

## The Veda's and their Times

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### Introduction:-

The chief source of information on the early history of the ancient India is the Vedas, which are perhaps the oldest literary remains knowledge. There are four Vedas: Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. The Rigveda is collection of 1028 hymns, mostly prayers to gods, for use at sacrifices. The Yajurveda contains sacrificial formula in prose and verse to be, recited by the priest who performed the manual part of sacrifice. The Samaveda is a collection of verses from the Rigveda for liturgical purposes. The Atharvaveda consists mainly of magical spells and charms.

The vedic literature has been traditionally held sacred: for it is believed to derive from divine source. The Vedas are belived to be eternal (nitya). The various sages (rishis) who are known as their authors no more than received them directly from god. Transmitted orally from generation to generation, the Vedas were not committed to writing until very late.

The Vedas from the oldest literary works not only of Indo-Aryans, but of the entire Aryan group known as the Indo-Germans, and as such, occupy a very distinguished place in the history of world literature, Besides, for more than three thousand years the Vedas have been looked revealed words of God by millions of Hindus and have formed the basis of their culture and religion amid continual changes and successive

developments. The word 'veda' means "knowledge" knowledge par excellence. i.e, 'the sacred' spiritual knowledge".

### **The Vedas:-**

- 1) The Rigveda samhita – A collection of hymns.
- 2) The Athravaveda – A collection of spells and charms.
- 3) The samveda samhita- A collection of songs mostly taken from the Rigveda.
- 4) The Yajurveda samhita- A collection of sacrificial formula.

### **The RIGVEDA:-**

The Rigveda or 'veda of verses" the most ancient and most important text of vedism. exists in the form of a collection of 1028 hymns ( sukta ), divided into ten ' circles" ( mandala ).The hymns contain from 1 to 58 verses : the total number of verses is 10,462. and the average 10 per hymn . The total is also divided in a more mechanical way which is also more recent, into eight parts ( ashataka ),which are themselves divided into lessons ( adhyaya), and these in turn into groups of five verses ( varga ). The mandala are also divided in a mechanical way into 'recitations" ( anuvaka ).

The samhita is shown by many indications to consist of fragments of different origins and Dates, despite the apparent uniformity of tone. The Rigveda was compiled in response to literary,Or if it is preferred archaeological, rather than liturgical needs. It is an anthology. It could almost be said without paradox that the work stands outside the vedic religion. Unlike the other it does not claim to be a practical manual. The hymn is carefully composed and often learned, containing a prelude in the form of an emphatic exhortation, a refrain at the end, a prayer, and a phrase emphasizing the transition from the oral rite to the practical rite. The body of the hymn consists in praise of the divinity, prayers, supplications,curses, but all in mythical episodes referred to in

an allusive way, remnants of an immense literature of legend which must have existed in an oral form long before (siege).

The interpretation of the Rigveda to Indian views rests primarily on the elements of commentary contained in the Brahmanas, on the Nirukta, and then on the series of Bhashya, "commentaries" (literally "oral texts"), which were compiled in the middle Ages: those of madhava, skandasvamin, Venkatamadhava, and best known thought certainly not the best that of sayana, a southern Brahman In the XI v the century.

Considerable passages from the Rigveda are found in the other Samhitas. The Sama, Yajur and Atharva Great numbers of mantras from the Rigveda are quoted in all the vedic treatises. The Rigveda is older than all the other vedic texts because it does not presuppose any of them, and all the others more or less directly presuppose it.

### **The YAJURVEDA:-**

The yajurveda, or more exactly the samhitas of the yajurveda, are five in number four relating to the Black yajurveda-that is to say, according to the traditional explanation, which is not necessarily authentic, the veda in which for mulae and prayers are associated with elements of commentary and the last to the white yajurveda, in which formulae and prayers are almost "pure", free from prose Brahamana. The five are.

- 1) The Kathaka, properly the Charayaniya-Katha-Samhita, the text in 5 grantha and 53 Sthanaka , representing the principal recension of the Katha school ;
- 2) The Kapishthalala-(Katha)-Samhita in 8 ashtaka and 48 adhyaya, another recension of the same school, of which the text been preserved only in part ;
- 3) The Maitrayanisamhita, in 4 kanda and 54 prapathaka, of the school of the Maitrayaniya ;

- 4) The Taittiriyaśamhita, in 7 kanda and 44 prapathaka ( the shortest division being by Groups of 50 words), of the Taittiriya school and more particularly of the Apastambin;
- 5) The Vajasaneyiśamhita in 40 adhyaya ; it takes its name from the master Yajnavalkya, whose patronymic was Vajasaneya. There are two recensions, that of the Kanva and that of the Madhyamdina.

## **The SAMAVEDA**

The Samaveda has come to us in three recensions, that of Kauthuma, which is the popular one, that of Ranayaniya, which appears to have been identical with the former, at least as regards the Samhita, and that of Jaiminiya or Talavakara. This last contains larger collections of melodies than the Kauthuma, while the verses are less numerous, differently arranged , and subject to some sound changes. The text of the Samaveda was commented on by Sayana in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

1. The Samhita proper, comprising the archika ( or purvarchika, “(first) group of verses”, the Aranyaka or aryannaka samhita) , “text of the forest”, a sort of appendix to the previous part, and finally the uttararchika, “ last group of verses”.
2. Four gana, collections of “chants”: (grama-)geya araya (geya) , uha and uhya ( or rahasya).

The Samaveda proper thus appears as a sort of handbook . In fact in part it is no more than the Index to a handbook. The most interesting part would have been the melody: unfortunately the melodies of the age of the Samhita have not been preserved. It is only at a relatively late period that there was recorded in the gana the musical notation in the terms of syllables, and more often with figures written above the line.

In order to suit the text to the requirements of the melody it was interspersed with stobha, exclamatory syllables or words,

or sometimes short phrases, which have a magical or mystical rather than a semantic value ( Van der Hoogt).

The first two gana give the melodies which “are to be sung in the village” and those which “are to be sung in the forest” (that is to say, too sacred or dangerous to be heard by human communities): they correspond to the “ words” of the archika and follow the same order. The last two gana (the uttaragana), like it follow the order of the ceremonial.

## **The ATHARVAVEDA**

The Atharvaveda is a collection of hymns and spells in twenty books or kanda. The subdivisions, which are in part modern, are called “lectures” (prapathaka), “recitations” ( anuvaka), and “decads” (dashati). Altogether there are 731 sections and nearly 6,000 verses.

The Atharvaveda contains many passages in prose, a prose often cadenced, a style earlier than that of the Brahmanas. But the greater part of the collection is in verse, though the versification is complex and loose, and is not easily brought within the common metrical rules. The language is definitely later than that of the Rigveda, but the style, marked by an expressive use of alliteration, repetition and various associations with magical purposes ( Gonda) , gives an impression of greater antiquity even than that of the Rigveda. The short prayers have a clarity and compactness which may attain a real intensity ; the final verse, presenting the wish as realised, at the same time gives the key to the veiled allusions in the body of the prayer.

It is no more possible to date the Atharvaveda than the other Samhitas. If it is clear that the collection was made later, and perhaps long after the Rigveda, that the linguistic stratum is more recent, and that the geographical and social conditions, like the myths and the speculations, betray a more advanced state, it is still true that the ritual is very primitive, and that the prayers may well have existed side by side with those of the

high cult, if not indeed before them. It is possible that when they were raised to the status of a Veda, a more “modern” form was imposed upon them. This is what Bloomfield expressed in another way when he emphasized the popular character of the collection. Thus it is wrong to speak of a period of the Atharvaveda.

### **Their Times:-**

The whole of the Vedic literature can be placed between two dates, both unhappily inexact. It was composed as a whole before the Buddhist doctrine was preached; and on the other hand its beginnings were contemporary with or a little later than the entry of the Aryans into India. The various strata of the texts must be arranged in this interval. The attempt to do this made long ago by Max Muller, the basis of which has often been questioned, remains justified in principle. Now if it is assumed that the entry of the Aryans took place about the 15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the hymns must be placed about this date. The evidence of the Mitanni documents tends to support this view, while the hypothesis, if it is admitted, of an Indo-European Mohenjo-Daro tells against it.

On the other hand the close relation of the Rigveda with the Avesta inclines us to bring the date lower (with Hertel), if at least we were sure that the Avestic gathas, so similar in form to the Veda, were not earlier than the Sixth or seventh century. However, in addition to the fact that this date is very uncertain, it is quite sure that the development of the Vedic literature requires a far longer time than this allows.

The Aryan civilization made its appearance in the north – west of India about 15,000 B.C. It has left us on stone remains, and there is nothing to indicate that it ever built in stone. Its sole legacy to the world is the vast religious compendium known as the Vedas, consisting of works written at very different times. The most important is the Rig Veda, which must have been composed no later than 1,000 B.C.

Properly interpreted, it recreates for us the language, religious beliefs and the ways of life and thought of the people who wrote it.

The name of Aryan has been given to a white-skinned black-haired people speaking a lost tongue known as Aryan, which was the forerunner of Sanskrit and which, more than fifteen centuries before the Christian era, was brought through the Kabul passes in the north-west of India. The people who spoke it were semi-nomad semi-sedentary tribes, skilled in agriculture, endowed, like so many nomads, with a vivid imagination, and resembling in their way of life the ancient Persians as described by Herodotus.

They advanced slowly from the Indus to the Ganges and from there to the Brahmaputra, conquering as they went the dark-skinned straight-haired peoples and the Turanians who had occupied the land before them. From being nomadic they gradually settled down.

The origins of these invaders, who played such an important part in the history of India, are wrapped in mystery.

It is generally acknowledged that before the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. the first Aryans were living in what is now Turkestan on the upper reaches of the Oxus. They are then thought to have split up into two major migratory groups, one moving towards Europe and the other towards Iran. After living for a long time in Persia, Bactria and Sogdiana, the descendants of those emigrants must have continued southwards and after crossing the Hindu Kush, entered India. If this theory is accepted, Europeans and Hindus have descended from the selfsame Asiatic tribes.

In Vedic time, the family and the race were the twin pillars of society. They were not separated by any tribal group, clan or government. Above the family there was only the race, while below there was nothing at all, since the individual had no separate existence but was part of his ancestors and descendants.

Religion itself was simply the worship of race and family. The gods were looked upon as being one with the forefathers of the race. Marriage and procreation were sacred acts. The transmission of life from father to son through the mother was the mysterious passage of Agni, the divine fire and principle of fertility, the lord and creator of the universe, thorough the woman's body to perpetuate eternal life.

To die without male issue had equally terrible consequences. The son assured his ancestors of immortality by his veneration and the sacrifices he offered up to them. Should any interruption occur in these, the shades of his forefathers would be condemned to limbo, and the family would cease to exist forever.

The basis of their society was the family, and society itself was composed of the whole race irrespective of functions or classes. Each head of a family made the sacrifices, farmed the land and went to war. These occupations which, when separated, formed the basis of the caste system, were then inextricably intertwined.

There was no tie between one village and another, nor was there any supreme power over the chieftains. The hazards of war brought them together, sometimes in large numbers, under a single command, but the concept of kingship did not gain ground until later. We shall find it among the Aryans when they settled in the Ganges basin, but in Vedic times the king was merely the equivalent of a war lord. A king with ministers, who levied taxes regularly and governed the whole race, was unknown during the Vedic period.

Kingship was in any case a purely nominal concept in India. In Aryan times the basic political unit was like a village, but more rigidly structured and forming a small but well-organized republic, with a chieftain In the fortress exercising wide authority under the title of rajah; this is the political system which has always prevailed in India and which the conquerors, whoever they were, were forced to respect, because it was unshakable.



We also find the first traces of the caste system which, from being loosely-defined and fluid when the classes were anxious only to distinguish between themselves, subsequently became so inflexible when it came under the influence of ethnic concepts that it ended by creating an unbridgeable gap between the races.

We can follow, from the Vedas, the widening of the gap between priests and warriors which was narrow to begin with but then increased steadily. The division of functions did not end there. While the sacrificer devoted himself more and more to the performance of the sacred rites and the composition of religious chants, and the warrior spent his time in daring forays or tests of prowess, what would have happened to the land, what would it have yielded, if others had not devoted themselves untiringly to cultivating it? A third caste thus emerged-that of the farmers.

In one of the last poems of the Rig Veda, the three castes appear as distinct entities and have already been given the names of Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya.

The fourth caste, that of Shudras, was formed later from the conquered hordes after they had been assimilated into the Aryan civilization.

Nothing is more difficult than to try to classify or arrange the Aryan gods in any sort of hierarchy.

Among the ill- defined gods and symbols with their inextricable confusion of powers and status which abound in Vedic mythology, those who are most often mentioned are:

Agni, the personification of fire, and Soma, the fermented liquid which adds force to Agni. Agni engendered the gods, the world and universal life. Soma makes the gods immortal and fills men with vigor. Soma also engendered the earth and the sky, Indra and Vishnu. Together with Agni he forms the sky and the stars.

The great epic poems of the Mahabharat and of the Ramayana, although considerably later than the first Vedic chants, are still genuinely Aryan works.

We learn from the Vedas that the gods they believed in resembled those beings of ambiguous aspect which the ancient naturalists classed sometimes as animals and sometimes as plants. In trying to classify them, the following points stand out from the over all body of beliefs set forth in the Vedas:

1. Worship of the forces of nature;
2. Personification of those forces as divine beings;
3. Belief in the immortality of the soul;
4. Ancestor worship;
5. The belief that nature, men and the gods are under the sway of another and all-powerful god, usually Indra;
6. The constant tendency to express religious beliefs in material ways with the result that religion degenerated into a self-interested exchange of gifts between the gods and men, the latter offering up their animals and the fruits of the earth as sacrifices and the former bestowing an abundance of rain when needed, health and wealth.

The beliefs with regard to a future life are equally nebulous and variable in the Vedas. It was thought that the individual returned to the elements after his death and that his soul acquired a new body, a concept which seems to herald the future belief I metempsychosis. The belief in the soul as the immortal principle inhabiting the body but superior to it and constituting the essential human personality was also to be seen in the Vedas.

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