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## PHILOSOPHY

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**CLASSICAL INDIAN: EPISTEMOLOGY AND  
METAPHYSICS**



# UGC NET - PHILOSOPHY

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## UNIT - 1

# NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

### INTRODUCTION

Philosophy develops a fascination for wisdom which is different from knowledge. Knowledge is acquired through the sense organs and mind while wisdom is obtained through the influence of the spirit called the self or soul. The former is fallible, conditioned, limited and alterable whereas the latter is infallible, unconditional, unlimited and unalterable. Though philosophy initially commences with knowledge, it culminates in wisdom. Only the men of wisdom are called 'wise men' or 'philosophers' in the genuine sense of the term. The root element for both of these exercises is 'thinking.' An ordinary human being thinks casually, but a philosopher thinks sincerely, seriously and systematically especially for the annihilation of the afflictions arising in human life. In this process a philosopher hesitates to accept any fixed explanations, beliefs or principles; rather it engages in dedicated persistent and systematic inquiry into the prevailing assumptions, methods, as well as criteria by which critical distinctions are made.

It is a well known fact that life is full of mysteries, containing lot of miseries. Life is generally and characteristically defined as the span of existence from cradle to grave. A child is born, grows, marries, brings forth offspring and dies. The doubt remains as to what happens to the soul after death, how does a soul enter into the body before birth? Why are we born? Why should we live? Why are there so many hurdles in life? How are we to overcome sufferings? What is the importance of material life? Is spiritual life superior to material life? What are permanence and change? Why are they caused? What is the problem of one and many? How was the world created? What is the stuff out of which it has been created? Will the universe exist for ever? Is there any super power called God? How is God related to the soul and the world? Is the soul one or many? What are appearance and reality?

Philosophy endeavours to explain through speculative reasoning the possible answers to these varieties of questions. Since each philosopher develops his own answer in accordance to his intellectual calibre, we have variegated philosophical truths. One thinker refutes the other and comes forward with his own viewpoints which are subsequently refuted by successive philosophers. This attitude is based on the historical situation of the philosopher. Metaphorically speaking, a philosopher inhales much before he exhales, i.e., he studies the environment in which he lives, the philosophical

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predicaments pronounced by his predecessors, the scriptures or literature available during his times, and develops dialogue, discussion, argument etc., with his rival thinkers so that he sharpens his intellect before exhibiting his philosophical doctrines. The method of refuting the alien view and the presentation of one's own view results in the enrichment as well as enhancement of wisdom to the ardent admirers of philosophy. New vistas of knowledge open the floodgates of wisdom thereby eliminating ignorance. Almost all philosophers both in the occident and the orient have unanimously declared that ignorance causes misery and the remedy for all maladies is acquiring wisdom.

Philosophical wisdom manifests in several ways – mainly theoretical and applied. The former is explanatory while the latter is the combination of both theory and practice. Rational discussions emanate mainly from four perspectives; metaphysical, epistemological, ethical and religious.

## **METAPHYSICS**

The etymological meaning of this term is that which transcends the physical realm. In physics we have direct accessibility to the material world and experience its manifestations in actual life. Metaphysical issues are deeply concerned with the intellectual analysis of the deep intricacies of the reality. In fact the truth about the 'reality' cannot be demonstrated or substantiated, but cannot be denied also. The facts about reality are conceptualized and described. Hence we have both positive and negative approaches to reality. Further the multifarious reflections of reality enabled the philosophers to contemplate on an ultimate reality and elucidate its nature and characteristic features variously. Thus the idea of God gains more significance as the ultimate reality. Philosophers who have theistic bent of mind have attempted to prove the existence of God logically and then only they exemplify the nature and functions of God based on certain religious scriptures. The interpretation of the scriptures has made the contemporary thinkers coin the term and explain it in terms of 'hermeneutics.' The belief in one God is known as monism, two Gods, dualism and many gods, pluralism. Some philosophers develop counter-arguments to the proofs and show their inadequacy or invalidity. Some other thinkers bluntly reject the existence of God with atheistic temperament and clinching arguments as well. The ontological, cosmological, moral, teleological and design are some of the titles on which the proofs for the existence of God are based. God and other associated activities like rituals, festivals etc. are extensive studies on religion.

Another important metaphysical concept is soul or self, the sustaining force in all human and other living species, responsible for consciousness. Like God, the existence of the soul also has been established through logical arguments. The materialists deny the

existence of a permanent abiding substance in the body. That substance which is responsible for all subjective phenomena is termed as the real and the realization of this self will pave the way for freedom from all sufferings. The ancient Greek philosophers had pronounced the famous slogan 'know thyself.' The idea of the self has a tinge with God of religion that it is the citadel for God to dwell in. As usual the atheists deny the existence of both of them and according to them death is the end of life. None can 'see' or 'feel' the so-called self. Only the mind and the sense organs both outer and inner are responsible for human experience. Further the terms like 'causality,' 'time,' 'space,' 'universals,' 'particulars,' 'matter,' 'form,' 'mind,' 'body,' 'idealism,' 'rationalism,' 'free will,' 'determinism,' 'naturalism,' 'solipsism' etc., are some of the metaphysical concepts which have been promulgated with arguments and equally rejected logically.

The logical positivists and the linguistic analysts have attempted to eliminate the very notion of metaphysics from the purview of philosophy based on the principle of verification. All verifiable statements are sensible and the non-verifiable statements are non-sensical and hence metaphysics is impossible. However, there are certain statements pertaining to future like the 'can' statements are neither verifiable nor non-verifiable. Hence the notion of verifiability has been bifurcated as 'strong' and 'weak' verifiabilities. In spite of the opposition to metaphysics, the study of metaphysics still retains its importance.

## **LOGIC AND EPISTEMOLOGY**

Since thinking process and the 'thought content' form the basis of all philosophical investigations, the role of logic and epistemology becomes very significant and immense. Logic has been derived from the root 'logos' which means 'thinking.' It has been succinctly defined as the normative science of correct thinking. It is a scientific study or systematic analysis of our thinking methodology and its product viz., 'thought.' The thought process takes place thus: A unit of thought is judgement; when a judgement is expressed in a language, it becomes a sentence. All sentences are to be converted into the logical structure viz., propositions have subject-predicate formula with a copula which should be always in the present tense. Only in this structure the linguistic expressions are considered true or false or doubtful. Aristotle is considered the father of traditional logic. Again, logic is treated as a normative science and not as a positive science. A positive science is one whose subject matter are studied 'as they are.' All natural sciences, a few human sciences such as sociology, geography, anthropology, political science, economics etc., are studied systematically whose contents are viewed from an existential point of view. No norms are prescribed for the study.

Logic, ethics and aesthetics are the normative sciences whose subject matter are studied from the 'ought to be' point of view. Logic insists on how one ought to think rather than how one is actually thinking. After a statement is made we pass judgements whether the statement is true or false and then we determine how that statement ought to have been uttered or written. There are two kinds of logic., viz., traditional and modern. The former is also known as Aristotelian logic which consists of two sections, deduction and induction. Deductive logic is seriously concerned with the formal nature or structure of statements or propositions so that their validity or invalidity is ascertained. From a given proposition we proceed to a conclusion through some common expressions, instantly or through a medium. Also we proceed from statement to conclusion or vice-versa. In induction the very validity of the given premise is questioned. It is a method through which the major proposition which is generally a universal one is obtained. Based on certain postulates the induction method proceeds from a few particular cases to universal truth. It has been established based on observation, experiment, hypothesis, analogy, enumeration etc. Universal statements are discovered which are supplied to deductive reasoning for the application of particular instances so that the conclusion is made beyond doubt. All scientific inventions and discoveries are based on this method.

The modern logic has obtained a new dimension wherein symbols are used instead of statements and like mathematics, based on certain formulae, the arguments are proved as valid or invalid. Propositional calculus, predicate calculus and axiomatic principles are dimensions of modern logic. All the defects and deficiencies of traditional logic are rectified through formal doctrines and authentic proofs and verifications. The modern logic is also known as mathematical logic. Symbols are used for conjunctive, disjunctive, implicative and negative propositions and arguments are verified through conjunctive normal forms and certain rules of inference etc.

Epistemology or theory of knowledge envisages the messages about the methods and techniques involved in knowledge itself. It is a deep study about the origin of knowledge, nature of knowledge, relevance of knowledge and validity of knowledge. The relationship between human mind and the phenomenal world which culminates in knowledge is analysed in epistemology. Theories of truth such as correspondence theory, coherence theory and pragmatic theory form an important subject matter in this subject.

## **ETHICS OR MORAL PHILOSOPHY**

Another branch of philosophy is ethics which has been derived from the root 'ethos' which literally means conduct. Hence ethics is a normative science of human conduct in relation to human environment. The term 'moral' has been derived from the root 'mores'

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which means behaviour. Ethics is seriously concerned with perfect human living with certain codes or principles pertaining to conduct and character. All human beings have critical situations to deal with; the reflection or reaction to such situations will determine the moral attitude of men. Morality commenced with the habits of individuals and when large number of people develop similar habits they become customs thus constituting customary morality or conventional morality. This process involves also instinct. We pass moral judgements on the instinctive behaviour of individuals whether good or bad or right or wrong. Good and bad are concerned with value while right and wrong are attributed to the established regulations or laws of the society or state. The herd instinct, the prudence, thirst, appetite, sex etc., are some of the instincts and how they are satisfied will pave the way for estimating the validity of behaviour. In the development of ethical codes, the role of reflective morality is immense. All the human activities are analysed from the perspectives of motivation, intention, consequence, etc. resulting in several theories of morality.

The fundamental question to which moral thinkers come forward to respond is: what is the standard of morality? What is the basis on which the human conduct is examined? What is the criterion by which the actions are judged to be good or bad, right or wrong? How are the norms or standards formed? As a normative science of human conduct ethics helps us in suggesting several criteria to judge human actions. They are classified as historical or classical and modern. The first one starts from Plato. Plato insists on knowledge and lack of knowledge will lead to evil. Leading a good life according to him is similar to the discovery of mathematical truth through mental power or ability. Aristotle promotes the idea of golden mean that perfect virtue lies between two extremes and a life of moderate action will bring forth happiness.

We come across several standards of morality such as hedonism (both psychological and ethical) that all human actions are oriented towards happiness; Epicureanism and cynicism come under hedonism; stoicism is a theory which advocates individual's perfection by learning to be indifferent to external influences; utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill proposes that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the standard of moral judgement. The former advocates gross utilitarianism while the latter subtle; Intuitionism, evolutionism, Marxism, Kant's critique of practical reason providing good will are some of the traditional theories of morality.

In the realm of modern ethics we have precise theories based on philosophical analysis to moral theories in connection with necessary and sufficient conditions. There are three different classifications of modern theories; i) either subjective or objective, ii) as

naturalistic, non naturalistic or emotive and iii) as motivist, deontological or consequence theories. All these theories are primarily concerned with the analysis of the language of morals. Any theory which is non-subjective is objectivistic. Ethical judgements become subjective when they depend on the psychology of the person who alters them. If a moral judgement is reduced to natural science (especially psychology) with true or false formula then that is naturalistic. If they are not reducible to natural science then they are non-naturalistic. If any moral judgement is neither true nor false, but consists of the expressions of feelings or emotions, and then it is emotive. If a moral theory is based on motive to determine its rightness or wrongness, then that is motivist. Deontological theory does not depend upon motive or consequence but upon the obligation or duty. If the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined based on the effect, then that is known as a consequence theory. All the theories whether classical or modern are having critical estimation which really enriches our knowledge of ethics.

## **RELIGION**

Another important branch of philosophy is religion which deals with the establishing of an intimate rapport with the Supreme Being or Reality or God. It has been generally claimed that philosophy without religion will lead to dogmatism or dry intellectualism. Similarly religion without philosophy will culminate in superstition or blind observances. Hence both philosophy and religion are complementary in clarifying the subtle implications of all rituals. The origin of religion is wonder or fear. Ancient people wondered the wonderful structure of the world and postulated that a wonderful superpower must exist to create such a magnificent universe. Some people were terrified over the terrors and horrors of the natural phenomena. As the scientific knowledge of such events was absent in those days, they were afraid of them and each force had been personified as a deity and oblations were offered; prayer songs arose; treatises on adoring such deities also emerged. A few religious people with metaphysical bent of mind wrote commentaries to such religious texts. This attitude enhanced and enriched the glory of that religious tradition. The idea of God has been introduced as a postulate and any religion with a God Supreme is based on belief, faith, love, hope and harmony.

The existence of God has been proved from three angles; i) logical, ii) scriptural and iii) experiential. Logically there are five proofs such as ontological, cosmological, moral, teleological and design. Scriptures vouchsafe for the existence of God revealed by eminent sages and saints. Experience of God in the bottom of the heart and soul is the best proof for the existence of god. The all-pervasive, all-knowing and all-powerful God is essentially required for human life mainly for expressing love or technically known as

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devotion or bhakti. For, God is personified as the very embodiment of love and this love of God towards mankind is expressed through creation, preservation, destruction and bestowal of grace. It is God's grace that sustains human beings at every moment. There are a few religions which deny the existence of a Supreme God, like Jainism and Buddhism, but they convey the idea that man can be elevated to the level of God through virtuous and compassionate living. The dwelling places for God have been constructed such as temple, church, mosque, gurudwara etc., and a few days are designated as auspicious and special rituals, festivals, prayers, worships etc. are offered to the presiding God in the dwelling spot. The firm belief is that God will redeem the afflicted souls and bring them ashore from the onslaught of transmigratory existence.

It is the human soul which has been tantalised between the sacred and the profane. The luring phenomenal world has an admixture of suffering and happiness; but the engrossment in divine ecstasy will engender self illumination and lead to divine communion which is characteristically termed as the 'path of no return.' The existence of the soul also has been proved logically and intuitively as well. Self-realization becomes an inevitable prelude to God-realization. It is the soul which knows with the help of the mind and sense organs, but relinquishes the empirical entanglements so that it can move towards God and enjoy His perennial bliss eternally.

Philosophy of Religion also analyses deeply the problem of evil. Some religions declare that man has invited evils due to baser temperaments and baseless temptations; some other religions emphatically hold that it is God who has caused evil so that only after the experience of the torture of evil forces, mankind will engage in overcoming them for which the holy scriptures and discourses of enlightened personalities serve as the guiding spirit. But still the question remains. If god is benevolent and merciful, evil should not exist; but evil persists. Therefore God is not omniscient and evil is a thorn in the gracious nature of God. Religious scholars endeavour to appropriately settle the issue of evil. Most of the religions are mainly concerned with the notions of bondage and liberation. Once again the idea of soul and the conception of God are involved in this process. The soul before embodiment was pure and free, but after entering into the body it becomes bound due to self-centredness, selfish activities and attachment towards the peripheral worldly objects. Through serious involvement in religious engagements and systematic adoration with sincere devotion, the devotees believe staunchly that they can overcome bondage and attain liberation. Becoming recipients of God's grace is the only remedy to all human maladies. The everlasting solace from the worries of the world is the objective of religious life.

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Another interesting factor in the religious philosophy is religious language especially found in the revelatory texts. When the saints are soaked in divinity they undergo some peak, but unique experiences which cannot be expressed at that time. Afterwards they recollect the past events and reveal them for posterity and for the betterment of the world. While doing so they refer to God's nature, soul's movements and the pernicious aspects of the world which fall under the legitimate province of the philosophers. The revealed texts contain perfect semantics, syntax and pragmatics. This phenomenon has been attributed to divine mystery.

Besides metaphysics, logic, ethics and religion, philosophy has a few applied avenues like philosophy of beauty dealing with the delightful joyous enjoyment or aversion due to ugly nature of objects of beauty. Technically this subject is known as aesthetics. Linguistic philosophy deals with the role of language in philosophical explanations, words, sentences, meaning and their interpretations are well analysed in developing sensible expressions. Political philosophy gives a fairly good account of origin of states, forms of government, social contract theories, the role of rulers and citizens in political settings etc. Social philosophy develops the views about human relationship in social aspects, such as group formation, social conflicts, social change etc.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY**

By 'Indian Philosophy' we mean the philosophical systems emerged from the Indian soil. Some scholars call it Hindu philosophy. It is not so, since a few non-Hindu systems are included such as Carvaka, Jainism and Buddhism which are really critical of Hindu doctrines. Indian philosophy has been designated as 'darsana' which is generally translated as philosophy, but it really means intuitive vision. 'philosophy' is accepted as the nearest equivalent term to darsana. A few saints of the highest order develop certain unique or mystic experiences and reveal them for the benefit of posterity. The spiritual heritage commences with such revelations and they are testified by reason by a few sages who have developed metaphysical bent of mind. The intuitive vision consists of the wisdom about reality and the secrets of human life both inner and outer. The interpretations of such wisdom form the basis of philosophical inquiry pertaining to metaphysical doctrines, logical truths, ethical codes and religious practices.

The book *sarva darsana samgraha* written by Sri Madhavacariya contains the quintessence of a few systems of thought evolved in ancient India. A large number of scholars, taking into account the contents of this work as the basis, have written volumes of work of Indian philosophy from the historical, conceptual, textual, evaluative and descriptive perspectives. It has been proclaimed that Indian Philosophy is scripture-based. The revelations of the saints have been codified and they are classified as having

broadly the ritualistic sections and the section on wisdom or jnana. The general name given to the holy text is 'veda' which has been derived from the root, 'vid' which means to know. The Vedic scripture is the ancient treasure trove which exemplifies the cultural heritage as well as religio-philosophical aspects of the Vedic systems. It contained both ritualistic and philosophical materials. Philosophical system like Purva Mimamsa directly developed its doctrines from the ritualistic portion and other schools of Vedanta built up their philosophical system from the upanisdas, the philosophical portion of the Vedas. Generally Indian systems are classified as orthodox and heterodox systems, astika and nastika systems, on the basis of acceptance or rejection of the Vedic authority. The philosophical schools that accept the vedic authority are the following; Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta. Carvaka, Jainism and Buddhism do not accept the vedic authority.

### **SPECIAL FEATURES OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY**

1. Almost all the schools of Indian thought emphatically declare that moksa or liberation is or should be the ultimate goal of life. Only the puranas describe the life after death pointing out the existence of hell and heaven with popular anecdotes. Intellectually it implies that one must free oneself from the cycle of births and deaths by putting an end once for all to the strife-torn life. To achieve this ambitious goal, the Indian philosophers suggest certain means starting from lower values to reach higher and the highest values. Wealth and sensuous enjoyment are considered as having lower values, while dharma or righteousness is regarded as the higher value. Obviously moksha is the highest value. These four values are obligatory in the life of everyone on this earth and hence they are called as purusarthas, the human values.
2. Indian Philosophy expects the seekers after truth and release to lead a life of renunciation. The life of attachment will engender suffering while the life of detachment will result in eternal solace. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna categorically asserts that a life of renunciation alone will enable the aspirants to reach the domain of God. So all the schools of thought have treated 'suffering' as one of the motivating factors for philosophical thinking. Only when the mind is purified through non-attachment, it will have pure and perfect wisdom and rest on self illumination, the real prelude to moksha. In fact, suffering or painful experience in life give the motivating force to promote new vistas of thinking and acting. Buddha built up philosophical doctrines on the edifice of suffering and all his noble truths centred around this concept only. The only difference that is noticed among the schools of philosophy is that according to the theistic thinkers only by the grace of God one can

overcome suffering, while others insist upon individual efforts through moral, physical, psychological and spiritual means.

3. The commencement of Indian philosophy based on suffering prompted a few critics to label Indian thought as pessimistic. Even though Indian philosophy looks at the darker side of life in elucidating the issues emerging in life, the mission with which one has to overcome suffering overcomes the criticism too, i.e. Indian thinking though starts with pessimism passes through optimism and culminates in eternal pragmatism. The Indian thinkers have realised the truth that a vision without a mission is blind; a mission without a vision is drudgery and a healthy combination of both vision and mission will make human life prosperous. The pleasure which we enjoy is mixed with pain is engendered in painful situation. The seers assert that it is possible to eliminate pain altogether and enjoy a life of bliss, ananda. Hence they are seriously concerned with sat, existence which is the truth also, cit (consciousness), and ananda (everlasting happiness).
4. In the hierarchy of values, Indian thinkers have classified as lower values, higher value and the highest value. The axiological approach in human life becomes immense in this analysis. Carvaka system considers kama, sensuous pleasure as the only human value, purushartha, while artha or wealth serves as the means to achieve such ambitious aims. But the orthodox schools treat both kama and artha as the lowest and lower values respectively. They cannot annihilate the human afflictions thoroughly. They are to be checked and continued as to regularise normal human existence. On the other hand they consider dharma, righteousness, as the higher value and moksha as the highest value. Only men of virtuous living can aspire for a blissful life where there is no iota of pain. While explaining the state of liberation, mukti, some thinkers advocate jivan mukti, liberation while alive and videha mukti, liberation after the disintegration of body and soul. As salvation becomes the salient feature of Indian philosophy it is more optimistic and treats life as having a brighter side.
5. Another important characteristic feature of Indian philosophy is the law of karma, which is based on the scientific law that all actions have equal and opposite reactions and the famous adage, 'As you sow, so you reap.' All the actions will yield the results and the efficacy of the fruits is known as 'karma' which has been derived from the root kr, which means action. The karmas which cause us to take birth and store up while we are born is known as sancita karma. The karmas which have started yielding the fruits are known as prarabdha karma and the karmas which we accumulate through our volitional behaviour are known as agamic karmas. Even those systems which do not accept God, believe in the doctrine of karma which is the sole reason for the cycle

of births and deaths. Due to the grace of God along with human dharmic endeavours the enforcement of karmic forces may be annulled. The Sancita karma would be totally burnt due to the grace of God through the guru or preceptor. But prarabdha karma which has started fructifying like the arrow sent out of the bow will affect the body and annihilate it. For it cannot harm the soul since it is spiritually strengthened and illumined. All the systems of Indian philosophy, in one way or the other insist upon the moral training as a prelude to metaphysical understanding and religious experience. Only the Carvaka system is rigorous and gives much importance to sensuous pleasure by ignoring righteousness, dharma, and all the cherished norms. The other schools though not explicitly elucidate the significant role of moral codes in human life, they emphasise the necessity of ethical principles to be adapted to actual life leading to virtues and resulting in happiness. Yoga system in the means for attaining Samadhi places yama, the five principles to be refrained from and niyama, the five practices to be adhered to, in the beginning itself. It is generally proclaimed that it will seldom lead to immortality.

6. Religion, an important branch of philosophy, also plays a vital role in Indian thought. Vedic religion is the starting point of philosophy in India. Vedantic thought, especially visistadvaita and Dvaita are directly based on vaishnava religious tradition. Saiva Siddhanta has Saivism and worship of Siva as the religious basis. Advaita at the empirical level does not deny the concept of Isvara and resorting to religious practices. In fact, Sankara has composed several devotional songs on Lord Siva, Sakti, Vishnu and Muruga. Though we have several religious sects with these religions constituting Hinduism, each religious sect has developed its own speculative metaphysics as well as means for redemption.
7. On par with Western philosophy, Indian philosophy also has dealt deeply with political ideologies, social doctrines, linguistic analysis, aesthetic explanations, cultural heritage and encompasses all the basic features of life. It builds up a fundamental structure with scriptural edifice and rational construction with spiritual super structure.

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## VEDAS AND UPANISADS

### VEDAS AND ITS CONTENTS

Vedas or the source of knowledge, is also referred to as the Sruti or that which is heard, Apauruseya or that which is not authored by a human, and Shastra or that which serves as a guide through its teaching. The words 'Agama' and 'Amnaya' are synonyms of the Veda. Since Veda is considered as a revelation it is termed as the 'primary' source of knowledge. The content of the Vedas that has come down to us for centuries is said to have been heard by the sages in deep meditation and these sages are therefore known as 'mantradrastas' or the 'seer of the mantras'. They transmitted this received knowledge orally to the next generation. Thus, in a generation of oral transmission, the Vedas are preserved. Though we have lost many of the Vedic mantras, we have managed to preserve this tradition to some extent. Moreover, the orally transmitted vedic mantras were made available in writing too and the oldest available written literature is considered to be the Rig Veda. Even though the written or printed material is not considered as the preservation of the Vedic tradition, since oral practise alone is the method to preserve the Vedas, however, the written records give a wider scope for analysis of the historical development of the Vedic tradition. Let us now briefly see the content of the Vedas.

The word 'Veda' generally refers to 'Mantras' and 'Brahmanas'. Mantras are hymns in praise of gods who are invoked in a ritual and Brahmanas are those portions which give various instructions on the performance of rituals. Based on this, Veda is said to be of two kinds, Mantras and Brahmanas. An anthology of mantras is known as 'Samhitas' and the Brahmana portions are an elaboration and are treated as the commentary to the Samhita portions. The Brahmana portions are further divided into three, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanisads. The Brahmana portions primarily teach the nature of ritual (yaga) and thus the word Brahmana also means 'yajna' (ritual). The Aranyakas are so named because it deals with meditation which are generally taken up while living in forest (aranya). The Upanisads reveal the Absolute Truth, which provides the means to liberation and is popularly known as the 'Vedanta'. Primarily the source with the four portions, namely, Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and the Upanisad is known as the Veda. But popularly the ritualistic and meditative portions (or at times only the ritualistic portions) came to be known as Veda and the philosophical discovery in the Upanisads got a distinct identity. Therefore, we say, the Veda and Upanisads. (But upanisads are also part of the Vedas.)

As to the historical data of the origin and development of the Vedas, we have many divided views among the historians and researchers, however here we provide a particular view -

- Age of the Rig Veda Samhita (2500 to 1500 B.C)
- Age of the Later Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanisads (1500 to 500 B.C)

Veda is one source with three forms and this is often referred to as 'Veda Trayi' or Three Vedas. The Rig, the Yajur and the Sama – are the three Vedas. In such references, the meaning of the Veda refers to the 'creation' and the three Vedas means the threefold creation of Agni or Fire (Rig), Vayu or Air (Yajur) and Aditya or Sun (Sama). The 'Atharva' refers to the 'soma' or the essence without which the above three cannot survive. The popular view is that the Sage Vyasa segregated the Vedic hymns, that is, the mantra-samhitas into four, viz., Rig Samhita, Yajur Samhita, Sama-Samhita and Atharva-Samhita and thus we say there are four Vedas.

For a Vedic ritual to take place, it requires four Rtviks (roughly translated as Priests). They are -

- (i) Hota – one who invokes the deity of a particular ritual by employing the invocatory hymns as found in the Rig-Samhitas and the collections of such hymns is referred to as Rig Veda. This is said to have been taught by Vyasa to Pela.
- (ii) Adhvaryu – one who performs the rituals as enjoined and the relevant mantras are in the Yajur-Samhita and the collection of this is known as Yajurveda which was taught to Vaimshampayana by Vyasa.
- (iii) Udgatha – one who sings in high intonation and maintains the rhythm of chanting as given in Samaveda and this is taught by Vyasa to Jaimini.
- (iv) Brahma – one who takes care of the entire proceedings of the ritual and suggests compensatory acts in case of omissions and commissions and this was taught to Sumantu by Vyasa.

Thus, the four Vedas were propagated through these four disciples of Vyasa.

## **A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE VEDIC LITERATURE**

We shall briefly deal with the Vedic literature and their contents beginning from the Rig Veda. Each Veda, as we had already mentioned, consists of four portions, namely, Samhita, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanisads. Here, we shall deal with these four portions of each Veda in a nutshell.

### **Rig Veda**

The word 'Rig' means praise or eulogy. The collection of Rig is known as Rig Veda. It is set in metrical form. The Rig is considered as the oldest record of revelations and the language of the Rig is considered as the most ancient.

There are five branches of Rig-Samhita and they are -

1. Shakala
  2. Vaskala
  3. Ashvalayana
  4. Samkhya and
  5. Mandakayana
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Rig-Samhita contains Suktas and Mandalas. Sukta means that which has been received from a reliable source and it is of four types -

- (a) Richi Sukta - a collection of hymns revealed through the Sages
- (b) Devata Sukta - a collection of hymns in praise of gods
- (c) Chanda Sukta - a collection of hymns in the same metrical form and
- (d) Artha Sukta - a collection of hymns, wherein the meaning of the mantras gets concluded.

The Mandalas are the sections of the Rig-Samhita. There are ten Mandalas with fifty anuvakas or sub-sections which contain suktas. The suktas in turn contain the mantras. The two Brahmanas and Aranyakas of the Rig that are available are: Aitareya Brahmana and Shankyayana Brahmana; Aitareya Aranyaka and Shankyayana Aranyaka. The popular Upanisads of the Rig are Kausitaki and Aitareya upanisads.

### **Yajurveda**

It is widely popular with varied descriptions of the yajna or rituals and is found in prose form. There are two divisions of Yajur, namely Krishna Yajurveda and Shukla Yajurveda. The Krishna Yajur is a combination of mantras and brahmanas, whereas, the Shukla Yajur is predominantly mantra portions. Of the fifty branches of Krishna Yajur, we have today only four branches (Taittiriya, Maitrayani, Katha and Kapilashthakatha). The Shukla Yajur is further divided into Madhyandina branch and Kanva branch. There is only a slight difference in the rendering of the contents of these two branches of Shukla Yajurveda. The famous available brahmana of the Krishna Yajurveda is the Taittiriya Brahmana and that of Shukla Yajur is Shatapatha Brahmana. The main Aranyaka portions of the Yajurveda are Taittiriya Aranyaka and Brihadaranyaka (also contains upanisadic portions). The widely read Upanisads of the Krishna Yajurveda are Kathopanisad and Taittiriyopanisad. The upanisads of the Shukla Yajurveda are Brihadaranayka and the Ishopanisad.

### **Samaveda**

The Samaveda is the Rig Veda set in musical form. The Samaveda consists of two predominant parts, viz., the Archika part and the Ganam part. The Archika part is that which consists of meanings of the words and it is a collection of Rks. It is further divided into Purva Archika and Uttara Archika. The Purva Archika consists of six chapters and is divided into four parts as -

1. Agneya parva (consists of mantras related to Agni)
2. Aindra parva (consists of mantras related to Indra)
3. Pavamana parva (with mantras related to Soma) and
4. Aranyakas (on meditations)

The Uttara Archika is with nine chapters with various divisions that primarily deals with the practice of various rituals. The three main branches of Samaveda are Kauthuma branch, Ranayaniya branch and Jaiminiya branch.

The various intonations and method of singing in different pitches are mentioned in detail in the Samaveda. The musical form is broadly divided into four kinds -

- (a) Veyaganam – the first five chapters of Purva-Archika are sung in Veyaganam.
- (b) Aranyakaganam – The mantras of the Aranyaka portion are sung in Aranyakaganam.
- (c) Oohaganam and d. Oohyaganam are the musical pattern of the Uttara-Archika portions.

Some of the important Sama-Brahmanas are Daivatam, Vamshabrahmanam, Tandyam etc. The available one Aranyaka of Samaveda is the Talavakara-Aranyaka. At the end of the Talavakara we find the Kenopanisad. The Chandogyopanisad also belongs to Samaveda.

### **Atharvaveda**

The Atharvaveda consists of nine branches and we have only two such branches available, namely, the Shaunaka branch and the Pippalada branch. There are three Samhitas of the Atharva, namely, Aashi, Acharya and Vidhiprayoga Samhitas. The only available Brahmana of the Atharvaveda is the Gopatha Brahmanam. It consists of two parts, Purvagopatha and Uttaragopatha. So far, we have not found any Aranyaka of the Atharvaveda. The three prominent upanisads of the Atharva are Prashnopanisad, Mundakopanisad and Mandukyopanisad.

### **Commentators of the Vedas**

The celebrated commentator of the Vedas, especially, the Brahmana portions is Sayana. Some of the other important commentators to various portions of the Veda like, Samhita, Aranyakas etc., are Skandasvami, Narayana, Madhavabhatta, Venkatamadhava, Anandatirtha, Uvvata, Halayudha, Ananta and others. The commentaries help us in understanding the import of the Vedic words. The commentators reveal the changing conditions in their interpretative commentaries.

### **SOME IMPORTANT VEDIC CONCEPTS - I**

Now, we shall briefly embark upon the varied topics found in the four portions of the Vedas and then derive certain important concepts that serve as the foundation of Vedic Religion and Philosophy.

### **Samhitas**

In the Rig-Mandalas, we find mention of many worldly affairs especially related to human life. Various aspects like the earliest mention on marriage and ancestral worship is seen

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