar Pradesh to Afghanistan), which is just the opposite of AIT (and is therefore called the Out of India Theory or the OIT).
- It is pointed out that the arrival of the horse and the chariot is not attested archaeologically and moreover, the word of horse (ashva) could have referred to some other similar animal as it did in Sumer.
- It is proposed that the RV and other Vedic texts do not represent the culture of the IVC area as such, but only of the Haryana/Sarasvati/UP area (which is evident from the internal testimony of the texts as well). Therefore, for this reason and also those stated in the first paragraph of this section, we can hardly expect a 1:1 correspondence between RV culture and IVC.
- It is shown that the legends in the RV represent the most archaic and holistic versions of several IE mythological themes, indicating that it was rather the IE speakers who left India in various waves.

- They highlight the fact that names of geographical places in north India and Pakistan do not have any Dravidian or Austro-Asiatic substrate, which is rather odd if the Aryans displaced Dravidian or Austro-Asiatic features.
- It is stated that if the Aryans had indeed brought the horse into India, then the Dravidian word for the same would have been borrowed from Vedic Sanskrit, but this is not the case.
- It is seen that late chariot features (like spoke wheeled) that are attested only as late as 2000 BCE, are to be found mentioned only in the latest parts of the Rig-veda. The earlier parts of Rig-veda are actually free of any references to spoke wheeled chariots, and presume only solid wheeled wagons and chariots.
- The presence of Dravidian words as such in the Vedic texts need not presuppose a substratum, but only a borrowing from an adjacent culture which was contemporary (and not necessarily one which was overcome via immigration or invasion).
- The AIT/AMT opponents refer to the fact that the horse in the Rig-veda has 34 ribs (and is therefore of a South East Asian/South Asian variety now mostly extinct) and is therefore not the Central Asian horse which has 36 ribs. The argument is that had the Aryans brought their horse from Central Asia, it would have had 36 ribs and not 34.
- AIT opponents point to the fact that certain linguistic peculiarities in modern Indo-Aryan languages of North India are not deductible either from Vedic Sanskrit or from Dravidian/Austro Asiatic. So is the case with numerous aspects of Hindu religion. All this suggests that the Vedas themselves represent the religious beliefs of only a section of the ancestors of modern Hindus. Consequently, it is inaccurate to represent Vedic Aryans as a 'group' that displaced IVC people. It is possible rather that inhabitants of different parts of the IVC area, peninsular India and the Gangetic plains were resident in their respective areas for along time and with time, their beliefs fused even further to lead to the formation of the magnificent construct that Hinduism is.

Opponents of AIT often tend to point to the Eurocentric or Marxist (within India) biases of the up-holders of AIT/AMT, a charge that is resisted by (some of) them stoutly. A great drawback of the OIT theories is that similar to AIT/AMT, it is not attested archaeologically. In its defense, it must be said however that the theory is rather new and therefore archaeologists will take several years to correlate their data with the suggestions of the OIT'ers, whereas the AIT/AMT has had a head start of 150 years to influence the mute findings of the archaeologists.

It would not be out of place to mention that most recent attempts aimed at the decipherment of the IVC script presume a language related to Sanskrit. All attempts to date have, however, been a failure.

The above was but a brief resume of a few conflicting viewpoints. As things stand, majority of Indologists (Linguists, historians, archaeologists) in India reject the AIT or even the AMT and almost all the archaeologists in the West and an increasing number of specialists from other fields are also rejecting these theories. Some linguists are now proposing that there is no way of determining the IE homeland and so the matter is best left ignored. They also agree that the old paradigms of the spread of the centum and satem groups of IE languages are no longer

valid because of the discovery of a centum language recently right in the foothills of Himalayas. In other words, the current state of linguistic data is such that it cannot be used as the primary evidence to support AIT/AMT but rather only as secondary evidence. And as for the primary, alternate, non-linguistic evidence for AIT/AMT - it is not yet forthcoming.

Within India, the matter has become highly politicized. Marxist historians (who have monopolized government institutions and grants in India since 1960's), politically active or fundamentalist Muslims, Christian missionaries/evangelists, Dravidian Nationalists (and also members of the oppressed lower castes, who are often incited by the aforementioned categories) and many other lay Indians of all religious and political persuasions still defend the AIT or the AMT. In contrast, although a majority of academicians in India have rejected the AIT (and some even the AMT), the anti-AIT view is often associated with Hindutva politics (although there does not appear to be a real cause and effect relationship between them). While proponents of the Hindutva viewpoint would naturally favor OIT today, historically the case has been quite the opposite. In fact, it has been and is still in the interest of Marxists and of the fundamentalist sections of the Indian minorities (as well as the Dravidian Nationalists) to uphold the paradigms foisted on Indians by their erstwhile colonial masters.

Therefore, what we need is a dispassionate look at the multifaceted evidence and also completely de-link the issue of the exact relationship between Aryans and IVC from the question of Indian Nationalism. What happened 35 centuries ago (or a earlier) is hardly of relevance to the question "Who is an Indian" because national identities and borders have been fluctuating all over the world down the ages.



## Introduction to the Veda Questions.

1. What are the names of the four Vedas?

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

2. Why is the Atharva Veda sometimes omitted and only 3 Vedas mentioned (Trayi-Veda)

- Because it is more materialistic than the others
- Because it was composed by non-brahmins
- Because it's literary style is inferior to the others
- Because it contains fewer Mantras.
- Because it doesn't have a Brahmana section


3. What does the name Veda mean?

1	
2	
3	
4	

4. Which are the 2 branches of the Yajur Veda?


5. The Content of the Veda is divided into 2 sections: Mantras and Brahmanas —  
Give 2 characteristics of Mantras.

1	
2	

Give 5 characteristics of Brahmanas.

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

6. What is a Shakha?

--

7. What is a Samhita?

--

8. Which Veda has the most Brahmanas?

9. How many Rishis contributed Suktas to the Rig Veda?

10. How many female Rishikas composed suktas?

11. How many schools of Vedic interpretation do you know of?

12. Where does the famous Purusha Sukta come from?

13. Where does the Narayana Sukta come from?

14. What is the last Sukta of the Rig-Veda?

15. What are the 2 most important things that we learn from the Vedas?  
 1   
 2

16. Which is considered to be the most important section of the Vedas?  
 Samhitas   
 Brahmanas   
 Aranyakas   
 Upanishads

17. What are the goals of human life?  
 1   
 2   
 3   
 4

18. When speaking of “Vedic Literature” which of the following are NOT included?

Kauśītaki Brāhmaṇa	<input type="checkbox"/>
Iśāvāsya Upaniṣad	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ṣaḍvimśa Brāhmaṇa	<input type="checkbox"/>
Viṣṇu Purāṇa	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kāthakam	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kena Upaniṣad	<input type="checkbox"/>
Śrīmad Bhāgavatam	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kauthuma Saṃhita	<input type="checkbox"/>
Padma Samhita	<input type="checkbox"/>

19. How many sūktas were composed on Viṣṇu?

20. Which of the Sacred Scriptures are the most authoritative in Hinduism?

Vishnu Purana	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mahabharata	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ramayana	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vedas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dharma Shastra	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kalpa Sutras	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nirukta	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. Of those Scriptures which sections are more authoritative?

Aranyakas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Samhitas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Upanishads	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brahmanas	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. What subject matter do the Grihya Sutras deal with?

Astronomy/Astrology	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worship of gods and goddesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Domestic ceremonies and sacraments	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public and state Yajñas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rules for the construction of fire-pits (kundas)	<input type="checkbox"/>

