

Ancient Indian Knowledge

Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas & Upaniṣads — the foundation literature of Sanātana Dharma

Foundation literature of Hindu dharma; For the Hindus the foundation literature are not one or one dozen. They are in hundreds. The foundation literature of the Indian culture have been classified systematically. The ancient books are being continuously subjected to refining by addition, deletion, modification and correction, for updating by keeping the original books intact. The original contents are maintained as the base for all references. For those who are interested in learning the old versions, they can follow that and make their own contributions and commentaries.

Those who want to study the modern books, produced by addition, deletion, modification and correction (by many scholars), have the freedom to do so. Thus we have authentic most commonly referred 10,000 commentaries in Sanskrit and 1,00,000 sub commentaries in other languages for 1280 (there may be difference of opinion about this number) authentic foundation literature of Sanathana dharma

Date of composing these literature: Since Hindu dharma is actually of unknown origin, none knows clearly when these literature were composed. But there is a general agreement that these literature might have composed in the present style (even though they might have been existing earlier also) by 8000 BC onwards or so. The archeological evidence also agree to some extent to this figure. The Hindu literature is generally known as anaadi because its origin is not clearly known. It is also known as apourusheya which means beyond the capacity of human beings. Hence we cannot say when exactly it started composing and when it was over.

My opinion is that the composing of Hindu literature is still continuing and it is as per the rule of addition, deletion, modification and correction.

Authors of the literature: Unlike the literature of other religion, Hindu literature are composed by hundreds and thousands of Rushies from different places, at different period of time. Our Rushies knew pretty well that one book or one dozen books can not bring out all the knowledge required for human beings. Hence they decided to bring out literature on each subject and many Rushies contributed to make them up-to-date always. Our Rushies knew that one or one dozen Rushies cannot bring out all the required knowledge of the choice of the people, because knowledge is so vast and many have to contribute.

The knowledge created during a particular period of time, need not find application for all the time. Hence refining the existing knowledge is required. Otherwise it becomes obsolete. Hence the writing of Hindu literature is a process which continues even today and will have to continue for the coming many thousand years. No knowledge is final.

Ultimate aim of all these literature: All these Hindu literature are aimed to create iccha sakti, jnaana sakti, kriya sakti in each individual to lead a happy and useful life on earth and make heaven here itself. Among these Vedas are the most important class of Hindu

literature which include, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads. These are known as the direct Vedic literature. They are the base for all the Indian cultural books (Vaideeka saahitya)..

Vedas and their recensions: There are four Vedas. Rig Veda, Yajurveda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. Rig Veda has 25 recensions (sakhas branches) Yajurveda has 108 (100) recensions; Sama Veda has 1000 recensions and Atharva Veda has 50 recensions. This type of classification under different recensions cannot be seen in any other religious books. Recensions means 'Sakhas'. (Since Yajurveda has two streams Sukla Yajurveda and Krishna Yajurveda, in discussions, we use four + one Vedas = Rig Veda + Sukla Yajurveda, + Krishna Yajurveda + Sama Veda + Atharva Veda)

Brahmanas and Vedas: Brahmanas are classified under these four + one Vedas. The Brahmanas word has nothing to do with the caste. It sometimes mean that 'prose'. We say that 'this book is composed in Brahminical style' means, it is composed as prose. Brahmanas are books primarily written for conducting the yaagas. They are classified under each Veda. i.e. the Brahmanas connected with Rig Veda, Yajurveda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda.

Rigvedeeya Brahmanas: Aitareya brahmana composed by Rushi Maheedasa Aitareya. Sankhyayana Brahmana composed by Maharshi Sankhyayana. Kousheetaki brahmana is composed by Kousheetaki Maharshi.

Sukla Yajurvedeeya Brahmana: Sukla Yajurveda has only one brahmana namely Satha patha brahmana available in two versions. One with 100 chapters belonging to vaajasaneyee maadhyndina Yajurveda saakha and other having 104 chapters belonging to Kaanwa Yajurveda saakha.

Krishna Yajurvedeeya Brahmanas: Krishna Yajurvedeeya brahmanas are Thaitheeya brahmana and Maithraayaneeya brahmana. Thaitheeya Brahmana is supposed to be composed of Maharshi Yajnavalkya and the other one is composed by Maitreya Maharshi.

Samavedeeya Brahmanas: Samavedeeya brahmanas are many. Few among them are Jaimineeya brahmana, thaandya brahmana, aarsheya brahmana, shadvimsa brahmana, chaandokhya brahmana, saamavidhaana brahmana, abhootha brahmana, vamsa brahmana and samhithopanishad brahmana.

Atharva vedeeya brahmana: Atharva Veda has only one brahmana namely Gopatha brahmana. Gopatha word means deep / confidential / possessing in-depth meaning or message. It also means the foot step of Vedas because 'go' also has two meanings; cow and other meaning Veda.

Subject matter of the Brahmanas: The subject matter in almost all the Brahmanas is the explanation on how to perform yaagas. Some of the Brahmanas are part of the Vedas and some are separate books. As a continuation of the Brahmanas comes the aaranyakas.

The aaranyakas: Aranyakas are those literature which are very difficult to understand describing the rituals to be performed by the men who are moving to vanaprastha and

sanyasa. For each Veda, there are separate aaranyakas. Some of the aranyakas are continuation of the brahmanas and hence separate aranyakas may not be available for some Vedas. Aaranyakaas are also classified under each Veda like brahmana literature: Rigvedeeya aaranyakas are Aithareya aaranyaka and kousheethakee aaranyaka, Sukla Yajurveda has no aaranyaka, Krishna Yajurveda has Maithraayaneeya aaranyaka and thaithireeya aaranyaka. Sama Veda and Atharava Veda do not have aranyaka, even though their brahmanas contain subjects dealt in aaranyakas.

Upanishads and Vedanta

The fourth part of Vedic literature is the Upanishad. Since they are coming as the end/ last part of Vedic literature, they are known as 'Vedaanthaas' (means which are coming in the end of Vedas. There are many Upanishads of which 108 Upanishads are important and they are classified under four + one Vedas as follows.

Rigvedeeya Upanishads: Aithareya Upanishad, Kousheethakee Upanishad, Naada bindu Upanishad, Aathma bhodha Upanishad, Nirvaana Upanishad, Mulgala Upanishad, Akshamaalika Upanishad, Tripura Upanishad, Soubhaagya lakshmi Upanishad, Bahvrucha Upanishad. (total ten Upanishads)

Sukla yajurvedeeya upanishads: Eesaavasya Upanishad, Bruhadaaaranyaka Upanishad, Hamsa Upanishad, Parama Hamsa Upanishad, Subaala Upanishad, Manthrika Upanishad, Thrisikhi Braahmana Upanishad, Niraalamba Upanishad, Mandala Braahmana Upanishad, Advaya Upanishad, Thaaraka Upanishad, Bhikshuka Upanishad, Adhyaathma Upanishad, Muktika Upanishad, Thaaraasara Upanishad, Yajnavalkya Upanishad, S'aatyaayana Upanishad, Thuriyaatheetha avadhootha upanishad (Total eighteen upanishads)

Krishna Yajurvedeeya Upanishads: Kata Upanishad, Thaithireeya Upanishad, Brahma Upanishad, Kaivalya Upanishad, Swethaaswethara Upanishad, Garbha Upanishad, Mahanaaraayana Upanishad, Amruthabindu Upanishad, Amruthanaada Upanishad, Kaalaagnirudra Upanishad, Kshurika Upanishad, Sarvasaara Upanishad, Sukarahasya Upanishad, Thejobindu Upanishad, Dhyaana bindu Upanishad, Brahmavidya Upanishad, Yogathathwa Upanishad, Dakshinaamoorthy Upanishad, Skanda Upanishad, Saareerika Upanishad, Yogasikha Upanishad, Ekaakshara Upanishad, Akshi Upanishad, Avadhootha Upanishad, Katarudra Upanishad, Rudrahridaya Upanishad, Panchabrahma Upanishad, Praanaagni hotra Upanishad, Varaaha Upanishad, Yogakundalini Upanishad, Kalisantharana Upanishad, Saraswathee rahasya Upanishad (Total thirty two Upanishads)

Saamavedeeya Upanishads: Kena Upanishad, Chaandokhya Upanishad, Aarunee Upanishad, Maithraayane Upanishad, Maithreyee Upanishad, Vajrasoochika Upanishad, Yogachoodaamony Upanishad, Vasudeva Upanishad, Mahopanishad, Sanyaasa Upanishad, Avyakta Upanishad, Kundika Upanishad, Saavitri Upanishad, Jaabaala Upanishad, Darsana Upanishad, Rudraaksha jaabaala Upanishad (Sixteen Upanishads)

Atharva vedeeya Upanishads: Prasna Upanishad, Mundaka Upanishad, Maandukya Upanishad, Atharvas'ira Upanishad,, Atharvas'ikha Upanishad,, Bruhadjaabaala

Upanishad, Seetha Upanishad, S'arabha Upanishad, Mahaanarayana Upanishad, Raamarahasya Upanishad, Ramathaapini Upanishad, S'aandilya Upanishad, Paramahansa Upanishad, Annapoorna Upanishad, Soorya Upanishad, Aathma Upanishad, Paas'upatha Upanishad Parabrahma Upanishad, Thripurathaapini Upanishad, Devi Upanishad, Bhaavana Upanishad, Bhasma Upanishad, Ganapati Upanishad, Mahaavakya Upanishad, Gopalathaapini Upanishad, Sreekrishna Upanishad, Hayagreeva Upanishad, Datthathreya Upanishad, Garuda Upanishad, Narasimhapoorva thaapini Upanishad, Narasimha utara thapini Upanishad, Naarada parivraajaka Upanishad (Thirty two Upanishads).

VEDAS , BRAHMANAS AND ARANYAKAS

RIGVEDA

Rig-Veda is the oldest literature of human race. It has been composed by many Rishies and not one Rishi. The Rig Veda is so known because it is composed of Riks. Riks means two lines of poems/ mantras with very stringent sruthies / tones to chant. Each suktha may have two or more Riks in it. Those who compose the Veda mantras are known as Mantra drushtara: means who could see the Veda mantra. Majority of the names of Vedic Rishies are not known to us and we will definitely explain that. These mantras were composed in many years and not at a particular period. They might have got composed during a period of thousands of years.

The first part of the Rig-Veda appears in old Vedic Sanskrit and last part appears to be modern Sanskrit. In short there is an opinion that the first part and second part of Rig Veda mantra were composed in slightly different Sanskrit style. The composers of Vedas : Rishies who composed the Veda mantra are known as mantra drushtaara. These mantras were classified by the Rishies of Veda Vyasa kula (clan). I.e. they classified/ rearranged all the Veda mantra sookthas available during then, to the present form as seen now in Rig-Veda.

Majority of the Veda hymns are composed by the Rishies of Viswamitra kula, Angeerasa kula, Athreya kula and Bharadwaaja kula and Kanwakula. All the hymns are adoring the Vedic devathas. Rigveda is composed almost fully in poetical style.

Sakhas of Rig-Veda: There are 25 sakhas for Rig-Veda. These sakhas are wrongly interpreted in English as branches. No ! They are recensions. Out of the 25 sakhas only four are available now, the remaining are lost for ever. Each saakha is known in the name of respective Rishies. They are Saakala saakha, Bhaashkala saakha, Saankhyaayana saakha, and Kousheethakee saakha are most important and they are composed or organized in the present status by Saakala, Bhaashkala, Saankhyayana and Kousheethakee Maharushies.

Major difference among these Vedic recensions of Rig-Veda are in the arrangements of some mantras (Riks) and also in the organization of the Parisishta mantras. (parisishta mantras are those mantras which are not strictly part of Vedas but they are chanted in

between Veda mantra sookthas as a custom. In different sakhas, in some places synonyms are also used like baahubhyam is changed to hasthaabhyam and like that. Arrangements of the mantras in different sakhas: The Rig-Veda mantras are arranged in the saakala saakha as mandala krama. All the mantras of the Rig-Veda has been included in ten mandala.

In Bhaashkala saakha the arrangement is in ashtaka as the bunch of eight chapters. There are totally 64 chapters and they are arranged in 8 ashtakas. The Saakala saakha of Rig-Veda has 193816 words which are composed by 397265 letters. There are 10552 Riks (stanzas) which are composed using 193816 words and they are organized in 2024 vargas. These many vargas are included in 64 chapters (adhyaayaas) and eight each of this form ashtakas and hence Saakala saakha of Rig-Veda has 64 adhyaayaas or 8 ashtakas.

Arrangements of the sookthas in mandalas: All these mantras included in 64 chapters (8 ashtakas) of Saakala Saakha are classified in a different method in the Bhaaskala sakha of Rigveda (with minor variations) into 10 mandalas. The first mandala has 191 sookthas, then in the order from 2nd to 10th mandalas, respectively 43, 62, 58, 87, 75, 104, 103, 114 and 191 sookthas are present. The number of Riks in each suktha or each mandala is vary significantly. Say for example in the first mandala there are 2006 Riks included 191 sookthas and in the last Mandala has 191 sookthas but consists of only 1754 Riks.

Names of the Rishies of the Veda mantras: We might have heard the names of some of the Rishies who have composed our puranas, itihisas etc. But we might not have heard the names of majority of the Rishies who composed Veda mantra. Some of the names are special. However if a researcher would like to go deep into the subject of the 'names' of these Vedic Rishies, he can understand that these names have very special meaning or message. Given below are the names of Rishies who composed Rig Veda.

The names are presented here just for information: Kanwa, Sunssespha, Aangeeras, Praskanwa, Savya Aangeeras, Nodha Gouthama, Gouthama rahoogana, Kuthsa angeeras, Kasyapa, Dhairghathamas, Romasa, Daivodaasi, Ouchadthya, Agasthya, Lopaamudra, Gurthsamada sounaka, Viswamitra gaadhina, Rushabha viswamitra, Utkeela kaathya, Katho viswamitra, Gaathee kousika, Bharatha, Prajapati viswamitra, Vamadeva gouthama, Thrasadasyu, Athreya, Kumara athreya, Vrushojaana, Vasusrutha, Isha athreya, Gaya athreya, Suthambhara athreya, Dharuna angeeras, Pururathreya, Vaprirathreya, Prayaswantha athreya, Sasa athreya, Viswasaama athreya, Gopayana, Loupaayana, Vasooyava athreya, Bharatha Raja, Viswamithrarathreya, Babhrurathreya, Gaathurathreya, Prabhuvasurangeeras, Athri bhouma, Avathsaara kasyapa, Sadaavuruna athreya, Prathikshathra athreya, Achanaana athreya, Bharadhwaaja, Bharhaspathya, Suhotra bharadwaja, Bharadhwaja, Samyu bruhaspati, Gargya bharadwaja, (Many Rishies of Bharadwaaja kula, Maitravaruna, Vasisthaputra, Viswamanu, Vaivaswatha manu, Medhathithi kanwa, Syaavascha athreya, Naabhaka kanwa, Syaavascha athreya, Viroopa angeeras, Thrisoka kanwa, Vasosavya, Ghora karna, Bhaga praagaatha, Pragaatha kanwa, Purahanma angeerasa, Haryatha praaagaatha, Gopavana athreya, Kurusutri kanwa, Kruthsa bhargava, Ekadhyunoundhas, Kuseedikanwa, Krishna aangeeras, Nrumedha

angeeras, Thirascheera angeeras, Repha kasyapa, Nomobhargava, Jamadagnir bhargava, Sobhari kanwa, Medhathithi kanwa, Hiranyasthoopa angeeras, Darddyachyutha, Bindhurangeeras, Nidhruvee kasyapa, Ambareesha, Yama, Yamee, Yamavaivaswatha, Yaamayatha, Vimada aindra, Vasuka aindra, Kavasha ailoosha, Lusadhana, Abhithaapa sourya, Ghosha kaakshivati, Suhashtya ghousesha, Saptha guru angeeras, Agni souchika, Gayaplaatha, Vasu karna, Vasukra, Aayaasya angeerasa, Sumitra Vandhyaswa, Beruhaspati Lounkhya, Viswakarma bhouvana, Manyuthaapasa, Suryasaavitri, Vrushtikaama, Vaikhanasa, Mulgala bharmaswa, Durmitra, Vairoopa, Agniyutha, Bhikshurangeerasa, Atharvana, Vasishta, Hiranyagarbha, Vagamdhruni, Kusika, Parameshti, Sakapootha, Paijavana, Aapsathya, Brahma, Nainruthi, Vairraaja, Vathayana, Aghamarshana, Samvanana, are the Vedic Rishies who composed Rigveda manthra (I habve tried to included almost all the names. Still there can be some omissions). Before chanting veda mantra everyone read/chant the names of the Rishi who composed the manthra, then the chandas (chandas is based on the number of letters in each Rik/ mantra in the suktha) and also the Vedic deity of adoration (the deity of the manthra). Example : Gaadhino viswamitra Rishi,Anushtub chanda: mitro devata....then the Veda mantra is to be chanted. Here the author of the manthra is Gaadhina viswamitra, The chandas is anushtub and the Vedic Deity is mitra (Sun). Aapasthamba Rushi, Jagati chanda Agnirdevata... Here the name of the Rishi, the chandas and the devatha are given in the order. So it is easy to know the name of the composer of each manthra. There are many mantras composed by the same Rishi. There are also mantras composed by the family members of the same Rishi. In the Rigveda text itself the names of the composer of each manthra are given and their associated texts.

Courtesy: Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan, Indian Institute of Scientific Heritage