

# Vedas

“Veda” and “Vedic” redirect here. For other uses, see [Veda \(disambiguation\)](#) and [Vedic \(disambiguation\)](#).

The **Vedas** (/ˈveɪdəz, ˈviː-/<sup>[1]</sup> Sanskrit: वेद *vēda*, "knowledge") are a large body of texts originating in ancient India. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the texts constitute the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and the oldest scriptures of Hinduism.<sup>[2][3]</sup> Hindus consider the Vedas to be *apauruṣeya*, which means “not of a man, superhuman”<sup>[4]</sup> and “impersonal, authorless”.<sup>[5][6][7]</sup>

Vedas are also called *śruti* (“what is heard”)<sup>[8]</sup> distinguishing them from other religious texts, which are called *smṛti* (“what is remembered”). The Veda, for orthodox Indian theologians, are considered revelations, some way or other the work of the Deity.<sup>[9]</sup> In the Hindu Epic the Mahabharata, the creation of Vedas is credited to Brahma.<sup>[10]</sup>

There are four Vedas: the Rigveda, the Yajurveda, the Samaveda and the Atharvaveda.<sup>[11][12]</sup> Each Veda has been subclassified into four major text types – the Samhitas (mantras and benedictions), the Aranyakas (text on rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices and symbolic-sacrifices), the Brahmanas (commentaries on rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices), and the Upanishads (text discussing meditation, philosophy and spiritual knowledge).<sup>[11][13][14]</sup> Some scholars add fifth category – the Upanasans (worship).<sup>[15][16]</sup>

The various Indian philosophies and denominations have taken differing positions on the Vedas. Schools of Indian philosophy which cite the Vedas as their scriptural authority are classified as “orthodox” (*āstika*). Other śramaṇa traditions, such as Lokayata, Carvaka, Ajivika, Buddhism and Jainism, which did not regard the Vedas as authorities are referred to as “heterodox” or “non-orthodox” (*nāstika*) schools.<sup>[17]</sup> Despite their differences, just like śramaṇa traditions, various Hindu traditions dwell on, express and teach similar ideas such as karma (retributive action) and moksha (liberation) in the fourth layer of the Vedas – the Upanishads.<sup>[17]</sup>

## 1 Etymology and usage

The Sanskrit word *vēda* “knowledge, wisdom” is derived from the root *vid-* “to know”. This is reconstructed as being derived from the Proto-Indo-European root *\*ueid-*, meaning “see” or “know”.<sup>[18]</sup>

The noun is from Proto-Indo-European *\*ueidos*, cognate

to Greek (φ)εἶδος “aspect”, “form”. Not to be confused is the homonymous 1st and 3rd person singular perfect tense *vēda*, cognate to Greek (φ)οῖδα (*w*)*oida* “I know”. Root cognates are Greek *ιδέα*, English *wit*, etc., Latin *videō* “I see”, etc.<sup>[19]</sup>

The Sanskrit term *veda* as a common noun means “knowledge”, but can also be used to refer to fields of study unrelated to liturgy or ritual, e.g. in *agada-veda* “medical science”, *sasya-veda* “science of agriculture” or *sarpa-veda* “science of snakes” (already found in the early Upanishads); *durveda* means “with evil knowledge, ignorant”.<sup>[20]</sup>

A related word *Vedena* appears in hymn 8.19.5 of the Rigveda.<sup>[21]</sup> It was translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith as “ritual lore”,<sup>[22]</sup> as “studying the Veda” by the 14th century Indian scholar Sayana, as “bundle of grass” by Max Muller, and as “with the Veda” by H.H. Wilson.<sup>[23]</sup>

Vedas are called *Marai* or *Vaymoli* in parts of South India. Marai literally means “hidden, a secret, mystery”.<sup>[24][25]</sup> In some south Indian communities such as Iyengars, the word Veda includes the Tamil writings of the Alvar saints, such as Divya Prabandham, for example Tiruvaymoli.<sup>[26]</sup>

## 2 Chronology

Main article: [Vedic period](#)

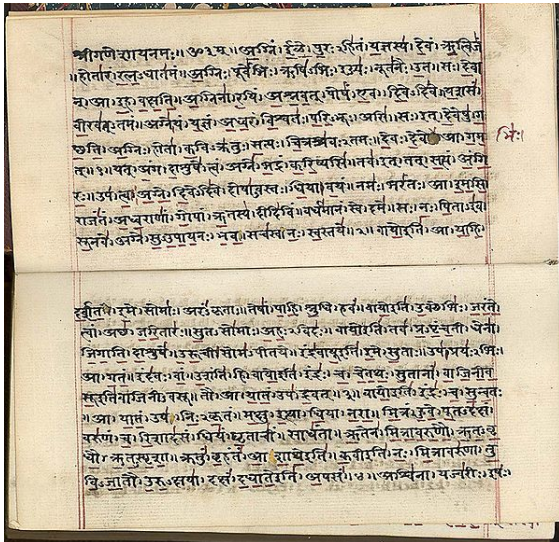
The Vedas are among the oldest sacred texts.<sup>[27]</sup> The Samhitas date to roughly 1700–1100 BCE,<sup>[28]</sup> and the “circum-Vedic” texts, as well as the redaction of the Samhitas, date to c. 1000-500 BCE, resulting in a Vedic period, spanning the mid 2nd to mid 1st millennium BCE, or the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age.<sup>[29]</sup> The Vedic period reaches its peak only after the composition of the mantra texts, with the establishment of the various shakhas all over Northern India which annotated the mantra samhitas with Brahmana discussions of their meaning, and reaches its end in the age of Buddha and Panini and the rise of the Mahajanapadas (archaeologically, Northern Black Polished Ware). Michael Witzel gives a time span of c. 1500 BCE to c. 500-400 BCE. Witzel makes special reference to the Near Eastern Mitanni material of the 14th century BCE the only epigraphic record of Indo-Aryan contemporary to the Rigvedic period. He gives 150 BCE (Patañjali) as a terminus ante quem for all Vedic Sanskrit literature, and 1200 BCE (the early Iron Age) as terminus post quem for

the Atharvaveda.<sup>[30]</sup>

Transmission of texts in the Vedic period was by oral tradition alone, preserved with precision with the help of elaborate mnemonic techniques. A literary tradition set in only in post-Vedic times, after the rise of Buddhism in the Maurya period, perhaps earliest in the Kanva recension of the Yajurveda about the 1st century BCE; however oral tradition predominated until c. 1000 CE.<sup>[31]</sup>

Due to the ephemeral nature of the manuscript material (birch bark or palm leaves), surviving manuscripts rarely surpass an age of a few hundred years.<sup>[32]</sup> The Sampurnanand Sanskrit University has a Rigveda manuscript from the 14th century,<sup>[33]</sup> however, there are a number of older Veda manuscripts in Nepal that are dated from the 11th century onwards.<sup>[34]</sup>

### 3 Categories of Vedic texts



Rigveda (*padapatha*) manuscript in Devanagari

The term “Vedic texts” is used in two distinct meanings:

1. Texts composed in Vedic Sanskrit during the Vedic period (Iron Age India)
2. Any text considered as “connected to the Vedas” or a “corollary of the Vedas”<sup>[35]</sup>

#### 3.1 Vedic Sanskrit corpus

The corpus of Vedic Sanskrit texts includes:

- The Samhitas (Sanskrit *saṃhitā*, “collection”), are collections of metric texts (“mantras”). There are four “Vedic” Samhitas: the Rig-Veda, Sama-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Atharva-Veda, most of which are

available in several recensions (*śākhā*). In some contexts, the term *Veda* is used to refer to these Samhitas. This is the oldest layer of Vedic texts, apart from the Rigvedic hymns, which were probably essentially complete by 1200 BCE, dating to c. the 12th to 10th centuries BCE. The complete corpus of Vedic mantras as collected in Bloomfield's *Vedic Concordance* (1907) consists of some 89,000 *padas* (metrical feet), of which 72,000 occur in the four Samhitas.<sup>[36]</sup>

- The **Brahmanas** are prose texts that comment and explain the solemn rituals as well as expound on their meaning and many connected themes. Each of the Brahmanas is associated with one of the Samhitas or its recensions.<sup>[37][38]</sup> The Brahmanas may either form separate texts or can be partly integrated into the text of the Samhitas. They may also include the Aranyakas and Upanishads.
- The **Aranyakas**, “wilderness texts” or “forest treaties”, were composed by people who meditated in the woods as recluses and are the third part of the Vedas. The texts contain discussions and interpretations of ceremonies, from ritualistic to symbolic meta-ritualistic points of view.<sup>[39]</sup> It is frequently read in secondary literature.
- Older **Mukhya Upanishads** (Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chandogya, Kaṭha, Kena, Aitareya, and others).<sup>[40][41]</sup>

The Vedas (*sruti*) are different from Vedic era texts such as Shrauta Sutras and Gryha Sutras, which are *smṛiti* texts. Together, the Vedas and these Sutras form part of the Vedic Sanskrit corpus.<sup>[41][42][43]</sup>

While production of Brahmanas and Aranyakas ceased with the end of the Vedic period, additional Upanishads were composed after the end of the Vedic period.<sup>[44]</sup>

The Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads, among other things, interpret and discuss the Samhitas in philosophical and metaphorical ways to explore abstract concepts such as the Absolute (Brahman), and the soul or the self (*Atman*), introducing *Vedanta* philosophy, one of the major trends of later Hinduism. In other parts, they show evolution of ideas, such as from actual sacrifice to symbolic sacrifice, and of spirituality in the Upanishads. This has inspired later Hindu scholars such as *Adi Shankara* to classify each Veda into *karma-kanda* (कर्म खण्ड, action/ritual-related sections) and *jñana-kanda* (ज्ञान खण्ड, knowledge/spirituality-related sections).<sup>[15][45]</sup>

#### 3.2 Shruti literature

Main article: Śruti

The texts considered “Vedic” in the sense of “corollaries of the Vedas” is less clearly defined, and may include numerous post-Vedic texts such as the later *Upanishads* and the *Sutra literature*. Texts not considered to be *shruti* are known as *smṛiti* (Sanskrit: *smṛti*; “the remembered”), or texts of remembered traditions. This indigenous system of categorization was adopted by Max Müller and, while it is subject to some debate, it is still widely used. As Axel Michaels explains:<sup>[40]</sup>

These classifications are often not tenable for linguistic and formal reasons: There is not only *one* collection at any one time, but rather several handed down in separate Vedic schools; Upanishads ... are sometimes not to be distinguished from Āranyakas...; Brāhmaṇas contain older strata of language attributed to the Saṃhitās; there are various dialects and locally prominent traditions of the Vedic schools. Nevertheless, it is advisable to stick to the division adopted by Max Müller because it follows the Indian tradition, conveys the historical sequence fairly accurately, and underlies the current editions, translations, and monographs on Vedic literature.”<sup>[40]</sup>

The *Upanishads* are largely philosophical works, some in dialogue form. They are the foundation of Hindu philosophical thought and its diverse traditions.<sup>[46][47]</sup> Of the Vedic corpus, they alone are widely known, and the central ideas of the *Upanishads* are at the spiritual core of Hindus.<sup>[46][48]</sup>

## 4 Vedic schools or recensions

Main article: *Shakha*

The four Vedas were transmitted in various *śākhās* (branches, schools).<sup>[49][50]</sup> Each school likely represented an ancient community of a particular area, or kingdom.<sup>[50]</sup> Each school followed its own canon. Multiple recensions are known for each of the Vedas.<sup>[49]</sup> Thus, states Witzel as well as Renou, in the 2nd millennium BCE, there was likely no canon of one broadly accepted Vedic texts, no Vedic “Scripture”, but only a canon of various texts accepted by each school. Some of these texts have survived, most lost or yet to be found. Rigveda that survives in modern times, for example, is in only one extremely well preserved school of Śākalya, from a region called Videha, in modern north Bihar, south of Nepal.<sup>[51]</sup> The Vedic canon in its entirety consists of texts from all the various Vedic schools taken together.<sup>[50]</sup>

Each of the four Vedas were shared by the numerous schools, but revised, interpolated and adapted locally, in and after the Vedic period, giving rise to various recensions of the text. Some texts were revised into

the modern era, raising significant debate on parts of the text which are believed to have been corrupted at a later date.<sup>[52][53]</sup> The Vedas each have an Index or *Anukramani*, the principal work of this kind being the general Index or *Sarvānukramaṇī*.<sup>[54][55]</sup>

Prodigious energy was expended by ancient Indian culture in ensuring that these texts were transmitted from generation to generation with inordinate fidelity.<sup>[56]</sup> For example, memorization of the sacred *Vedas* included up to eleven forms of recitation of the same text. The texts were subsequently “proof-read” by comparing the different recited versions. Forms of recitation included the *jaṭā-pāṭha* (literally “mesh recitation”) in which every two adjacent words in the text were first recited in their original order, then repeated in the reverse order, and finally repeated again in the original order.<sup>[57]</sup> That these methods have been effective, is testified to by the preservation of the most ancient Indian religious text, the *Rigveda*, as redacted into a single text during the *Brahmana* period, without any variant readings within that school.<sup>[57]</sup>

The Vedas were likely written down for the first time around 500 BCE.<sup>[58]</sup> However, all printed editions of the Vedas that survive in the modern times are likely the version existing in about the 16th century CE.<sup>[59]</sup>

## 5 Four Vedas

The canonical division of the Vedas is fourfold (*turīya*) viz.,<sup>[62]</sup>

1. Rigveda (RV)
2. Yajurveda (YV, with the main division TS vs. VS)
3. Samaveda (SV)
4. Atharvaveda (AV)

Of these, the first three were the principal original division, also called “*trayī vidyā*”, that is, “the triple science” of reciting hymns (Rigveda), performing sacrifices (Yajurveda), and chanting songs (Samaveda).<sup>[50][63]</sup> The Rigveda is the oldest work, which Witzel states are probably from 1900 BCE to 1100 BCE period. Witzel, also notes that it is the Vedic period itself, where incipient lists divide the Vedic texts into three (*trayī*) or four branches: Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva.<sup>[50]</sup>

Each Veda has been subclassified into four major text types – the *Samhitas* (mantras and benedictions), the *Aranyakas* (text on rituals, ceremonies such as newborn baby’s rites of passage, coming of age, marriages, retirement and cremation, sacrifices and symbolic-sacrifices), the *Brahmanas* (commentaries on rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices), and the *Upanishads* (text discussing meditation, philosophy and spiritual knowledge).<sup>[11][13][14]</sup> The *Upanasans* (short ritual worship-related sections) are considered by some scholars<sup>[15][16]</sup> as the fifth part. Witzel



notes that the rituals, rites and ceremonies described in these ancient texts reconstruct to a large degree the Indo-European marriage rituals observed in a region spanning the Indian subcontinent, Persia and the European area, and some greater details are found in the Vedic era texts such as the Grhya Sūtras.<sup>[64]</sup>

Only one version of the Rigveda is known to have survived into the modern era.<sup>[51]</sup> Several different versions of the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda are known, and many different versions of the Yajur Veda have been found in different parts of South Asia.<sup>[65]</sup>

## 5.1 Rigveda

Main article: Rigveda

Nasadiya Sukta (Hymn of non-Eternity):

Who really knows?  
Who can here proclaim it?  
Whence, whence this creation sprang?  
Gods came later, after the creation of this universe.

Who then knows whence it has arisen?  
Whether God's will created it, or whether He was mute;  
Only He who is its overseer in highest heaven knows,  
He only knows, or perhaps He does not know.

—Rig Veda 10.129.6-7<sup>[66]</sup>

The Rigveda Samhita is the oldest extant Indic text.<sup>[67]</sup> It is a collection of 1,028 Vedic Sanskrit hymns and 10,600 verses in all, organized into ten books (Sanskrit: *mandalas*).<sup>[68]</sup> The hymns are dedicated to Rigvedic deities.<sup>[69]</sup>

The books were composed by poets from different priestly groups over a period of several centuries from roughly the second half of the 2nd millennium BCE (the early Vedic period), starting with the Punjab (Sapta Sindhu) region of the northwest Indian subcontinent.<sup>[70]</sup> The Rigveda is structured based on clear principles – the Veda begins with a small book addressed to Agni, Indra and other gods, all arranged according to decreasing total number of hymns in each deity collection; for each deity series the hymns progress from longer to shorter ones; yet, the number of hymns per book increases; finally, the meter too is systematically arranged from jagati and tristubh to anustubh and gayatri as the text progresses.<sup>[50]</sup> In terms of substance, the nature of hymns shift from praise of deities in early books to Nasadiya Sukta with questions such as, “what is the origin of the universe?, do even gods know the answer?“,<sup>[66]</sup> the virtue of Dāna (charity) in society,<sup>[71]</sup> and other metaphysical issues in its hymns.<sup>[72]</sup>

There are similarities between the mythology, rituals and

linguistics in Rigveda and those found in ancient central Asia, Iranian and Hindukush (Afghanistan) regions.<sup>[73]</sup>

## 5.2 Samaveda

Main article: Samaveda

The Samaveda Samhita<sup>[74]</sup> consists of 1549 stanzas, taken almost entirely (except for 75 mantras) from the Rigveda.<sup>[40][75]</sup> The Samaveda samhita comprises two major parts. The first part include four melody collections (gāna, गान) and the second part three verse “books” (ārcika, आर्चिक).<sup>[75]</sup> A melody in the song books corresponds to a verse in the *arcika* books. Just like Rigveda, the early sections of Samaveda typically begin with Agni and Indra hymns but shift to abstract, and their meters too shifts in a descending order. The later sections of the Samaveda have least deviation from substance of hymns they derive from Rigveda into songs.<sup>[75]</sup>

In Samaveda, some of the Rigvedic verses are repeated more than once.<sup>[76]</sup> Including repetitions, there are a total of 1875 verses numbered in the Samaveda recension translated by Griffith.<sup>[77]</sup> Two major recensions have survived, the Kauthuma/Ranayaniya and the Jaiminiya. Its purpose was liturgical, and they were the repertoire of the *udgātṛ* or “singer” priests.<sup>[78]</sup>

## 5.3 Yajurveda

Main article: Yajurveda

The Yajurveda Samhita consists of prose mantras.<sup>[79]</sup> It is a compilation of ritual offering formulas that were said by a priest while an individual performed ritual actions such as those before the yajna fire.<sup>[79]</sup>

The earliest and most ancient layer of Yajurveda samhita includes about 1,875 verses, that are distinct yet borrow and build upon the foundation of verses in Rigveda.<sup>[80]</sup> Unlike the Samaveda which is almost entirely based on Rigveda mantras and structured as songs, the Yajurveda samhitas are in prose and linguistically, they are different from earlier Vedic texts.<sup>[81]</sup> The Yajur Veda has been the primary source of information about sacrifices during Vedic times and associated rituals.<sup>[82]</sup>

There are two major groups of texts in this Veda: the “Black” (*Krishna*) and the “White” (*Shukla*). The term “black” implies “the un-arranged, motley collection” of verses in Yajurveda, in contrast to the “white” (well arranged) Yajurveda.<sup>[83]</sup> The White Yajurveda separates the Samhita from its Brahmana (the Shatapatha Brahmana), the Black Yajurveda intersperses the Samhita with Brahmana commentary. Of the Black Yajurveda, texts from four major schools have survived (Maitrayani, Katha, Kapisthala-Katha, Taittiriya), while of the White Yajurveda, two (Kanva and Madhyandina).<sup>[84][85]</sup> The

youngest layer of Yajurveda text is not related to rituals nor sacrifice, it includes the largest collection of primary Upanishads, influential to various schools of Hindu philosophy.<sup>[86][87]</sup>

## 5.4 Atharvaveda

Main article: [Atharvaveda](#)

The *Atharvaveda Samhita* is the text "belonging to the Atharvan and Angirasa poets. It has about 760 hymns, and about 160 of the hymns are in common with the Rigveda.<sup>[88]</sup> Most of the verses are metrical, but some sections are in prose.<sup>[88]</sup> Two different versions of the text – the Paippalāda and the Śaunakīya – have survived into the modern times.<sup>[89][88]</sup> The Atharvaveda was not considered as a Veda in the Vedic era, and was accepted as a Veda in late 1st millennium BCE.<sup>[90][91]</sup> It was compiled last,<sup>[92]</sup> probably around 900 BCE, although some of its material may go back to the time of the Rigveda,<sup>[93]</sup> or earlier.<sup>[88]</sup>

The Atharvaveda is sometimes called the “Veda of magical formulas”,<sup>[94]</sup> an epithet declared to be incorrect by other scholars.<sup>[95]</sup> The Samhita layer of the text likely represents a developing 2nd millennium BCE tradition of magico-religious rites to address superstitious anxiety, spells to remove maladies believed to be caused by demons, and herbs- and nature-derived potions as medicine.<sup>[96][97]</sup> The text, states Kenneth Zysk, is one of oldest surviving record of the evolutionary practices in religious medicine and reveals the “earliest forms of folk healing of Indo-European antiquity”.<sup>[98]</sup> Many books of the Atharvaveda Samhita are dedicated to rituals without magic, such as to philosophical speculations and to theosophy.<sup>[95]</sup>

The Atharva veda has been a primary source for information about Vedic culture, the customs and beliefs, the aspirations and frustrations of everyday Vedic life, as well as those associated with kings and governance. The text also includes hymns dealing with the two major rituals of passage – marriage and cremation. The Atharva Veda also dedicates significant portion of the text asking the meaning of a ritual.<sup>[99]</sup>

## 5.5 Embedded Vedic texts

### 5.5.1 Brahmanas

Further information: [Brahmanas](#)

The Brahmanas are commentaries, explanation of proper methods and meaning of Vedic Samhita rituals in the four Vedas.<sup>[100]</sup> They also incorporate myths, legends and in some cases philosophy.<sup>[100][101]</sup> Each regional Vedic *shakha* (school) has its own operating manual-like Brah-

mana text, most of which have been lost.<sup>[102]</sup> A total of 19 Brahmana texts have survived into modern times: two associated with the Rigveda, six with the Yajurveda, ten with the Samaveda and one with the Atharvaveda. The oldest dated to about 900 BC, while the youngest Brahmanas (such as the *Shatapatha Brahmana*), were complete by about 700 BC.<sup>[103][104]</sup> According to Jan Gonda, the final codification of the Brahmanas took place in pre-Buddhist times (ca. 600 BCE).<sup>[105]</sup>

The substance of the Brahmana text varies with each Veda. For example, the first chapter of the Chandogya Brahmana, one of the oldest Brahmanas, includes eight ritual *suktas* (hymns) for the ceremony of marriage and rituals at the birth of a child.<sup>[106][107]</sup> The first hymn is a recitation that accompanies offering a Yajna oblation to *Agni* (fire) on the occasion of a marriage, and the hymn prays for prosperity of the couple getting married.<sup>[106][108]</sup> The second hymn wishes for their long life, kind relatives, and a numerous progeny.<sup>[106]</sup> The third hymn is a mutual marriage pledge, between the bride and groom, by which the two bind themselves to each other. The sixth through last hymn of the first chapter in Chandogya Brahmana are ritual celebrations on the birth of a child, and wishes for health, wealth and prosperity with a profusion of cows and artha.<sup>[106]</sup> However, these verses are incomplete expositions, and their complete context emerges only with the Samhita layer of text.<sup>[109]</sup>

### 5.5.2 Aranyakas and Upanishads

Further information: [Vedanta](#), [Upanishads](#) and [Aranyakas](#)

The Aranyakas layer of the Vedas include rituals, discussion of symbolic meta-rituals, as well as philosophical speculations.<sup>[110][111]</sup>

*Aranyakas*, however, neither are homogeneous in content nor in structure.<sup>[110]</sup> They are a medley of instructions and ideas, and some include chapters of Upanishads within them. Two theories have been proposed on the origin of the word *Aranyakas*. One theory holds that these texts were meant to be studied in a forest, while the other holds that the name came from these being the manuals of allegorical interpretation of sacrifices, for those in *Vanaprastha* (retired, forest-dwelling) stage of their life, according to the historic age-based *Ashrama* system of human life.<sup>[112]</sup>

The Upanishads reflect the last composed layer of texts in the Vedas. They are commonly referred to as *Vedānta*, variously interpreted to mean either the “last chapters, parts of the Vedas” or “the object, the highest purpose of the Veda”.<sup>[113]</sup> The concepts of Brahman (Ultimate Reality) and Ātman (Soul, Self) are central ideas in all the Upanishads,<sup>[114][115]</sup> and “Know your Ātman” their thematic focus.<sup>[115][116]</sup> The Upanishads

are the foundation of Hindu philosophical thought and its diverse traditions.<sup>[46][117]</sup> Of the Vedic corpus, they alone are widely known, and the central ideas of the Upanishads have influenced the diverse traditions of Hinduism.<sup>[46][118]</sup>

*Aranyakas* are sometimes identified as *karma-kanda* (ritualistic section), while the Upanishads are identified as *jñana-kanda* (spirituality section).<sup>[15][119]</sup> In an alternate classification, the early part of Vedas are called *Samhitas* and the commentary are called the *Brahmanas* which together are identified as the ceremonial *karma-kanda*, while *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads* are referred to as the *jñana-kanda*.<sup>[120]</sup>

## 6 Post-Vedic literature

### 6.1 Vedanga

Main article: Vedanga

Six technical subjects related to the Vedas are traditionally known as *vedāṅga* “limbs of the Veda”. V. S. Apte defines this group of works as:

“N. of a certain class of works regarded as auxiliary to the Vedas and designed to aid in the correct pronunciation and interpretation of the text and the right employment of the *Mantras* in ceremonials.”<sup>[121]</sup>

These subjects are treated in *Sūtra* literature dating from the end of the Vedic period to *Mauryan* times, seeing the transition from late *Vedic Sanskrit* to *Classical Sanskrit*.

The six subjects of Vedanga are:

- Phonetics (*Śikṣā*)
- Ritual (*Kalpa*)
- Grammar (*Vyākaraṇa*)
- Etymology (*Nirukta*)
- Meter (*Chandas*)
- Astronomy (*Jyotiṣa*)

### 6.2 Parisista

Main article: Parisista

*Pariśiṣṭa* “supplement, appendix” is the term applied to various ancillary works of Vedic literature, dealing mainly with details of ritual and elaborations of the texts logically and chronologically prior to them: the *Samhitas*,

*Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Sutras*. Naturally classified with the Veda to which each pertains, *Parisista* works exist for each of the four Vedas. However, only the literature associated with the *Atharvaveda* is extensive.

- The **Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Pariśiṣṭa** is a very late text associated with the *Rigveda* canon.
- The **Gobhila Gṛhya Pariśiṣṭa** is a short metrical text of two chapters, with 113 and 95 verses respectively.
- The **Kāṭiya Pariśiṣṭas**, ascribed to *Kātyāyana*, consist of 18 works enumerated self-referentially in the fifth of the series (the *Caranavyūha*) and the **Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra Pariśiṣṭa**.
- The *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* has 3 *parisistas* The **Āpastamba Hautra Pariśiṣṭa**, which is also found as the second *praśna* of the *Satyasādhya Śrauta Sūtra*, the *Vārāha Śrauta Sūtra Pariśiṣṭa*
- For the *Atharvaveda*, there are 79 works, collected as 72 distinctly named *parisistas*.<sup>[122]</sup>

### 6.3 Puranas

Main article: Puranas

A traditional view given in the *Vishnu Purana* (likely dating to the *Gupta period*<sup>[123]</sup>) attributes the current arrangement of four Vedas to the mythical sage *Vedavyasa*.<sup>[124]</sup> Puranic tradition also postulates a single original Veda that, in varying accounts, was divided into three or four parts. According to the *Vishnu Purana* (3.2.18, 3.3.4 etc.) the original Veda was divided into four parts, and further fragmented into numerous *shakhas*, by Lord *Vishnu* in the form of *Vyasa*, in the *Dvapara Yuga*; the *Vayu Purana* (section 60) recounts a similar division by *Vyasa*, at the urging of *Brahma*. The *Bhagavata Purana* (12.6.37) traces the origin of the primeval Veda to the syllable *aum*, and says that it was divided into four at the start of *Dvapara Yuga*, because men had declined in age, virtue and understanding. In a differing account *Bhagavata Purana* (9.14.43) attributes the division of the primeval veda (*aum*) into three parts to the monarch *Pururavas* at the beginning of *Treta Yuga*. The *Mahabharata* (*santiparva* 13,088) also mentions the division of the Veda into three in *Treta Yuga*.<sup>[125]</sup>

### 6.4 Upaveda

The term **upaveda** (“applied knowledge”) is used in traditional literature to designate the subjects of certain technical works.<sup>[126][127]</sup> Lists of what subjects are included in this class differ among sources. The *Charanavyuha* mentions four *Upavedas*:<sup>[128]</sup>

- Archery (Dhanurveda), associated with the Rigveda
- Architecture (Sthapatyaveda), associated with the Yajurveda.
- Music and sacred dance (Gāndharvaveda), associated with the Samaveda
- Medicine (Āyurveda), associated with the Atharvaveda .<sup>[129][130]</sup>

## 6.5 “Fifth” and other Vedas

Some post-Vedic texts, including the Mahabharata, the Natyasastra<sup>[131]</sup> and certain Puranas, refer to themselves as the "fifth Veda".<sup>[132]</sup> The earliest reference to such a “fifth Veda” is found in the Chandogya Upanishad in hymn 7.1.2.<sup>[133]</sup>

Let drama and dance (Nāṭya, नाट्य) be the fifth vedic scripture. Combined with an epic story, tending to virtue, wealth, joy and spiritual freedom, it must contain the significance of every scripture, and forward every art. Thus, from all the Vedas, Brahma framed the Nāṭya Veda. From the Rig Veda he drew forth the words, from the Sama Veda the melody, from the Yajur Veda gesture, and from the Atharva Veda the sentiment.

— First chapter of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Abhinaya Darpana<sup>[134][135]</sup>

"Divya Prabandha", for example Tiruvaymoli, is a term for canonical Tamil texts considered as Vernacular Veda by some South Indian Hindus.<sup>[25][26]</sup>

Other texts such as the Bhagavad Gita or the Vedanta Sutras are considered *shruti* or “Vedic” by some Hindu denominations but not universally within Hinduism. The Bhakti movement, and Gaudiya Vaishnavism in particular extended the term *veda* to include the Sanskrit Epics and Vaishnavite devotional texts such as the Pancaratra.<sup>[136]</sup>

## 7 Western Indology

Further information: Sanskrit in the West

The study of Sanskrit in the West began in the 17th century. In the early 19th century, Arthur Schopenhauer drew attention to Vedic texts, specifically the Upanishads. The importance of Vedic Sanskrit for Indo-European studies was also recognized in the early 19th century. English translations of the Samhitas were published in the later 19th century, in the *Sacred Books of the East* series edited by Müller between 1879 and 1910.<sup>[137]</sup>

Ralph T. H. Griffith also presented English translations of the four Samhitas, published 1889 to 1899.

Voltaire regarded Vedas to be exceptional, he remarked that:

The Veda was the most precious gift for which the West had ever been indebted to the East.<sup>[138][139]</sup>

Rigveda manuscripts were selected for inscription in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2007.<sup>[140]</sup>

## 8 See also

- Hindu philosophy
- Historical Vedic religion
- Pandit
- Shakha
- Vedic chant

## 9 Notes

- [1] “Veda”. *Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*.
- [2] see e.g. Radhakrishnan & Moore 1957, p. 3; Witzel, Michael, “Vedas and Upaniṣads”, in: Flood 2003, p. 68; MacDonell 2004, pp. 29–39; *Sanskrit literature* (2003) in Philip’s Encyclopedia. Accessed 2007-08-09
- [3] Sanujit Ghose (2011). "Religious Developments in Ancient India" in *Ancient History Encyclopedia*.
- [4] Vaman Shivaram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, see apauruSeya
- [5] D Sharma, *Classical Indian Philosophy: A Reader*, Columbia University Press, ISBN , pages 196-197
- [6] Jan Westerhoff (2009), Nagarjuna’s Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0195384963, page 290
- [7] Warren Lee Todd (2013), *The Ethics of Śāṅkara and Śāntideva: A Selfless Response to an Illusory World*, ISBN 978-1409466819, page 128
- [8] Apte 1965, p. 887
- [9] Müller 1891, pp. 17–18
- [10] *Seer of the Fifth Veda: Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa in the Mahābhārata* Bruce M. Sullivan, Motilal Banarsidass, pages 85-86
- [11] Gavin Flood (1996), *An Introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-0521438780, pages 35-39



- [12] Bloomfield, M. *The Atharvaveda and the Gopatha-Brahmana*, (Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde II.1.b.) Strassburg 1899; Gonda, J. *A history of Indian literature: I.1 Vedic literature (Samhitas and Brahmanas); I.2 The Ritual Sutras*. Wiesbaden 1975, 1977
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- [14] Jan Gonda (1975), *Vedic Literature: (Samhitās and Brāhmaṇas)*, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, ISBN 978-3447016032
- [15] A Bhattacharya (2006), *Hindu Dharma: Introduction to Scriptures and Theology*, ISBN 978-0595384556, pages 8-14
- [16] Barbara A. Holdrege (1995), *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture*, State University of New York Press, ISBN 978-0791416402, pages 351-357
- [17] Flood 1996, p. 82
- [18] Monier-Williams 2006, p. 1015; Apte 1965, p. 856
- [19] see e.g. Pokorný's 1959 *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch s.v. u(e)id<sup>2</sup>*; Rix' *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben, ueid-*.
- [20] Monier-Williams (1899)
- [21] Sanskrit: यः समधि य आहुती यो वेदेन ददाश मृतो अग्नये । यो नमसा स्वध्वरः ॥५॥ ऋग्वेदः सूक्तं ८.१९. Wikisource
- [22] K.F. Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda*, Harvard Oriental Series 33-37, Cambridge 1951
- [23] HH Wilson, *Rig-veda Sanhita Sixth Ashtaka, First Adhayaya, Sukta VII (8.19.5)*, page 291, Trubner London
- [24] Vasudha Narayanan (1994), *The Vernacular Veda: Revelation, Recitation, and Ritual*, University of South Carolina Press, ISBN 978-0872499652, pages 194
- [25] John Carman (1989), *The Tamil Veda: Pillan's Interpretation of the Tiruvaymoli*, University of Chicago Press, ISBN 978-0226093055, pages 259-261
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- [29] Gavin Flood sums up mainstream estimates, according to which the Rigveda was compiled from as early as 1500 BCE over a period of several centuries. Flood 1996, p. 37
- [30] Witzel, Michael, "Vedas and Upaniṣads", in: Flood 2003, p. 68
- [31] For the possibility of written texts during the 1st century BCE see: Witzel, Michael, "Vedas and Upaniṣads", in: Flood 2003, p. 69; For oral composition and oral transmission for "many hundreds of years" before being written down, see: Avari 2007, p. 76.
- [32] Brodd, Jefferey (2003), *World Religions*, Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, ISBN 978-0-88489-725-5
- [33] Jamison, Stephanie W.; Brereton, Joel P. (2014). *The Rigveda*. vol. 1. Oxford University Press. p. 18. ISBN 978-0-19-972078-1.
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- [35] according to ISKCON, Hindu Sacred Texts, "Hindus themselves often use the term to describe anything connected to the Vedas and their corollaries (e.g. Vedic culture)".
- [36] 37,575 are Rigvedic. Of the remaining, 34,857 appear in the other three Samhitas, and 16,405 are known only from Brahmanas, Upanishads or Sutras
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- [38] *Brahmana Encyclopedia Britannica* (2013)
- [39] Jan Gonda (1975), *Vedic Literature: (Samhitās and Brāhmaṇas)*, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, ISBN 978-3447016032, page 424-426
- [40] Michaels 2004, p. 51.
- [41] Witzel, Michael, "Vedas and Upaniṣads", in: Flood 2003, p. 69.
- [42] For a table of all Vedic texts see Witzel, Michael, "Vedas and Upaniṣads", in: Flood 2003, pp. 100–101.
- [43] The Vedic Sanskrit corpus is incorporated in *A Vedic Word Concordance (Vaidika-Padānukrama-Koṣa)* prepared from 1930 under Vishva Bandhu, and published in five volumes in 1935-1965. Its scope extends to about 400 texts, including the entire Vedic Sanskrit corpus besides some "sub-Vedic" texts. Volume I: Samhitas, Volume II: Brahmanas and Aranyakas, Volume III: Upanishads, Volume IV: Vedangas; A revised edition, extending to about 1800 pages, was published in 1973-1976.
- [44] Flood 2003, pp. 100–101
- [45] Edward Roer (Translator), *Shankara's Introduction* at Google Books to *Bṛihad Aranyaka Upanishad* at pages 1-5; Quote - "The Vedas are divided in two parts, the first is the karma-kanda, the ceremonial part, also (called) purva-kanda, and treats on ceremonies; the second part is the jnana kanda, the part which contains knowledge, also named uttara-kanda or posterior part, and unfolds the knowledge of Brahma or the universal soul."



- [46] Wendy Doniger (1990), *Textual Sources for the Study of Hinduism*, 1st Edition, University of Chicago Press, ISBN 978-0226618470, pages 2-3; **Quote**: "The Upanishads supply the basis of later Hindu philosophy; they alone of the Vedic corpus are widely known and quoted by most well-educated Hindus, and their central ideas have also become a part of the spiritual arsenal of rank-and-file Hindus."
- [47] Wiman Dissanayake (1993), *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice* (Editors: Thomas P. Kasulis et al.), State University of New York Press, ISBN 978-0791410806, page 39; **Quote**: "The Upanishads form the foundations of Hindu philosophical thought and the central theme of the Upanishads is the identity of Atman and Brahman, or the inner self and the cosmic self."; Michael McDowell and Nathan Brown (2009), *World Religions*, Penguin, ISBN 978-1592578467, pages 208-210
- [48] Patrick Olivelle (2014), *The Early Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0195352429, page 3; **Quote**: "Even though theoretically the whole of vedic corpus is accepted as revealed truth [shruti], in reality it is the Upanishads that have continued to influence the life and thought of the various religious traditions that we have come to call Hindu. Upanishads are the scriptures par excellence of Hinduism".
- [49] Flood 1996, p. 39.
- [50] Witzel, M., "The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools : The Social and Political Milieu" in Witzel 1997, pp. 257–348
- [51] Jamison and Witzel (1992), *Vedic Hinduism*, Harvard University, page 6
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- [61] Joshi 1994, pp. 91-93.
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- [63] MacDonell 2004, pp. 29–39
- [64] Jamison and Witzel (1992), *Vedic Hinduism*, Harvard University, page 21
- [65] Witzel, M., "The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools : The Social and Political Milieu" in Witzel 1997, p. 286
- [66] • Original Sanskrit: Rigveda 10.129 Wikisource;  
• **Translation 1**: Max Muller (1859). *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*. Williams and Norgate, London. pp. 559–565.  
• **Translation 2**: Kenneth Kramer (1986). *World Scriptures: An Introduction to Comparative Religions*. Paulist Press. p. 21. ISBN 0-8091-2781-4.  
• **Translation 3**: David Christian (2011). *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*. University of California Press. pp. 17–18. ISBN 978-0-520-95067-2.
- [67] see e.g. Avari 2007, p. 77.
- [68] For 1,028 hymns and 10,600 verses and division into ten mandalas, see: Avari 2007, p. 77.
- [69] For characterization of content and mentions of deities including Agni, Indra, Varuna, Soma, Surya, etc. see: Avari 2007, p. 77.
- [70] see e.g. Avari 2007, p. 77 Max Müller gave 1700–1100 BCE, Michael Witzel gives 1450-1350 BCE as *terminus ad quem*.
- [71] Original text translated in English: The Rig Veda, Mandala 10, Hymn 117, Ralph T. H. Griffith (Translator); C Chatterjee (1995), Values in the Indian Ethos: An Overview, Journal of Human Values, Vol 1, No 1, pages 3-12
- [72] For example,  
**Hymn 1.164.34**, "What is the ultimate limit of the earth?", "What is the center of the universe?", "What is the semen of the cosmic horse?", "What is the ultimate source of human speech?"  
**Hymn 1.164.34**, "Who gave blood, soul, spirit to the earth?", "How could the unstructured universe give origin to this structured world?"  
**Hymn 1.164.5**, "Where does the sun hide in the night?", "Where do gods live?"  
**Hymn 1.164.6**, "What, where is the unborn support for the born universe?";  
**Hymn 1.164.20** (a hymn that is widely cited in the Upanishads as the parable of the Body and the Soul): "Two birds with fair wings, inseparable companions; Have found refuge in the same sheltering tree. One incessantly eats from the fig tree; the other, not eating, just looks on."; Sources: (a) Antonio de Nicholas (2003), *Meditations Through the Rig Veda: Four-Dimensional Man*, ISBN 978-0595269259, pages 64-69;  
Jan Gonda, *A History of Indian Literature: Veda and Upanishads*, Volume 1, Part 1, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, ISBN 978-3447016032, pages 134-135;  
Rigveda Book 1, Hymn 164 Wikisource

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- [74] (from *sāman*, the term for a melody applied to metrical hymn or song of praise, Apte 1965, p. 981.
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- [79] Michael Witzel (2003), "Vedas and Upaniṣads", in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (Editor: Gavin Flood), Blackwell, ISBN 0-631215352, pages 76-77
- [80] Antonio de Nicholas (2003), *Meditations Through the Rig Veda: Four-Dimensional Man*, ISBN 978-0595269259, pages 273-274
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- [82] Witzel, M., "The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools : The Social and Political Milieu" in Witzel 1997, pp. 272-274
- [83] Paul Deussen, *Sixty Upanishads of the Veda, Volume 1*, Motilal Banarsidass, ISBN 978-8120814684, pages 217-219
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- [86] Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, Motilal Banarsidass (2011 Edition), ISBN 978-8120816206, page 23
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- [92] "The latest of the four Vedas, the Atharva-Veda, is, as we have seen, largely composed of magical texts and charms, but here and there we find cosmological hymns which anticipate the Upanishads, -- hymns to Skambha, the 'Support', who is seen as the first principle which is both the material and efficient cause of the universe, to Prāna, the 'Breath of Life', to Vāc, the 'Word', and so on." Zaehner 1966, p. vii.
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- [94] Laurie Patton (2004), *Veda and Upanishad*, in *The Hindu World* (Editors: Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby), Routledge, ISBN 0-415215277, page 38
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## 12 External links

- Vedas in Hindi and Sanskrit
- GRETIL etexts
- The Vedas at sacred-texts.com
- Vedas: Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva
- Vedas and Upanishads Complete set
- Glimpses of Vedic Literature - Kireet Joshi



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