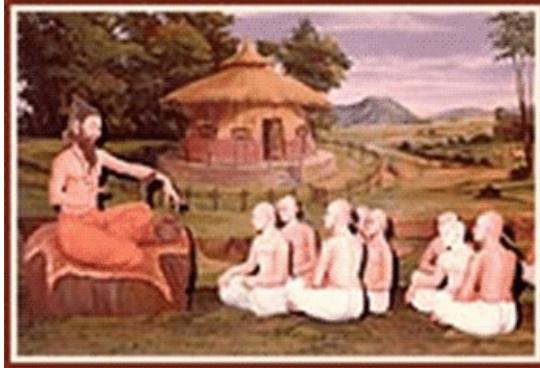




Glory of Bharath » Bharatheeya Samskrithi

Vedas



The Vedic literature is the most ancient in the world. It is a treasure house of wisdom. It has contributed to the all-round development of man. The Veda is the first-ever book in human history. It is the birthplace for human culture and the basis for all kinds of powers. All branches of learning have their origin in the Veda. All dharmas and virtues have sprung from the Veda. The Veda is endless, unfathomable, indefinable, and blissful. The word Veda is derived from the Sanskrit root Vid, meaning knowledge of jnana. Easwara jnana (knowledge of the Lord) is Veda. Atma jnana (knowledge of the Self) is Veda. Brahma jnana (knowledge of the supreme Absolute) is Veda. Adwaita jnana (non-dual knowledge) is Veda. Veda is vijnana (knowledge par excellence). All these terms are synonyms for Self-knowledge or Atma jnana.

The divinity of the Veda is all-pervasive and has eight aspects of splendour, viz., sabda Brahma-mayee (sound Brahman), charachara mayee (movable and immovable), jyothirmayee (effulgence), vaangmayee (speech and literature), nityaananda mayee (everlasting bliss) paratpara mayee (transcendental), maya mayee (delusion), and sree mayee (prosperity). This is indeed the Prajnanamaya Brahma (constant integrated awareness). It does not pertain to one individual, one place or time. It is universal. Knowing that it is not possible for ordinary people to understand such sacred Vedic literature, Sage Vyasa compiled it into four volumes.

The Veda consists of three "kandaas" or Cantos, namely, Karma Kaanda (cantos dealing with rituals and other actions), Upasana Kaanda (cantos of devotion), and Jnana Kaanda (cantos of wisdom). These three divisions represent the progressive steps in man's spiritual evolution. Man starts with actions, recognising that the human body is meant for achieving dharma (righteousness) through karma. When he goes on performing good karmas, he will in due course become fit for understanding Upasana (devotional practices). When he worships God over a period of time, with love and in a spirit of dedication, he attains the final stage of Jnana. On the whole, karma, upasana, and jnana may be considered as three stages of one process, comparable to the flower, the raw fruit, and the ripe fruit respectively. Since the common people cannot understand and practice the teachings of the Veda, subsidiary literature has been created later in the form of Puranas (mythological treatises) and Ithihasas (epics), so that even the lay people can practice karma, upasana, and jnana.

The Vedas are the recordings of sages to whom the mantras were revealed. They proclaim the transcendental Truth which is not changed by time or place. They indicate the means to prosperity and security for the denizens of the three worlds. Veda is derived from the root "Vid", which means "to know". The Veda teaches how to achieve purity of heart, getting rid of impurities. The Vedas have been declared to be infinite and hence beyond the comprehension of common people.



In the beginning there was only one Veda. To study it considerable time and effort were needed. Vyasa divided it into different parts to enable people to study as well as practice the teachings of the Veda. Out of the countless number of hymns, Vyasa gathered some Rks and compiled them in the Rig Veda, collected some yajus to form the Yajur Veda and some Samans to make up the Sama Veda.

The Rig Veda is mainly devoted to hymns in praise of various deities. The Yajur Veda consists of mantras for worshipping the deities. The mantras of the Yajur Veda are used in the performance of yagas and yajnas and in doing acts of charity. Each Veda has three sections' Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads.

- [History](#)
- [Aims](#)
- [Concept](#)
- [Parenting](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Training Programmes](#)
- [Expansion](#)
- [Development](#)
- [Syllabus](#)
- [Bal Vikas Administration](#)
- [Past Students](#)
- [Home](#)

Activities from States

[At the Lotus Feet](#)[Gurus Corner](#)[Children's Corner](#)[From the Annals of the World History](#)[Special Page](#)[Glory of Bharath](#)

The Vedic mantras were utilised in yagas and yajnas (ritual sacrifices) for promoting the wellbeing of society and the world. They were intended to secure timely rains so that the crops may be good and there may be prosperity all round. The mantras which form part of the Karma Kanda (the path of rituals), were regarded as conducive to the promotion of general well-being and happiness.

The Vedas developed under nine heads: (1) Sruti; (2) Anuswara; (3) Trayee; (4) Aamnaayam; (5) Samaamnayam; (6) Chandas; (7) Swaadhyayam; (8) Gama; and (9) Aagama.

Sruti refers to the process of learning, the Vedas from a preceptor by practising the precise manner of chanting the mantras and thereby acquiring proficiency in the recitation of the Vedas. The sounds have to be reproduced exactly as taught by the preceptor by listening to him with intense earnestness. The Vedic mantras are thus learnt entirely by listening.

Anuswara refers to the practice of repeating the mantras learnt from the preceptor, contemplating on them and preserving them in their purity by constant recitation.

Trayee: Originally only three Vedas-Rg, Yajur and Sama Vedas--were considered Apourusheya, without a human origin (that is, emanating from the Divine). The Atharvana Veda comprises hymns taken from the Yajur Veda. Because of their Divine origin, the first three Vedas were called "Trayee" (the Triad).

Aamnaaya refers to constant contemplation of the root syllable "Na." Acquiring knowledge of the Vedas by this practice has been described as Aamnaaya and Samaamnaaya .

One meaning of **Chandas** is that it is knowledge which should be guarded in secret and propagated with care. The Vedas are also described as Chandas. The entire Sama Veda consists of Chandas.

Swaadhyayam refers to the process by which the Vedas have come down from generation to generation, through father to son, in genealogical succession. Acquisition of Vedic knowledge was not through books. It was transmitted from preceptor to disciple over the years. It is because this knowledge was handed down directly from preceptor to pupil, it has been described as Swaadhyaya.

Gama and Aagama are the names given to the inhaling and exhaling of the Lord's breath which were the origin of the Vedas. All in all, the Vedas represent the emanations from the breath of the Lord.

The great sages who listened to these mantras as revelations from the Divine found the key to them in eight basic letters. All the Vedic mantras with their musical rendering were remembered by reflecting on the eight letters: "A, Ka, Cha, Ta, Tha, Pa, Ya, Sa." The great seers fostered the Vedas by the use of these letters.

Vetthi ithi Vedah"; Knowing, knowledge is Veda. That is to say, man can know from the Vedas, the Code of Right Activity and the Body of Right Knowledge. The Vedas teach man his duties from birth to death. They describe his rights and duties, obligations and responsibilities in all stages of life - as a student, householder, recluse and monk. The stream of Indian culture always emphasised the authority of the Vedas as the supreme authority for deciding the values of human living.

The Vedas have emphasised that man will be truly human only when he lives upto human values and practices the good life. The Vedas have a universal outlook, embracing all that is noble and sacred. They have taught the principle of samatwa (equality) in respect of everything. They have proclaimed the concept of oneness. They taught men to face joy and sorrow with equal serenity.

The Vedas have been mainly concerned with the Pravritti Marga (the Path of Action). All the different branches of knowledge--physics, chemistry, botany, economics, music, etc - are covered by the Vedas. These are concerned with the external world. Hence the Vedas have been considered dualistic. Only the Upanishads have taught the Nirvritti Marga (the Path of Knowledge) by going within oneself. This means that, of the four Purusharthas, the four main goals of man. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha--the Vedas have been concerned with only the first three and Vedanta with Moksha.

The Vedas are the foundational scriptures of Humanity and the heritage of Mankind. The Vedas in general uphold Dharma, proclaim the reality, promote peace and harmony. The validity of the contents of the Vedas and injunctions as well can never be questioned, since they prescribe guidelines for the welfare of entire mankind.



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» May 2009 » September 2009 » December 2009 » March 2010
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