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Paper : **Vedic, Epic and Puranic Culture of India**
Module : **Vedangas**


ज्ञान-विज्ञान-विमुक्तये

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Component-I (B) – Description of module:

Subject Name	Indian Culture
Paper Name	Vedic, Epic and Puranic culture of India
Module Name/Title	Vedangas
Module Id	IC / VEPC / 03
Pre requisites	Knowledge in Vedic literature and its allied texts
Objectives	To know about the six vedangas and its significance
Keywords	Veda / Vedanga

E-text (Quadrant-I):

1. Introduction to Vedangas

The Vedic literature consists of 'Shruti' -revealed literature and 'Smriti' -memorized literature. Shruti literature consist of Vedas: Rig Veda -Collection of prayers, Yajur Veda -Sacrificial manual, Sama Veda -Mostly Rig Vedic hymns in musical form, Atharva Veda -Magical charms.

Each Veda has four parts: Samhita - essential part of a Veda containing hymns, Brahmanas-prose commentaries on Vedas with detailed observations on prayers and ceremonies, Aranyakas -texts to be read by Risrvi in forests as they deal with mystic meanings of Samhita texts and Upanishads -philosophical aspects which are to be taught by Acharyas to their trusted students .

Smriti literature consist of Vedangas, Upavedas, etc. which form supplementary sections of Vedic literature.

2. Vedic literature

The Vedic literature was mostly created by the Aryans. The Vedic literature consists of

'Shruti' (revealed) literature

And

'Smriti' (memorized) literature.

2.1. Shruti literature consist of **Vedas**: Rig Veda (Collection of prayers), Yajur Veda (Sacrificial manual), Sama Veda (Mostly Rig Vedic hymns in musical form), Atharva Veda (Magical charms).

Each Veda has four parts:

Samhita (essential part of a Veda containing hymns), Brahmanas (prose commentaries on Vedas with detailed observations on prayers and ceremonies), Aranyakas (texts to be read

by Risrvis in forests as they deal with mystic meanings of Samhita texts) and Upanishads (philosophical aspects which are to be taught by Acharyas to their trusted students).

2.2 Smriti literature consist of Vedangas, Upavedas, etc. which form supplementary sections of Vedic literature.

3. Vedangas

Vedangas literally mean the limbs of the Vedas. They are six in number. Just like the limbs of the body, they perform various supportive and augmenting functions in the study, preservation and protection of the Vedas and the vedic traditions.

The six Vedangas are Siksha, Chhanda, Vyakarana, Nirukta, Jyotisha and Kalpa.

Shiksha = phonetics, Vyakarana = grammar, Chandas = metre, Nirukta = etymology, Kalpa = ritual, Jyotishya = astronomy.

Upa Vedas (supplementary Vedas) are largely secular in nature.

Gandharva Veda = music, Shilpa Veda = sculpture, Ayur Veda = medicine, Dhanur Veda= archery or art of war Sutras (that guide people in various fields).

Grihya Sutras deal with domestic rituals Shrauta Sutras deal with public rituals Sulha Sutras deal with science of altars Dharma Sutras deal with customary law and practices.

The Vedangas are very important as illustrated by the following verse from Paniniya

छन्दः पादौ तु वेदस्य हस्तौ कल्पोऽथ पठ्यते ।

ज्योतिषामयनं चक्षुर्निरुक्तं श्रोत्रमुच्यते ॥

शिक्षा घ्राणं तु वेदस्य मुखं व्याकरणं स्मृतम् ।

तस्मात्साङ्गमधीत्यैव ब्रह्मलोके महीयते ॥

--- पाणिनीय शिक्षा 41,42

Vedangas compared to Limbs of Human Body

One who studies Vedas with the six-fold limbs as above reaches the abode of the Supreme.

VEDANGA	LIMBS COMPARED WITH
Chandah	Legs
Kalpa	Hands
Jyotisa	Eyes
Nirukta	Ears
Siksha	Nose
Vyakaranam	Face

3.1.Siksha:-

lays down the rules of phonetics – pronunciation / sounds / duration of utterance of each syllable – euphony. The goal is to achieve correct pronunciation and articulation through, akshara suddhi (syllable purity); svara suddhi (tonal / pitch purity – discussed in Vol. 1.2) and maatraa suddhi (durational purity), balam (force of articulation), samam (evenness) and santana: (continuity). Phonetics are most critical in the case of Vedic language, because, as was discussed in the article of the previous issue of the Journal (Vol. 1.2), we see that a change in sound results in completely different effects. Because of its importance, the first chapter of Taittiriya Upanishad – siksha valli - describes these six attributes in its very first section in the following verse:

शीक्षां व्याख्यास्यामः । वर्णस्वरः ।
मात्रा बलं । साम सन्तानः ।
इत्युक्त शीक्षाध्यायः ॥

(Refer to Vol. 1.2 for details of this mantra)

That is why sage Panini , the grammarian, gives in his "paanineeeya siksha", how much care should be exercised when chanting vedas:

व्याघ्री यथा हरेत् पुत्रान्
दंष्ट्राभ्यां च न पीडयेत् ।
भीत पतनादेताभ्यां
तद्धत् वर्णान् प्रयोजयेत् ॥

As the mother tiger (cat family) carries its young gripping it by its teeth (firm, so that cub does not fall, but gentle, so that it does not harm), the mantras must be chanted lucidly, un-blurred, un-faded and not too loud. Neither should they be casually mouthed nor spat in staccato tones !

The Sanskrit language has 51 letters, called Maatruka Maatru is the cosmic Mother and the 51 letters are in Her image. The Siksha Sastra says that these 51 letters represent the various parts of Her body and even define which one represents which

3.2. Vyakaranam

The most important exposition of Grammar is that of sage Panini which is in the form of sutras or aphorisms. It is known as ashtaadhyayi, because it has 8 chapters. There is an interesting story relating to the origin of the Panini Sutras. At the end of the Cosmic Dance, Lord Nataraja (Siva) clicked his damaru 9 times and 5 times (14 times). The dance was witnessed by Sanaka and other rishis. Sage Panini, also witnessed the dance through his "divya dhrushti" . With the 14 sounds produced from His damaru, Lord Siva gave birth to

the vyakarana sutras or Mahesvara sutras Refer Sanskrit Lesson of Vol. 1.1) . They are recited during the observance of Upakarma on Sravana Poonima.

The commentary on the Vyakarana is called Maha Bhashya written by Sage Patanjali. The other commentary was written by Vararuchi. These three - the Vyakarana and the two commentaries - are important texts in Vyakarana Sastra. Vyakarana propounds the Sabda Brahma Vaada – that Sound and Brahman are One - which is the basis of Nada Brahma Upasana (Vol. 1.2) – Music .

3.3. Chandas

Though the word chandas also means vedas themselves, the meaning here refers to the meter of vedic poetry. Rig and Sama vedas are fully in the form of verses, whereas, Yajur Veda has prose and poetry. A sloka or veda mantra is generally a quartet with four quarters or paada . Depending on the number of syllables in each of the paadas, we have different meters – anushtup (8 syllables), brihati (9) pankti (10) trishtup (11) ushnik (4 paadas of 7 syllable each = 28 syllables) – like that up to even 26 syllables to a paada. (Any meter beyond 26 syllables to a paada, is called dandakam.) The well known Gayatri Mantra has three paadas of 8 syllables each; the meter itself is known as gayatri since it has 24 syllables; however, when people perform japa, they recite it only as a 23 syllabled meter instead of , and so is called nicrut gayatri chandas.

Chandas helps us to ensure the form of the Mantra (by meter count). No alteration to this can be attempted since it would disturb the spiritual significance of the mantra itself!

Each mantra is dedicated to a Devata, has a specific chandas and has a Rishi who brought it to the world. That is the reason why we touch our head as we recite the name of the Rishi (symbolically placing his feet on our head), touch the nose when we recite the chandas (the guardian for the mantra is meter and so there is no life of the mantra without it; in the same way, there is no life without breath); touch our heart when reciting the name of the devata (to meditate upon the deity in our heart)

3.4. Nirukta is generally known as vedic dictionary or kosa. Amara Kosa is one of the popular sanskrit dictionaries. Dictionary is also called nighandu. Kosa is actually the etymology where each word is split into syllables and gives the root from which the word is derived with meaning. The root of a word is called dhaatu. In Sanskrit all words have roots.

3.5. Jyotisha deals with vedic astrology / astronomy. It was mainly designed to help in arriving at the most favorable time for the performance of vedic rituals; this is to indicate the measure of success or lack of it when vedic rituals are performed under the influence of a particular graha, nakshatra, tithi etc. It involves precise mathematical calculations concerning the transit of planets etc., and so mathematics is an integral part of it. Jyotisha sastra has three parts - skandha trayaatmakam. (the word skandha means main branch from the trunk of a tree) They are,

1. siddhanta skandham deals with trigonometry / arithmetic / algebra / geometry etc.
2. hora skandham : deals with the movement of planets and their effect on people etc.
3. samhita skandham deals with aspects like, the location of underground waters, designing and building houses, of omens, etc.

Jyotisha sastra covers principles of gravitation, rotation of earth etc. Famous astronomers like Arya Bhatta, Varahamihira and others have given beautiful discussions on these and other concepts.

The origin of creation is also calculated using astronomical principles; the samkalpam which we perform before doing any ritual is based on such calculations. (Details of these and similar concepts will be discussed in a future article).

3.6. Kalpa deals with the aspects inducing a person into vedic action. The mastery in the other 5 vedangas mentioned so far is aimed to perform the actions mentioned in kalpa successfully. In a way, it is like a manual which will give details like a) how a ritual should be done; b) what are the functions of brahmacharis, grihastas, sannyasis etc.c) what ritual involves which mantra, devata, materials d) how many priests should perform a given ritual, e) what vessel of what shape, size to be used etc.

Kalpa sastra (sutra) has been compiled by many sages like, Apasthamba, Bhodayana, Vaikhanasa, and others. In each of the veda recessions, there are two kinds of kalpa sutras – the srouta (named after sruti which means veda) sutra and the grihya sutra. They outline the forty rituals (garbhadana, pumsavana, seemantha, etc. – details of which will be covered in a future issue) to be performed from the time of formation of the embryo in the womb to the time of cremation of the body ! They also outline the eight Atma gunas (virtues like, compassion, tolerance, cleanliness etc.) Among the two sutras, srouta sutras describe the major sacrifices and the Grihya sutras describe the domestic rites. When we do abhivadanam to elders, we state what sutra we follow – Apasthamba, Bodhayana etc. These refer to Srouta sutras. In ancient times, the Srouta karmas were given greater importance than grihya karmas. In addition, there are other texts called, sulpa sutras, dharma sutras etc. Among the four vedas, the kalpa sutras of Atharva Veda (which itself is very less in practice), are not readily available.

4. Summary

These six sastras are known as vedangas or the organs (limbs) of the vedas. Our Rishis have done a very great service to humanity through such analytical and sophisticated approach to enable the understanding of the veda mantras. It is really sad that whatever little scholarship remains today in these subjects is fast deteriorating due to lack of adequate appreciation and encouragement. Let us all commit to change this trend for the better as a token of our gratitude to veda mata.