

CHAPTER-I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE *ATHARVAVEDA SAMHITĀ*

1.1. Names of the *Atharvaveda*:

There are four Vedas in Sanskrit literature viz., *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda*. In *Atharvaveda*, this *Veda* has been mentioned after the names of the three other Vedas¹. The *Atharvaveda* is also known as *Atharvāṅgirasah*²-a name which indicates the close relation of this *Veda* with the two ancient families of priests viz., *āṅgiras* and *atharvan*³. The first family of priests is considered as mythical and the later one is a family of priests 'who are related to the gods'⁴. According to Bloomfield the word *atharvan* stands for holy charms whereas the word *āṅgiras* means witchcraft i.e., black magic⁵. The later name is also connected to hostile sorcery known as *āṅgirasa*. According to Kauśika the meaning of the word *āṅgiras* is *ābhicāra* or *ghora* and the 5th *kalpa* of the *Atharvaveda* goes by the names *Āṅgirasakalpa*, *Abhicāra kalpa* and

¹ cf., *yasmāḍrco apātakṣan yajuryasmādapākaṣan*
sāmāni yasya lomānyatharvāṅgiraso mukhaṁ
skambhaṁ taṁ brūhi katamaḥ svideva saḥ|| X.7.20.

² *ṛk yajuḥ sāmabhirā juṣṭam atharvāṅgirasa tadā* | *Mbh.*12.322,37

³ cf., also. *AV.*, XI.6.13

⁴ cf., *ātharvaṇam ... devabandhum*, *AV.*,V.11.11

⁵ Bloomfield, M., *Hymns of the Atharvaveda*, *SBE*, Vol -42, Introduction, Delhi, 1987, pp. XVIII, XIX.

*Vidhānakalpa*⁶. In the *Atharvaveda*, the *āṅgīrasa* Mantras are used for warding off enemies⁷.

These two different names signify two different qualities of this *Veda*⁸. This *Veda* is popularly known as *Atharvāṅgīrasa Samhitā* in later Vedic literature too⁹. In later times the use of some other names of this *Veda* came into vogue. One is *Bhṛgavāṅgīrasaḥ*¹⁰, The Bhṛgus too are fire priests. Another name *Brahmaveda* perhaps came into use because of the speculative nature of this *Veda*¹¹. This name also signifies religious content of this *Veda*. This *Veda* is said to belong to Brahmā, the chief priest of the sacrificial council (*yajña samsad*) of the Vedas. It is considered that Brahmā is expert in all four Vedas and has outstanding knowledge in *Atharvaveda*, which contains all that, which are separately found in the four Vedas. This *Veda* is primarily related to the duties of this priest and therefore, it is considered as *Brahmaveda*¹². *Atharvaveda* is also known as *Chandoveda*¹³ and also as *Mahīveda*¹⁴. In *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.8.14.1-4 it receives the name *Kṣatraveda* and in the *Atharvaveda* XI.6.14 it is

⁶ Bloomfield, M., *Atharvaveda and The Gopatha Brahmana*, Allahabad, 1975, p.8
cf., *RV*.I.121.3;

⁷ *AV*.,II.12.5; III.21.8

⁸ See *GB*., 1.2.21; 1. 5.10. where two qualities of the *Atharvaveda* one ‘auspicious’ and one ‘terrible’ are distinguished.

⁹ *ŚB*., 13.4.3.7; *GB*., 1.20 etc.

¹⁰ *etadvai bhūyīṣṭhaṁ brahma yad bhṛgavāṅgīrasaḥ|GB*., 1.3.4

¹¹ *cf.*, Bloomfield. M., *Hymns of the Atharvaveda*, *SBE*, Vol -42, Introduction, Delhi, 1987, p. XLIII; *cf.*, *AV*. V.19.1,2

¹² *TS*., 7.3.14; *TB*.,2.3.10.1. *ŚB*., 11.5.8.3 ; *brahmaveda eva sarvam| GB*., 1.5.15

¹³ *AV*., XI. 7.24

¹⁴ Karambelkar, V.W., *The Atharvavedic Civilization*, Introduction, Nagpur, 1959, pp., 2,3 ; See *AV*., X.7.14

referred to as *Bhaiṣajyaveda*. The above mentioned names give a clear idea about the status of the *Atharvaveda*. But there arises a question as to why this *Veda* is always commonly known as *Atharvaveda*. In this regard Karambelkar says as follows—“*Atharvāṅgiraṣḥ* was the most original name of this *Veda*, with every probability, for it not only includes the names of the two ancient mythical sages but also represents their very characteristic representations and contributions. In later period the name *Bhṛgu* replaced the name *Atharvan* and the *Atharvaveda* came to be known as *Bhṛgavāṅgiraṣaḥ* and finally the title *Atharvāṅgiraṣa* was shortened into the convenient and heady title “*Atharvaveda*” which is now in vogue.”¹⁵

1.2. Recensions of the *Atharvaveda*:

According to tradition, *Atharvaveda*¹⁶ consists of nine ‘schools’, on the basis of its number of hymns or their ritualistic employment by the practitioners of Atharvaṇic Mantras. These nine schools or recensions of the *Atharvaveda* are the *Paippalāda*, *Tāṇḍya*, *Mauda*, *Śaunaka*, *Jājala*, *Jalada*, *Brahmaveda*, *Devadarśin*, and *Cāraṇavaidya*¹⁷. Among them seven existed only by the name. The texts of these Śākhās have not been found. Therefore, it seems that the material originally collected by the Atharvavedins was already at an early date had split up into two versions. One is *Paippalāda* founded by Pippalāda or

¹⁵ Karambelkar, *op. cit.*, pp.,2-3

¹⁶ Bloomfield, M., *The Atharvaveda and The Gopatha Brahmana*, Allahabad, 1975., p.11

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.11-15

Pippalādī,¹⁸ and the other one is Śaunakīya, founded by Śaunaka¹⁹. The division of the recensions is not only based on the arrangement of the contents but also on the contents themselves. The *Paippalāda* text of the *Atharvaveda* has more than one hundred stanzas including some extra materials which are not found in the Śaunakīya recension²⁰. On the other hand, Śaunakīya recension has a *padapāṭha*, a *samhitāpāṭha*, two Prātisākhya and some Aṅukramaṇis²¹. The text of the Śaunakīya recension is accented like *Rgveda* except for a few metrical portions. In it there are 20 books (*Kāṇḍa*), each of which is divided into Anuvākas and Sūktas²². The Śaunakīya recension of this *Samhitā* is considered to be a systematic and important *Samhitā*. The *Paippalāda* recension has not been properly preserved and systematically arranged and is not accented.

The Śaunakīya recension of the *Atharvaveda* has 5038 hymns according to Whitney²³. The commentary of Sāyaṇa is available on this *Samhitā*. It is considered that the books I- XVIII are undoubtedly the oldest compositions. These are arranged according to certain numerical principles. The first three great divisions i.e. I-VII, VIII-XII and XIII-XVIII are regarded as the original

¹⁸ Karambelkar., *op. cit.* .,p.27

¹⁹ *cf.*, Bhattacharyya, D., *The Fundamental Theme of The Atharvaveda.*, Poona, 1968, p.22,

²⁰ *cf.*, Gonda., J., *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol.I., p.272, Otto Harrassowitz Wiesbaden, 1977 ; See L.C. Barret, in JAOS, 46 p.8.

²¹ Vishva Bandhu, *Atharvavedapāṭhānukramaṇī*, Hoshiarpur, 1964; *Atharvavedīya Brhat-Sarvānukramaṇikā*, Hoshiarpur, 1970.

²² Whitney, *Atharvaveda Samhitā*, ed., Joshi, K.L., Vol. I, Delhi, 2009, p.xiii

²³ *ibid.*, p.xiv

nucleus. The arrangement of these divisions is based on basically two principles viz., the variation of the subject-matter and length of the *Sūktas*²⁴. The first division consists of short hymns of miscellaneous, but generally magical subjects. In the hymns of the books I-V number of Mantas are 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and in books VI and VII are 3 and 2 per *Sūkta* respectively, but the constant factor is that the minimum number of stanzas is 4 per *Sūkta*. In the first 13 books the hymns include 4-12 Mantras per *Sūkta*. But books VI and VII have shorter hymns too. These seven books contain hymns likes, sacrificial hymns for social and family welfare, and some magical hymns meant for destruction of rivals and enemies. Books VIII-XII contain hymns of philosophical and cosmogonic character. Books XIII-XX consist of some hymns considered as supplementary in character.

1.3 Contents of the *Atharvaveda*:

It is true that this *Veda* consists of many magical formulas. There is no clear distinction between the benevolent and malevolent elements, between materials derived from the atharvans and those originating among aṅgirasas which are generally called as sorcery, and are some what related to the domestic rites i.e. *Gṛhya* rites. This *Veda* differs from the other three Vedas because in this *Veda* magic has received considerable recognition. However, there are in it

²⁴ Bloomfield. M., *The Atharvaveda And The Gopatha Brahmana*, Allahabad, 1975, pp. 38

many passages which are ritualistic in nature without being magical²⁵. Again some are not connected with rituals at all. It may be noted in this connection that there is no systematic division and definite subject matter in the first twelve Kāṇḍas, than last two again deal with miscellaneous topics. In this context it is very important to state that the entire content of the *Atharvaveda Samhitā* cannot be generalised under terms like ‘sorcery’, ‘witchcraft’ or ‘magic’. This fact has indeed been pointed out by Gonda as follows- “It would be incorrect to describe the *Atharvaveda Samhitā* as a collection of magical formulas.....The difference between this *Veda* on the one hand and the *R̥gveda* and *Yajurveda* on the other as regards ‘magic’ lies in the degree of its prominence and applicability”. Gonda has further pointed out that the magical rites performed to cure diseases by exorcising demons were but ‘symbolical practices’²⁶. In this connection one may also refer to the view of Adhikari who has nullified the idea that ‘the chief aim of this book is “to curse”’. Adhikari further affirms that ‘It is academically indiscreet to label the *Atharvaveda* as a *Veda* of magical formulae.’²⁷ One may here further look into the view of Bali who has not included *ābhicārikāni* in his

²⁵ Bloomfield., M., *The Atharvaveda And The Gopatha Brahmana*, Allahabad, 1975, p.69

²⁶ Gonda, pp.,277 and 279

²⁷ T.N.,Adhikari, *Ātharvana Priests and Abhicāra : Some introspection*, *Vedic Studies*, Vol. VI, ed., N.N., Bandopadhyay, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, 2014, pp.1,10

classification of the contents of the *Atharvaveda Samhitā*.²⁸ However, it is very interesting to note the following observation of Bali on the contents of the *Atharvaveda* – “While the *Sāmaveda* cannot claim an independent personality and character for itself, the rich variety of subjects dealt with in the *AV*, viz., *bhaiṣajyāni*, *ābhicārikāni*, *rājakarmāṇi*, *strīkarmāṇi*, *pauṣṭikāni* etc. surprises its readers and critics²⁹. As one can see in this statement Bali has clearly mentioned the *ābhicārika* Mantras as forming one of the rich subject-matters of the *Atharva Samhitā*.

Following is a chart showing the arrangement of the *Atharvaveda Samhitā* (*Śaunakīya*) into Kāṇḍas, Anuvākas, Sūktas and Mantras³⁰.

<i>Kāṇḍa</i>	<i>Anuvāka</i>	Sūktas	Mantras
I	6	35	153
II	6	36	207
III	6	31	232
IV	8	40	322
V	6	31	383
VI	13	142	467
VII	10	123	284
VIII	5	15	291
IX	5	15	303
X	5	10	350
XI	5	12	313
XII	5	11	293

²⁸ S.K., Bali, History of Vedic Studies in the Atharvaveda, *Historical and Critical Studies in the Atharvaveda*, ed., S.K. Bali, Delhi, 1981, p.46

²⁹ S. K., Bali, *loc.cit.* p.19

³⁰ According to *Atharvaveda Samhitā* with the commentary of Sāyaṇācārya ed. by Shankar Pandurang Pandit, Vol. I-IV, Chowkhamba Krisnadass Academy, reprint 2012.

XIII	4	9	194
XIV	2	2	138
XV	2	18	220
XVI	2	9	102
XVII	1	1	30
XVIII	4	4	283
XIX	7	72	456
XX	9	143	959

There is yet another arrangement of the contents of the *Atharvaveda Samhitā* (*Śaunakīya*) into Prapāṭhakas, Kāṇḍas, Sūktas and Mantras³¹. This arrangement is as follows:

Prapāṭhakas	Kāṇḍas	Sūktas	Mantras
I	1 to 7	433	2030
II	8 to 12	45	1573
III	13 to 18	43	1063
IV	19 to 20	215	1411

Bloomfield has divided the contents of the *Samhitā* under 14 headings³². A brief summary of their contents is given below –

(i) ***Bhaiṣajya Sūktas*** – Atharvaṇic *Bhaiṣajya* Sūktas deal with diseases, their causes and cures and show a remarkable insight into the subject of medical science in Vedic India. These charms are also known as *Bheṣaja* and *Bhaiṣajyāni*. Among the medicinal charms some are related to fever and others

³¹ According to *Atharvaveda samhitā* with the commentary of Sāyaṇācārya ed. by Shankar Pandurang Pandit, Vols. I-IV, Chowkhamba Krisnadass Academy, reprint 2012.

³² Bloomfield. M., *The Atharvaveda And The Gopatha Brahmana*, Allahabad, 1975, p.57

to various ailments³³. In the *Atharvaveda*, fever is known as *takman* and there are some charms against *takman*³⁴. The *kuṣṭha* plant is used against *takman* in the *Atharvaveda*. It is believed that the god Agni removes fever. The Atharvaṇic priest is spoken of as curing diseases like *takman* with the help of medicinal magic and rituals. The *Gaṇamālā* of *Atharvaparīṣiṣṭa* presents approximately 19 hymns to cure fever under the head *Takmanāśanagaṇa*³⁵. One also finds charms against some diseases like jaundice, cough, *balāsa*, *jakṣmā*, headache and excessive discharges from the body, constipation, retention of urine, dropsy, leprosy, scrofulous sores, wounds, worms, poison, diseases of eyes, baldheadedness, sexual incapacity, insanity etc³⁶.

It may be noted that *Atharvaveda* is the source of later Āyurvedic medicine³⁷. *Atharvaveda* recognizes violations of laws of nature, anger of deities and malevolent spirits and previous sins committed by man as well as germs, as the causes of diseases and prescribe medicines and psychical remedies, chants

³³ *AV.*, IX.8; V.22.2; and also VI.20.3; I.12; 22; VI.44; 105; I. 3; 10; VII,83; I.23; 24 ; VI.25; 83; VII.76; V.5; VI.109; II.31;32; V.23; IV.7; V.13; VI.6; 100; VII.56; VI.16; 136; 137; IV.4; VI.111 etc.

³⁴ *ibid.*, V.22; VI.20; I.25;VII,116

³⁵ See *AV.*,I.12.1; 25.1; II.8.1; 9.1; 10.1; III.7.1; 11.1; IV.28.1; V.4.1; 9.1; 22.1; 26.1; 42.1; 85.1; 91.1; 127.1; VII.116.1;V.4.1

³⁶ *ibid.*, IV.6

³⁷ See *Śusrutasamhitā*, I.3

and charms in plenty³⁸. Many of Atharvaṇic Mantras describe the medicinal utility of herbs³⁹.

(ii) Hymns for long life and health: The Atharvavedic *Āyusyāṇi* Sūktas contain supplications for longevity and good health and are meant to be uttered on auspicious occasions like *chaula* (tonsure) *upanayana* (investiture with the sacred thread) *godāṇa* (gifting of cows) and so on. The prayers are recited for the sake of *āyus*, *jīvana*, *prāṇa*, *asu* etc, all of which are terms indicative of long life. These charms are also believed to secure physical strength, glory, wealth, etc. which may secure happiness in life.

(iii) Black Magic: Black Magic is aimed at destroying or harming enemies as well as countering the evil intentions and evil acts of enemies. Witchcrafts are of two types. Some are directed against human enemies called the Yātudhānas and the others are aimed at destroying demoniac powers represented by Rākṣasas, Piśācas etc. The *Cātanagaṇa* of the *Kauśika Sūtra* (1.8.25) enumerates a number of Atharvaṇic magical charms used in witchcraft and sorcery. It is stated that there are some deities through whom men can achieve their goals or wishes by appeasing them. The number of magical charms aimed at destroying demoniac powers or enemies is larger than the charms meant for countering the evil intentions of the enemies, demons and sorcerers⁴⁰. Use of lead⁴¹,

³⁸ *AV.*, VI.90; VI.80; II.8; III.7; IV.37; II.9; IV.36; II.25; VI.32; VI.85; VIII.7;

³⁹ *AV.*, I.2; II.8; V.4; VI.96; XIX.39

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, I.7 and I.8

⁴¹ *ibid.*, I.16

*soma*⁴² and other medicinal plants like *sadampuspa*⁴³ and *apāmārga*⁴⁴ etc. for destroying demons and sorcerers are described in such Mantras. These are considered as the *ghora* part of the *Atharvaveda* and are connected with the *Āngirasas*. Some other branches of sorcery practices are *Kṛtyā* (spell), *valaga*, (secret spell) *mūlakarma* or *mūlin* (practices with the roots of plants) etc. which are performed in secret places because these are considered as dangerous⁴⁵.

(iv) Charms pertaining to women: This part of the *Atharvaveda* consists of various types of practices both good and bad related to women, such as charms for obtaining a husband, to remove the evil signs of a woman, germs, violations of laws of nature, anger of deities and malevolent spirits etc. *Atharvaveda* prescribes charms for obtaining a good husband, blessings for a married couple, a male child, to make a woman fertile, to prevent miscarriage, to alley jealousy, regaining lost love and so on. Although these charms are meant for women, these were used by men also. Destruction of one's enemies including the lovers of one's spouse, averting of evil spirits, mesmerizing others through whom one can get one's desires fulfilled etc are some of the topics dealt with under the head *Strīkarmāṇi*. Some of these are performed even to bring misfortune to a woman, to make a woman barren, and to destroy rivals or co-wives etc⁴⁶.

⁴² *AV.* VI.2

⁴³ *ibid.*, IV. 20

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, IV.19; VII.65

⁴⁵ Karambelkar, *op. cit.*, p.16

⁴⁶ *AV.*, I.14; III.18; VI.35, 113,114

(v) Charms pertaining to royalty and Warfare: These charms are known as *Rājakarmāṇi* and *Sāmgrāmikāni*. The *Atharvaveda* provides a reasonably good picture of political life in Vedic India. The very name *Kṣatrayeda* applied to this *Veda* is indicative of the fact that it contains important materials related to the Kṣatriyas. It is seen that the king and other persons related to statecraft used magical practices for victory against enemies and for the prosperity of the state and also for its security. The king performed rites, tied amulets, and involved other people for practicing rites, which were supposed to make the king powerful and help him to secure extra power.

(vi) Charms to secure harmony in life and society: The hymns which fall under this class are known as *Sāmmanasyāni*. According to Sāyaṇa this word denotes togetherness of men arising out of love for one another⁴⁷. While the meaning of the term varies as per the contents of the charms, *Sāmmanasya* charms are supposed to be used in securing harmony in personal and social life of the people. These charms, therefore are *śānta* in their essence.

(vii) Charms to secure prosperity in house, field, cattle, business, gambling, and kindred matters: These charms are known as *Paṣṭikāni*. Charms of this type are concerned with the protection, increase and welfare of cattle, agriculture, prosperity of the householder, deliverance from calamity, regaining of lost property, uplift of a farmer or a merchant or even of a gambler.

⁴⁷ Sāyaṇa on *AV.*, III.30

(viii) Charms for expiation of sin and defilement: Hymns of this category are meant to be used primarily for the expiation of sins and are known as *Prāyaścittāni*. In Vedic times mental deficiency or physical instability were looked upon as the results of sins committed both at the personal and social levels. The *Prāyaścittāni* hymns are aimed at removal of the evil effects of the sins. These charms are also used against evil omens, bad dreams, nightmares and so on.

(ix) Prayers and imprecations in the interest of the Brāhmaṇas: A large number of charms of the *Atharvaveda* are related to the interest of the Brāhmaṇas. Brāhmaṇas were regarded as especially vulnerable to being exposed to spiteful demons. It is considered that a *Brāhmaṇa* is able to protect himself from evil spirits and can destroy them by the power of the sacred thread. The charms used by the Brāhmaṇas to protect their interests are known as *Brahmanyāni*.

(x) Cosmogonic and theosophic hymns: Cosmogonic and theosophic hymns of the *Atharvaveda* seem to belong to the latest part of this *Veda*. Contents of these hymns are philosophical in character but even some of these hymns are tinged by magic as in the hymns IV.16 and IX. 2. Prajāpati is considered as the highest god as the creator and preserver of the world. Cosmogonic and theosophic hymns of the *Atharvaveda* can perhaps be considered as a step forward in the development of Vedic philosophy. The Absolute is designated in these hymns by various names such as *Kāla* (.XIX.53, 54), *Skambha* (X.7, 8.), *Ucchiṣṭa* and

Vrātya (XV) which are rather peculiar to this *Veda*. Theosophic ideas are ascribed to *Brahmacārin* (IX.5), *Anadvān* (IV.11), *Rṣabha* (IX.4), *Vasā* (X.10), *Brahmaudāna* (IV.34, 35) and so on, which too are peculiar to this *Veda*. Majority of hymns of this category are found in the books VIII to XIX.

(xi) Ritualistic and general hymns: Atharvavedic ritualistic hymns are employed in different Vedic *Śrauta* rituals like *Agniṣṭoma*, *Paśubandha*, *Agnicayana* etc. These types of hymns have their own specific subject matters in accordance with the rituals related to them. Most of these hymns are found in the 20th book of the *Samhitā*. Some hymns are meant for certain general purposes such as acquisition of wealth, glory, power, stability and the like.

(xii) Hymns dealing with individual themes: *Atharvaveda* book XIII-XVIII deal with special themes. XIII.1 mentions prayer for sovereign power, addressed to the god Rohita and his consort Rohiṇī. They are the creators and preservers of four footed and two footed animals and are supposed to be the forms of Prajāpati. In this hymn it is said that the god Rohita generated heaven and earth.

Book XIV contains two *Sūktas* (XIV.1, 2) related to marriage ceremony which treat wedding customs. Book XV is related to *Vrātya* hymns. The word *vrātya* here represents the *Brāhmaṇa*. In this book sixteen *Sūktas* are found related to *Vrātya*. Book XVI consists of two distinct parts of different subjects. The first part is related to Prajāpati and the second to evening prayers to be recited before going to rest and specially for warding off bad effects of

nightmares⁴⁸. Book XVII consists of a single *Anuvāka* called *Viṣāsahī*⁴⁹. It consists of 30 verses. Book XVIII contains four funeral hymns. This book is also known as ‘The Yamas’ or ‘Yama-hymns’.

(xiii) Hymns of the twentieth book: Barring a few hymns almost all the hymns of this Book are found in the *Ṛksamhitā*. This Book of the *Atharvaveda* consists of 143 hymns. Among them 13 hymns are called *Kuntāpasūktāni*. Some of the hymns of this Book are found in the *Atharvaveda* of the *Paippalāda* school,⁵⁰ some are again replications of some Ṛgvedic hymns.

(xiv) The *Kuntāpa* hymns: The *Kuntāpa* hymns of the *Atharvaveda* are XX.2, 48, 49, 127-136. These hymns have not been arranged into Prapāṭhakas. The names of the seers, deities, metres and applications of these hymns have not been mentioned. They have no commentary. According to some Ācāryas the *Kuntāpa* Sūktas are supplementary in nature⁵¹. The meaning of the word *kuntāpa* is ‘*kuyān tapyate*’ i.e., turning into ashes by heating the heinous vices⁵².

⁴⁸ Whitney, *op.cit.*, Vol.III, pp. 91,319 also *AV.*, XIX.23.26

⁴⁹ *AV.*, XIX.23.27

⁵⁰ As quoted by Bloomfield, M., *The Atharvaveda And The Gopatha Brahmana*, Allahabad, 1975, p.95

⁵¹ *cf.*, *kuntāpākhyam sūktam khile kuntāpanāmake granthe samāmnātām trimśadṛcam.*, Sāyaṇa on *AB.*, 6.32.1 ;

⁵² See Whitney, *op.cit.*, p.599

According to *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*⁵³ evil and sinful works are burned by these hymns. So these are called *Kuntāpa* Mantras.

It should be noted here that the above mentioned contents of the *Atharvaveda* are found scattered here and there in the *Samhitā*. This has made it quite difficult to arrange them systematically. However, the *Kausika Sūtra* and the *Gaṇamālā* of the Atharvapariśiṣṭa (32) have arranged the charms into Gaṇas i.e. broad divisions on the basis of the nature of their contents. Some such Gaṇas are *Vāstugaṇa*, *Mātrnāmāni*, *Cātanagaṇa*, *Mṛgāragaṇa*, *Mahāsāntigaṇa*, *Varcasyagaṇa*, *Aparājitāgaṇa*, *Abhayagaṇa*, *Abhišekagaṇa* and so on.

1.4 Date of the *Atharvaveda*:

It has not been possible to determine with certainty the date of the *Veda*, because of its hoary antiquity. This is true in respect of all the four Vedas. As a result, many speculations and opinions have come into existence regarding the age of these works. From the chronological point of view, the four Vedas are *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda*⁵⁴.

MaxMüller, on the basis of the argument that Buddhism arose as an anti-thesis of Brahmanism, has assumed that the Vedas are pre- Buddhist⁵⁵. The birth of Gautama Buddha is assumed to be 560 B.C. and his enlightenment is

⁵³ As quoted by Keshada Mahanta in *Atharvaveda*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 2007, p.470

⁵⁴ See *ChāUp.*, 7.1; *BṛUp.*, 2.4.10; 4.1.2; 4.5.11

⁵⁵ MaxMüller.F., *Gifford Lectures on Physical Religion*, New Delhi, 1979, p.81

supposed to have taken place in 525 B.C. Hence, the age of the beginning of Buddhism may be stated as 525 B.C.⁵⁶. MaxMüller has divided the Vedic literature into three parts viz., a) Vedic hymns b) Brāhmaṇas, and c) Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads. He has assumed a span of time for each part as at least 200 years. Hence, he has argued that the period of arrangement of all the Vedic hymns are roughly from 1000 to 800 B.C.⁵⁷.

Jacobi opines that about the period of compilation of Vedic literature should be assigned to the 3rd millenary B.C, on the basis of astronomical calculations. Some western scholars also support Jacobi's view.

According to Ludwing the time of the *Veda* can be fixed as 4500 B.C. on the basis astronomical data preserved in the Brāhmaṇas and the Vedic Sūtras. Jacobi too has fixed the time of the *Veda* as 4500 B.C.⁵⁸. Tilak on the other hand, has assumed the date of the *Veda* as 6000 B.C.⁵⁹. Winternitz is of the opinion that the Vedic hymn poetry is likely to have had its origin in about 2500 B.C to 2000 B.C. and its end may be assumed around 700 B.C.⁶⁰. Of late, a new theory has been put forward by Siddharth on the basis of a) astronomical data generated at the Birla planetarium, Hyderabad and on the basis of b) excavations done at

⁵⁶ See Dasgupta, S., *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol.I, New Delhi, 1997, p.81

⁵⁷ As quoted by Winternitz, M., *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol.I, New Delhi, 1972, pp.292-293

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.296

⁵⁹ Tilak. B.G., *The Orion or Research into the Antiquity of the Vedas*, Bombay, 1893., pp.206-207

⁶⁰ Winternitz, M., *op cit*, p.310

Turkey by Heuptman that Vedic civilization belongs to about 7,300 B.C. Siddharth holds that Vedic people entered India in about 4000 B.C⁶¹. In this connection it may be noted that according to Shankar Balkrishna Dixit, the Indian scholar the probable date of the *Atharvaveda* is before 3000 B.C⁶². So far as the task of determining the date of the *Atharvaveda* is concerned, one needs to remember that this *Veda* has not been mentioned in the early Vedic texts i.e. in the hymns of the *R̥gveda*, the *Sāmaveda* and the *Yajurveda* as well as in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts of the Vedas. As it has been already mentioned it is only in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* that one comes across the name of this *Veda*.

It is however, to be noted that although the *Atharvaveda* has not been mentioned in the *R̥gveda*, it contains references to the Atharvavedic seers viz., *Atharvan* and *Aṅgiras*⁶³. The absence of references to the *Atharvaveda* in early Vedic literature does not necessarily point to a very late origin of the Atharvavedic hymns. The reason behind this fact may be that in essence this *Veda* displays a very different character and very different usage of its charms and spells. As it has been pointed out by Winternitz, the *Atharvaveda* as a whole seems to be later than the *R̥gveda*. But at the same time, the latest hymns of the

⁶¹ Vide, news item and article, *The Sentinel*, September 4, 1991 and *The Times of India*, November 1, 1993, New Delhi.

⁶² According to Balakrishna, Gayatri Pariwar, *Vedic Cosmology-3, The Period of the Veda*, literature.awgp.org

⁶³ *RV.*, I.80.16; I.83.4; VI.16.13,14; X.48.2 etc.

Rgveda may not be of earlier origin than all the hymns of the *Atharvaveda*; Again some of the Athrvavedic hymns display rather more primitive traits than some of the Ṛgvedic hymns. Furthermore, some of the Athavavedic and Ṛgvedic hymns may have originated at the same period of time. By taking into consideration, these factors, Winternitz has stated that it is not possible to speak about a ‘period of the *Atharvaveda*’ because the hymns of this *Veda* have had their origin in periods of time which stand centuries apart⁶⁴.

While concluding this discussion it may be stated that according to Bhattacharya, the prose passages found in the *Atharvasamhitā* belong to the Yajurvedic period whereas, the ritualistic Mantras have had their origin in the later part of the *Brāhmaṇa* period of Vedic era⁶⁵.

1.5 Literature of the *Atharvaveda*:

i) *Brāhmaṇa*

Gopatha Brāhmaṇa is the only *Brāhmaṇa* belonging to the *Atharvaveda*. It has two parts viz., *Pūrva* and *Uttara*. The *Pūrva Brāhmaṇa* consists of five Prapāṭhakas. These are very similar to *Śathapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Adhyāyas 11 and 12. Here one finds descriptions of *Soma* and *Satra Yajñas*. *Uttara Brāhmaṇa* consists of six Prapāṭhakas and 123 Adhyāyas. According to *Atharvapariśiṣṭa*,

⁶⁴ Winternitz, *op.cit.*, pp.116,117 ; See Bloomfield, M., *The Atharvaveda And The Gopatha Brahmana*, Allahabad, 1975, p.22

⁶⁵ Bhattacharya, N., *Atharvavede Bhāratīya Saṁskṛti*, Kolkata, Bengali era 1310, pp.19, 23

Gopatha Brāhmaṇa originally consisted of 100 Prapāṭhakas⁶⁶. The five Prapāṭhakas of *Pūrva Brāhmaṇa* are related to various rituals, the materials of which are derived from the *Vaitāna Sūtra*, and other *Brāhmaṇa* and *Śrauta* texts. On the other hand, *Uttara Brāhmaṇa* has followed only the *Vaitāna Sūtra*. The *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* belongs to the *Paippalāda* school of the *Atharvaveda*. This has been indicated by the fact that it mentions the verse viz. *sanno devirabhiṣṭaya...etc* as the first verse of the *Atharvaveda*⁶⁷ and it is the *Paippalāda Samhitā* which begins with this verse, While, this view has been supported by Renou⁶⁸, scholars like Bloomfield and Karambelkar hold that the *Gopatha*, is a text related to the *Śaunakīya* recension⁶⁹. So far as the chronological position of this *Brāhmaṇa* in Vedic literature is concerned, it appears to be anterior to the *Kauśika* and the *Vaitāna Sūtras* of the *Atharvaveda*. Adhikari has placed this work in between six and seven centuries B.C⁷⁰.

ii) Upaniṣads

There are a large number of Upaniṣads which tradition connects with the *Atharvaveda*. Among them some belong to the *Śaunakīya* recension and some to the *Paippalāda* recension. The Atharvavedic Upaniṣads that are available to

⁶⁶ *Gopatha Brāhmaṇam (Mūlamātram)*, ed. by Vijaypalo Vidyavaridhi, Calcutta, 1980 p.61; *AP.*, 49

⁶⁷ *GB.*, 1.2.20

⁶⁸ See Renou, L., *Vedic India*, Varanasi, 1971, p.28

⁶⁹ See Bloomfield, M., *The Atharvaveda And The Gopatha Brahmana*, Allahabad, 1975 p.16; Karambelkar, *op.cit.*, p.29

⁷⁰ Adhikari, T.N., *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa –A Critical Study*, Calcutta, 1994, pp.19-26

posterity are *Praśna*, *Muṇḍaka* and *Māṇḍukya* and these are counted among the ten principle Upaniṣads.

Praśnopaniṣad – The contents of this *Upaniṣad* has been arranged into six Praśnas. These are called so because, the discussions in each of them are presented in answer to six questions asked by six disciples to Paippalāda. The discussions in it, revolve around the nature of the Creator and His Creation.

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad - This *Upaniṣad* consists of three chapters known as Muṇḍakas. The teacher of this *Upaniṣad* is Aṅgiras and the teachings have been imparted to his disciple Śaunaka. The word *muṇḍaka* means a razor. The contents of this *Upaniṣad* aims at shaving i.e. shedding off ignorance thereby showing the path of liberation from earthly bondage. The work is composed in an intermixture of prose and poetry.

Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad- *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* is the shortest of all the extant Upaniṣads. The contents of this work are presented in just twelve Pravacanas (teachings). The teachings revolve around the sacred syllable *aum* which represents the Supreme Soul.

(iii) Sūtra :

There are two *Sūtra* works of the *Atharvaveda*. One of them is *Kauśika Sūtra* related to *Gṛhya* rites and the other one is the *Vaitāna Sūtra* related primarily to *Śrauta* rites. These two texts have been dealt with at length in the second chapter of this thesis.

(iv) Śikṣā:

Māṇḍukī Śikṣā is the only *Śikṣā* related to *Śaunakīya* School of the *Atharvaveda*.

(v) Kalpas:

There are five Kalpas available to the *Atharvaveda*, viz., *Nakṣatra kalpa*, *Vaitāna Kalpa*, *Samhitā Kalpa*, *Āṅgīrasa Kalpa* and *Śānti Kalpa*. According to Sāyaṇa the five Kalpas deal with the *Gṛhya* rites related to four recensions of the *Atharvaveda*. The practitioners of these five Kalpas are called *Pañcakalpinah*⁷¹.

(vi) Pariśiṣṭas:

There are 72 *Pariśiṣṭas* known as *Kaśikokta Pariśiṣṭāni* of the *Atharvaveda*⁷². *Pariśiṣṭas* discuss various subjects like state-craft, deeds of importance, grammar, astrology, historical events and so on. The important *Pariśiṣṭas* are *Gaṇamālā* (32), *Āsurīkalpa* (35), *Uttamaṭāla* (46), *Kautsavyaniruktanighantu* (48) and *Caraṇavyuha* (49).

(viii) Lakṣaṇagranthas:

Lakṣaṇagranthas as stated in the *Atharvapariśiṣṭa* are – (a) *Caturadhāyī* (b) *Atharvaveda Prātiśākhya* (c) *Pañcapāṭalikā* (d) *Dantausṭhavidhi* (e) and *Bṛhatsarvānukramaṇikā*⁷³

⁷¹ See Sāyaṇa's Introduction to his commentary on *Atharvaveda Samhitā.*, ed. by Shankar Pandurang Pandit, Vol. I, Chowkhamba Krisnadass Academy, Reprint 2012, p.25; *Gopatha Brāhmaṇam (Mūlamātram)* ed. by Vijaypalo Vidyavaridhi, Calcutta, 1980 p.19

⁷² *AP.*, 49

⁷³ *cf., lakṣaṇagranthāḥ bhavanti/ caturadhāyī prātiśākhyaṁ pañcapāṭalikā dantausṭhavidhi bṛhatsarvānukramaṇikā //, AP.*, 49.

(a) *Caturadhāyī* : It is also known as *Śaunakīya Caturadhāyī*⁷⁴ It is a kind of *Prātiśākhya*. There are six parts in it containing an introduction, *svaraprakriyā*, *śikṣā* and *sandhi*, *saṁhitāpāṭha* and *prakriyā* of *kramapāṭha* and some miscellaneous topics. There is a close connection between *Caturadhāyī* and Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. It deals only with simple grammatical definitions.

(b) *Atharvaveda Prātiśākhya*: There are only three Prapāṭhakas in this work. It is quite different from the *Caturadhāyī* because while this work belongs to the *Atharvaveda* in general, *Caturadhāyī* belongs only to the *Śaunakīya* text of the *Atharvaveda*.

(c) *Pañcapaṭalikā*: It is an *Anukramaṇi* of the *Atharvaveda* describing the names of seers, metres, and deities of the *Atharvaveda*. The author of the work is not known.

(d) *Dantausṭhavidhi*: This text is only known by name.

(e) *Bṛhatsarvānukramaṇikā*: It is a major *Anukramaṇi* text of the *Atharvaveda* belonging to the *Śaunakīya* recension. There are 10 Paṭalas in it. The author of this work too is not known.

(ix) *Ātharvaṇa Jyotiṣa*:

It is also known as *Ātmajyotiṣam*. It belongs to the *Śaunakīya* recension. As per tradition the author of this work is *Svayambhū Brahmā*, who expounded it to

⁷⁴ See Karambelkar, *op. cit.*, p.281

Kāśyapa. The contents of this work deal with *muhūtra*, *karaṇa*, *tithi*, *vāra*, *nakṣatra* and such other related topics.

(x) *Atharvavidhāna*:

Hemādri has mentioned a work called *Atharvavidhāna* in the *Vratakhanda* of his *Caturvargacintāmaṇi*. This work is not available to posterity.

(xi) *Atharvaprāyaścittāni*:

This work deals with expiations of sins which one may incur during sacrificial rites and magical and witchcraft practices and also of other sins related to Atharvavedic tradition are also dealt with in it.

(xii) *The Svaraśāstra*:

The *Svaraśāstra* has not come down to posterity. This work was related to accentuation of Atharvavedic Mantras.