

## Study notes for History topic - Vedic Literature

Hello dear learners, today we will be learning about the vedic literature. So, let's start.

# Vedic Literature

The Vedas are the large bodies of religious text that is composed of Vedic Sanskrit and originated in ancient India. They form the oldest scriptures of Hinduism and the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature. The Vedas are said to have passed on through verbal transmission from one generation to the next. Therefore, they are also known as Shruti. The term Vedic literature means the four Vedas in their Samhita and the allied literature based on or derived from the Vedas. We classify the Vedic literature into the following categories: The four Vedas i.e. the Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva and their Samhitas. The Brahmanas are attached to each Samhita. The word 'Veda' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'vid', meaning to know, signifying knowledge par excellence. The Vedic text is 'shruti' i.e. directly revealed to authors by God. Smritis are remembered and collected parts of literature of later periods. They are also called Samhitas in the sense that they represent an oral tradition of the time. Four Vedas and their Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads form a class of literature known as Shruti.

**i) The Rig Veda:** Rig-Veda is known as the oldest religious text in the world. It is also known as the "First testament" of mankind. It was composed around 1700 BC. Last hymns were composed between 1500-1200 BC. It's a collection of hymns by a number of priest families. It is organized in 10 books which are called Mandalas.

**ii) The Yajur Veda:** "Yajus" means "sacrificial formula" and Yajurveda is the book of sacrificial prayers. It contains the rituals of the Yajnas. It is estimated to have been composed between 1,400 and 1000 BC. It prescribes the rituals for performing different sacrifices. It was the manual of the Adhvaryus.

**iii) The Sama Veda:** "Saman" means melody and it contains the Rhythmic compilation of Hymns of Rigveda. It ranks next in sanctity and liturgical importance to the Rigveda. It contains 1549 hymns which are meant to be sung at the soma sacrifice by a special class of Brahmans called "Udgatris". It has three shakhas or recensions: Kauthuma: Panchvish Brahmana The Jaiminiya: Jaiminiya Brahmana Ravayaniya: Shadvish Brahmana

**iv) The Atharva Veda:** Atharva-Veda is entirely different from the other three Vedas and is chronologically the last of the four. It is important and interesting as it describes the popular beliefs and superstitions of the humble folk. Atharvaveda contains the magic spells, incorporates much of early traditions of healing and magic that are paralleled in other Indo-European literatures. This Veda is also known as Brahma Veda.

# The Upavedas

These are subsidiary Vedas dealing with secular subjects. Four important upavedas are as follow:

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1. Ayur Veda Pertain to medicine.
2. Dhanur Veda Pertain to the art of warfare.
3. Gandharva Veda Pertain to music.
4. Shilpa Veda Pertain to art and literature.

## The Upanishads

“Upa” means nearby and “sada” means sit. So, Upanishads contain the knowledge imparted by the gurus to their disciples. The term Upanishads indicates knowledge acquired by sitting close to the teacher. Under it, many metaphysical topics were discussed, such as the origin of the universe, the nature of God, the origin and death of mankind etc. They do not believe in orthodox rituals and sacrifices. On the contrary, they are the followers of Karma (Action), Atma (Soul) and God (Brahma). They are spiritual and philosophical in nature. Also known as Vedanta or the end of Vedas. They always preach the Jnana marga (knowledge path). Upanishads are 108 in number. Satyamev Jayate is extracted from Mundaka Upanishad. Vedangas are six auxiliary disciplines associated with the study and understanding of the Vedas. They include Shiksha (Phonetics), Kalpa (Ritual Canon), Vyakaran (Grammar), Nirukta (explanation), Chhanda (Vedic meter) and Jyotish (Astrology).

## Epics

**Ramayana:** It was created by Maharishi Valmiki. It consists of 24,000 verses in seven books (Kandas) and 500 sargas and tells the story of Rama. Verses in the Ramayana are written in a 32- syllable meter called Anustubh and ranges in 50000 lines in total. Valmiki is also regarded as India's First Poet.

**Mahabharata:** Mahabharata is written by Ved Vyas and it is considered as one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India in Hinduism, the other one is Ramayana. Originally Mahabharata consisted of 880 verses then it was raised to 24000 verses. The final compilation brought the number of 5 verses to 100000. Razmnama is a translation of Mahabharata in the Persian language.

**Puranas:** They are late descriptions of ancient legends and consist of history of the universe from creation to destruction, genealogies of kings, heroes, sages, and demigods, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology, philosophy, and geography. They are colored with superstitions and also represent a corrupt form of Hindu Philosophy. There are 18 major Puranas. The word Purana means old. The writer of Puranas is Lomharsh's son Ugrvarsh. It was written in the 4th century in the Gupta age. The number of Puranas are 18. Oldest Purana is the Matsya Purana. It tells about the Satvahan dynasty. In the Purana, it has been mentioned. Vayu Puran gives details about the Gupta dynasty.

This was all about the vedic literature. Hope all your queries related to this topic are clear. For more such history blogs stay connected with us.