

**Vedas: The Oldest Form Of Literature**

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(Received:26November2019/Revised:10December2019/Accepted:16December2019/Published:26December2019)

**Abstract**

Since time immemorial, Literature has played an important role in the society. Vedas and Upanishads are the oldest form of Literature in India. The study of Vedas have not reached the common man. The Vedas have to be studied from the Literary point of view. Rig Veda is one of the important testimonies of rich wisdom, knowledge, culture, science, history of ancient India. Vedas are said to be ahead of their times.

**Key words: Veda, Upanishads, Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, AtharvaVed, Sam Veda.**

Indian Literature, in my view, is the most ancient literature which is relevant even in the present century. Indian Literature has been present since time immemorial. India is a multilingual country and so is its literature. Amongst the different languages present in India, Sanskrit: the Divine Language is the most ancient and the literature of this language is considered as the earliest literatures which are found in the world.

The Vedas, which are considered to originate from the mouth of Brahma (the Creator) himself are the source of all the scriptures and literature in India. Some literati may question this point. I would like to pacify their questions with a brief description of Vedas. As per the Mundak Upanishad there are four Vedas: Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sam Veda, and Atharva Veda. These four Vedas are further divided into four Upvedas: Ayurveda (creation of Dhanvantri), Dhanurveda (creation of Vishwamitra), Gandharvveda (creation of Narad Muni), Sthyapatyaveda (creation of Vishwakarma).

As per Manusmriti Vedas alone are called Shruti. The word “Shruti” finds its origin in “Shru” which means ‘to listen’, therefore, Shruti refers to the ‘Knowledge obtained by listening’. Shruti is divided into two vibhagas (parts): Vaidik and Tantrik. Veda also has two vibhagas (parts): Mantras and Brahmanas. Mantra vibhagais also called Samhita. The Brahman vibhaga contains Aranyak and Upanishad. There are thirteen Brahman Granthas like, Rig Veda: 2, Yajur Veda: 2, Sam Veda: 8, Atharva Veda: 1.

There are 108 Upanishadas in all but only 12 are considered as the main Upanishadas: Mundak, Eesh, Kath are some of the main Upanishadas.

A deep study of the Vedas reveals that it deals with all the aspect of usage of alphabets, words, grammar, numbers, and, punctuations, types of word-usage like padya (poetry), gadya (prose), gayan (music). Initially, up to the end of Dwaparayuga there was only one Veda and it became difficult to study and practice Veda in a person's life time so VedVyas (considered to be the incarnation of Lord Narayana) divided Veda into four vibhagas (parts) which are today known as Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sām Veda, and Atharva Veda. Thereafter, he distributed these four Vedas to his disciples named Pael , Vaishampāyan, Jaimini and Sumantu for their propagation and preservation.

Rig Veda consists of 64 Adhyaya, 8 Ashtak, 10 Mandal, 2006 Varga, 1000 Sukta, 84 Anuvak, and 10440 Mantra. The Mantras of Rig Veda invoke Gods and Goddesses by the process of Yajna. The different Suktas provide important and astonishing information about the different subjects. Rig Veda is one of the important testimonies of rich wisdom, knowledge, culture, science, history of ancient India. There are Suktas in which the praises for the donation given by the different kings and noblemen are sung. There are Suktas about conversation between two individual like Pururava – Urvashi, Samvad (Rig: 10/85), Yam–Yami, Samvad (Rig: 10/10), Sarma – Pani, Samvād (Rig: 10/130). These Samvad (conversations) depict a form of drama and poetry. The Samvad between Pururava and Urvashī is full of love and romance. It is a story of an angel from heaven marrying a man from the Earth on the basis of certain contracts which when broken lead to sorrow and Urvashi's consequent return to heaven.

The conversation between Yam and Yami who are brother and sister is an issue relating to fulfillment of sexual desires. Yami, the sister seeks for the fulfillment of her sexual desires with her brother Yam. However, Yam, being a man of strong morals and intense character refuses to fulfill her desire and convinces her to find another husband as according to him there can be no sexual interchange between the same bloodline. This conversation has three important outlooks: first, marrying in the same bloodline is not good for the future generation which has been scientifically proved today, secondly, it deals with morality and character and lastly with culture. It would not be out of way to say that this culture is practiced in India even today.

The conversation between Sarma and Pani gives us a glimpse into the social structure of that era. The Pani people used to steal the cows (which were supposed to be a valuable asset) of the Sarma people. The Sarma used to threaten the Pani by singing songs about the valiant acts of the Aryans.

According to Mahabhasyakar (Linguist) Patanjali, Yajur Veda has 101 shakhas in which Krishna Yajur Veda has 86 and ShuklaYajur Veda 15. However, during the present time only 4shakhas of Krishna Yajur Veda and all shakhas of ShuklaYajur Veda are present. Yajur Veda has been written in the form of prose and is functional in nature viz. it tells us about the process and method of conducting Yajna.

The Sam Veda emphasizes upon the correct use of vowels, consonants, pronunciation and grammar etc. It also makes mention of the seven swaras of music. The Sangeet Shastra is supposed to have originated from Sam Veda.

Atharva Veda had 9shakhas (parts) out of which only two are still present, one Shaunak and the other Paeplad Samhita. It underlines in detail the various political aspects including the characteristics of the ruler, the duties and obligations of the ruler and the ruled, election/selection of the ruler, his rights and duties, formation of assemblies and committees, etc. Apart from this it also throws light upon jurisdiction and punishment. An analysis of Atharva Veda reveals various aspect about religion, economy, biological and emotional needs, and salvation (Dharma, Artha, Kām, and Moksha). Sociologically Atharva Veda has details about politics, economy, religiosity, and scientific knowledge. From the literary point of view, it has elaborated on subjects like Rasa (genre), Alankar (Figures of speech), Chhand (Metrical forms), Bhava (emotions), and Bhashasaundarya (Beautification of language), etc. Cultural viewpoint of Atharva Veda discusses about the three strata present in the society.

Apart from the multiplicity of above-mentioned subjects, it provides emotional inspiration, enhancement of the thought process and discussion, sense of duty, morality and principles.

### **Conclusion**

When we study Vedas from the Literary point of view (and not from the religious aspect), we find it as a valuable source of Literature. Vedas contain almost all forms of Literature for example the Rig Veda has *Suktas* which are nothing but the praises sung for the donations received from various kings and noble men. Vedas give us a glimpse into the various literary devices like emotions and forms like poetry, drama and prose.

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