CHAPTER 1

Short Note On Vedas
A SHORT NOTE ON VEDAS

Sanskrit literature is unique among the literatures of the world, ancient or modern. It preserves the earliest specimens of the literary art of the humanity. The Vedas are the earliest literary record of the Aryan race. The vedic literature not only stands at the beginning of the Indian literature but is also the first full religious and literary account of the Indo-Aryan people. The Hindus have received this religious literature through revelation. These are direct intuitional revelations and are held to be “Apaurusheya” or entirely superhuman, without any author in particular.

1.1 The Term Veda

The term “veda” comes from the root word “Vid” ‘to know’. It can be also derived from “Vid” “to exist” and “Vid” “to reflect”. The word “veda” means knowledge. When applied to scripture, it signifies a book of knowledge. The Vedas have provided the foundation for the scriptures of the Hindus. The Veda is the storehouse of Indian Wisdom and is a memorable glory which man can never forget till eternity.

1.2 The unique glory of the Vedas

Vedas are called by various names in later Vedic literature such as Sruti, Amnaya, Traye, Nigama etc. It is called “Sruti” “heard” because in the preliterate society the entire text was composed, remembered and handed down orally from father to son or from poet or priest or preceptor to
disciples among the twice born. It contains everything in it. Hence Manu says,

"\(^{\wedge}\text{वेदोज्ञेभिऽ धर्ममूलम्}\)"

"सर्व ज्ञान मयो हि स:
सर्व वेदां प्रसिद्धिं"

The Vedas represent the spirited experiences of the Rishis of yore. The Rishi is only a medium or an agent to transmit to people the intuitional experiences that he received. The truths of the Vedas are revelations. All the other religions of the world claim their authority as being delivered by special messengers of God to certain persons, but the Vedas do not owe their authority to any one. They themselves are the authority as they are eternal and as they are knowledge of the Lord. Lord Brahma, the creator, imparted the divine knowledge to the Rishis or seers. The Rishis disseminated the knowledge. The Vedic rishis were great people who had realized themselves and had direct intuitive perception of Brahman or the Truth. They were inspired writers.

1.3 Division of the Vedas

The Veda does not mean one single literary work or a complete collection of a certain number of books but a whole great literature, which arose in the course of many centuries. The devotees have found the Vedas so captivating that they could maintain nothing other than the Vedas, which are the voice of God! The philosophers have found the Vedas as the storehouse of early philosophic speculation from which different philosophic schools have sprung.

Short Notes on Veda
"Veda" representing a particular form of literature, signifies four literary texts known as the Rigveda Samhita, the yajurveda Samhita, the Samaveda Samhita and the Atharva Veda Samhita. The word "Samhita" means "collection". None of the four books is the production of a single poet or sage. The mantras of so many sages or seers have been compiled in each book hence it is called a Samhita.

Among the four Vedas, the Yajurveda is again divided into Sukla and Krishna Yajurveda. The Krishna or Taittiriya is the older book and Sukla or the Vajasaneya is a later revelation to sage Yajnyavalkya from the resplendent Sun God.

The Rigveda is divided in to twenty-one sections, the Yajurveda in to one hundred and nine sections, the Sama Veda into one thousand sections and the Atharva-Veda into fifty sections. In all, the whole Veda is thus divided into one thousand one hundred and eight recensions.

The Rigveda Samhita is the oldest of all. Its style, language and the tone are most beautiful and mysterious. Its immortal Mantras embody the greatest truths of existence, and it is perhaps the greatest treasure in all the scriptural literature of the world. Its priest is called as a Hotri.

The Yajurveda Samhita is mostly in prose and is meant to be used by the Adhvaryu, the Yajurvedic priest, for superfluous explanations of the rites in sacrifices, supplementing the Rig-Vedic Mantras.
The *Samaveda Samhita* is mostly borrowed from the *Rigveda Samhita*, and is meant to be sung by the *udgatri*, the *samavedic* priest, in sacrifices.

The *Atharvaveda samhita* is meant to be used by the *brahman*, the *Atharvavedic* priest, to correct the mispronunciations and wrong performances that may accidentally be committed by the other three priests of the sacrifice.

### 1.4 Classification of Vedic literature

The Vedic literature consists of four different classes of literary work. They are *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Sutras*. This classification suits four stages of a man in his life.

**Samhitas**: *Samhitas* are collection of hymns, prayers, incantations, benedictions, and sacrificial formulas.

**Brahmanas**: Voluminous prose texts which contain theological matter, especially observations on sacrifice and the practical or mystical significance of the separate sacrificial rites and ceremonies.

**Aranyakas**: "*Forest texts*" and "*Upanishad*" "Sacred Doctrines" which interpret philosophy of the original text.

**Sutras**: The sutras are compendious treatises composed in an extremely concise style of prose dealing with Vedic ritual on the one hand and with customary law on the other.

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The main object of the Sutras is to supply a short survey of the sum of the scattered details. They are not concerned with the interpretation of ceremonial or custom but aim at giving a plain and methodical account of the whole course of the rites or practices with which they deal. They are marked for their utmost brevity.

Besides the four told division as Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva there is yet another classification, a three fold one. According to which Veda is described as Trayi.

This division is very ancient one. This description as Trayi has however deluded by some scholars into thinking that Atharva Veda, which is not mentioned in this context, must have been a later collection. In most of the old works "Trayi Vidya" "the three fold knowledge" is mentioned which includes the Rig, Yajur and Samaveda. Atharvaveda is regarded as the later work. But actually according to the Trayi classification, mantras are of three types Ric-Mantras composed in metrical forms with a sense complete in themselves, Sama-Mantras that are sung are called Saman and the rest are called Yajur. As the mantras of Atharva Veda are composed in metrical form, they do come under the group of Ric Mantras.

The of पुरुष सूक्त of Rig veda X. 90.9 clearly shows that there were four Vedas in the beginning and they were revealed together out of the cosmic sacrifice.

"तत्समायायुज्ज्वलेन ध्रुवं सामानि जडिष्टे।

छन्दोसि जडिष्टे तत्समायायुज्ज्वलाय।"
“From that sacrifice, to which the universal oblation was offered the Richas and Samans were produced from him the meters were born, from him the Yajur was born

The बृहदारण्यक Upanishad confirms this in I. 2.5.

३चौ यजूषि, सामानि छन्त्यासि

The अथवेद itself enumerates the four Vedas in X.7.20

“यस्मादृश्चो अपातकश्चर्वजयस्मादपाकष्णै ।
सामानि यस्य लोगन्यत्वावहिगरसो मुखयु -- -- ।।”

The Rigveda IV.58.3 refers to

“चतवारि शृङ्ग त्रियो अस्य पात्या
ढे शीर्षे सता हस्तासो अस्य ।”

Commenting on this Yaskacharya writes चतवारि शृङ्गेन्ति वेदा वा ऐत उक्ता:

XIII.7 Nirukta

Also in Rig Veda I.164.45

चतवारि वाकपरिभाव विहानि

We have a reference to the speech in the context of the four Vedas. So, to sum up, the Samhitas are four in number while the mantras are three fold.

All the four Vedas have Sakhas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. The following table shows these individually.
Vedas

Rgveda
- शाक्त वाण्डल
  - कपिष्टल तत्त्वितक गठक मैवणि
    - ऐंत्रिय शंकावान अर चापीतकी
      1. ऐंत्रियारण्यक
      2. काशिकारण्यक
      3. शाक्त वाण्डल
  - सूक्ष्म शुल्क

Yajur Veda
- कुष्ट शुल्क
  - कपिष्टल तत्त्वितक गठक मैवणि
    - ऐंत्रिय शंकावान अर चापीतकी
      1. ऐंत्रियारण्यक
      2. काशिकारण्यक
      3. शाक्त वाण्डल
  - राजावुमणीय
    - तत्त्वकर
    - तत्त्वमी

Samaveda
- कूलुम
  - राजावुमणीय
    - तत्त्वकर
    - तत्त्वमी

Atharva Veda
- लेशनक पैप्लाद
  - गोष्ठ ब्राह्मणा
  - नो आरण्यका

Upanishad
- चाँदनीय
- केन
  1. प्रसन
  2. सुपंचक
  3. मांधुस्क
1.5 Contents of the Vedas

According to our tradition, when God creates the world he reveals the Vedas for the welfare of the world and when the ends the creation, He takes them back again. Some people say that all human knowledge is available in the Vedas in symbolic form and that the knowledge of all our discoveries and inventions are already contained in the Vedas. It is true that the Vedas are not mere books of some magical chants. They are loaded with spiritual knowledge.

The Vedas are very exhaustive scriptures. Each Veda contains several sections and thousands of hymns. Some of the vedic hymns, especially the hymns of the *Rig Veda* are considered to be at least 6000-8000 years old.

*RigVeda Samhita* is the oldest of all the works of vedic literature. It consists of a collection of 1028 hymns or *Suktas*, which are divided into ten books or Mandalas. Out of the ten mandalas the oldest hymns are found in the books II to VII, which are called the “Family books” because each book is ascribed to a particular family of seers. *Rishi Gritsamada Vishwamitra, Vamadeva, Atri, Bharadvaja and Vasishta* are associated with the Family books. Book VIII is ascribed to the race of *Kanvas* and *Angiras* ascribed to book IX, which glorifies the drink of *Soma*. Books X and I are composed with diversified elements.
The Atharva Veda was recognized as the fourth Veda during the later Vedic period. It contains hymns that deal mostly with practical and philosophical aspects of human existence. The hymns deal with such themes as social conduct, success in trade and agriculture, human welfare and such practical matters.

_Atharva Veda_ is the Veda of the _Atharvans_. According to Prof. Winternitz the word _Atharvan_ means priest in general or fire priest. In this Veda we find holy magic for securing well-being and spells for causing various types of harms to the adversary. These later are the practices that have been named as _Ghora_ or _Angiras_ rites. The Veda is also known as _Atharva Angirasa_ which means that it refers to a work that was used both to curse and bless. Bless comes from the _Atharva_ side and curse comes from the _Angirasa_ side. In later times kings were advised to have in employment an _Atharvan_ priest. _Atharvan, Angiras_ and _Brigu_ are the three seers associated with _Atharva Veda_ and _Rig Veda_.

The geographical conditions, the division of society and the worshiping of Gods in spite of natural phenomenon prove that _Atharva Veda_ belong to a period which is later than that of the _Rig Veda_. This is divided into twenty bocks called _Kandas_, out of which eighteen is considered to be genuine.
1.6 Antiquity of the Vedas

We regard the Vedas as eternal and in *Rig Veda* itself it is said to have originated from the sacrifice. Thus the verse X. 90.9

"तत्स्माद्वजातसर्वहुतः ऋषचिमां जविरि छन्दकि जविरि तत्स्माद्वजस्तत्स्माद्यायत्त॥"

The opinion of the most of the people is that *Rig Veda* stands out to be the oldest literary monument of the human race. But this statement remains vague.

There are different lines of approach for determining the age of the *Rig Veda*. We can ascertain the age of the Vedas from the point of view of linguistic data, geographical conditions, archaeological evidences and astronomical evidences.

The earliest scholars generally hold that the Vedas belong to a very remote antiquity when man first gave expression to poetic thought. The first attempt at determining approximately the chronology of vedic literature was made by Prof. Maxmuller in 1859, who put forward a tentative scheme of chronology based mostly on subjective consideration and prompted by the great prejudice felt by the European scholars generally against admitting any great antiquity for the Vedas. Therefore the endeavor of most European scholars has been to show that the mantras could have been composed before 1400 B.C.

It is well known fact that the Vedas are pre-Buddhist and even the *Sutra* literature is anterior to Buddhist that derives many ideas from the *Upanishads* and makes references to the Brahmanas and the Vedas.

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Because the Buddha attained nirvana somewhere in 548 B.C, Vedic literature existed before 6th century B.C. Now we know that the vedic literature is grouped under three distinct groups from the point of style and language – That is Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads. The philosophical thoughts contained in the Upanishads are not the result of a few years or a few decades. It must have taken at least 200 years for these accumulated thoughts according to Max Muller and therefore may be placed before the date of Buddha i.e. 600 – 800 B.C. Thus the Brahmanas that are earlier than that may be placed between 800-1000 B.C. and the Vedas occupy a period between 1000-1200 B.C.

The “Vedas” might not be of one period as it is clear from the statement of “older and newer sages”.

अनि: पूर्वीपि ऋषिपरिरद्धः नूतनन्तरः।

Rg.I.1.2

May that Agni who is to be celebrated by both ancient and modern sages conduct the Gods hither.

Prof. Max Muller assigns them the date 1200 B.C. It is essential to note here that Max Muller never regarded this chronology of vedic literature as a proved one but he took it as a mere suggestion. After words he called this estimation too low and named the period from 1500-1200 B.C. as the period of composition of vedic hymns.

It is clear, therefore, that this was merely a hypothesis but in course of time this dating came to be regarded as a definite fact. And there are also scholars who tenaciously cling to this date as the most probable scheme of
the chronology of the vedic literature. Moreover there is a tendency of the Europeans to reduce the antiquity of the Vedas and they do not think that it can be earlier than the one suggested by Max Muller.

However, Panini who is not later than 5th century B.C. deals with a language that is markedly different from that of the Vedas and Brahmanas. Before Panini, Yaska too in the first chapter of his Nirukta remarks that there were sages to whom, the Vedas were revealed and they by means of their intuitive knowledge taught the text to the next generation and the second generation handed them on to the third generation but the later generations declining the oral instructions for want of intuition required the text which could explain to them the vedic meaning and other things connected with it. And as a result there came into being the six Vedangas.

*Yaska*, says in his Nirukta “समान्य : समान्त :”, ‘A list of vedic words has been prepared’.

This shows that there were words which were difficult and which came down traditional, and later on the need for explaining these words was felt, with the result, the Nirukta came into being.

The remark of *Yaska* shows that there was a great gulf between the time of *Rig Veda* and his own time, and at the modest estimate it must not be less than 1000 years and the composition of hymns was a continuous process which covers a period at least few centuries and it may go back to 1600 B.C. Thus the dating of Max Muller is unsatisfactory.
In the excavations of *Harappa and Mohenjadaro*, which belong to 3000 B.C., we find the phallic emblem, pointing to the prevalence of phallus worship. When we study the four *Samhitas* we find that the worship of Siva is not clear in *Rig Veda* where God Rudra occupied a significant position and also we do not find identification between Rudra and the Siva. Moreover Phallus worship is denounced in *Rig Veda*.

“मा शिवम् बैवा अपि: न ऋतुं गु: ।”

“May not those who worship phallus enter our sacred places”.

This indicates the gradual evolution of Phallus worship. In *Yajurveda* Phallus worship is very important in the *Asvamedha* sacrifice and we also find a hymn of praise on Siva in *Satapatha Brahmana* and in later literature also. It can be suggested that Indus civilization represents a state, which can equitable to the state of *Brahmana* period and thus the date of the Vedas would go back to 3000 B.C.

Two scholars working quite independently in different countries carry the vedic age much earlier than the one suggested by Max Muller. These scholars are Herman Jacobi and Bala Gangadhar Tilak.

Prof. Jacobi gives two arguments with astronomical evidences. In Brahmanas there is a statement that *krithikas* were to raise exactly at the eastern point from which they never swerved and the experts in astronomy tell us that this was the position of constellation in the sky in 2500 B.C., In Rig Veda we find that the position of *krithikas* as stated in *Brahmanas* with reference to the time of vernal equinox (21st March) is occupied by “Orian” “*Mrigasiras*” according to the precession of equinoxes i.e., moving away
from equinoctial points with reference to constellations, it would have taken a period of 2000 years for *krithika* to occupy the point at the vernal equinox, which was occupied by Mrigasiras at the time of Rig Veda, and this fixes the date of *Rig-veda* as 4500 B.C.

Another point is that of “Dhruva star” which is the brighter one approaching the northern point. According to the astronomers a star of first magnitude, which could have occupied the position close to, northern point should be designated as pole star “*Alfa Draconia*”. It took this position around 2500 B.C., *Alfa Draconia* shown by the bridegroom to the bride in the *Grihaya sutras* according to Indian marriages ceremonies. So, if *Grihyasutra* period is 2500 B.C. then the vedic age must go a period which is 2000 years earlier to this date i.e., 4500 B.C.

This theory of Jacobi startled the European scholars and Balagangadhar Tilak too fixes this date. Tilak goes further back, because of the reference of “*Punarvasu*” constellation in Rig Veda, to 6500 B.C., and he fixes the home of Aryans as *Arctic region*.

Hence in this way we can come to a conclusion that the Vedas might have been revealed around 7000 B.C., approximately.