

The Vedas: Ancient Texts of Hinduism

Category: Religion

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[The Vedas](#) are a collection of religious texts that hold immense significance in Hinduism. These texts are considered to be the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and the oldest scriptures of the religion. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the Vedas consist of four main divisions: the **Rigveda**, **Yajurveda**, **Samaveda**, and **Atharvaveda**.

Each Veda is further divided into four subdivisions, which serve different purposes. The Samhitas contain mantras and benedictions, while the Brahmanas provide commentaries and explanations of rituals and ceremonies. The Aranyakas focus on rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices, and symbolic-sacrifices, and the Upanishads delve into meditation, philosophy, and spiritual knowledge. Some scholars also recognize a fifth category called Upasanas, which pertains to worship.

The Samhitas and Brahmanas primarily discuss daily rituals and are intended for individuals in the Brahmacharya and Grihastha

stages of the Chaturasrama system. On the other hand, the Aranyakas and Upanishads are meant for those in the Vānaprastha and Sannyasa stages, respectively.

What sets the Vedas apart from other religious texts is that they are considered to be śruti, meaning “what is heard.” This distinguishes them from smṛti texts, which are “what is remembered.” According to Hindu belief, the Vedas are apauruṣeya, which translates to “not of a man, superhuman” and “impersonal, authorless.” They are believed to be revelations of sacred sounds and texts heard by ancient sages after intense meditation.

For centuries, the Vedas have been orally transmitted using elaborate mnemonic techniques. The mantras, the oldest part of the Vedas, are recited in the present age for their phonology rather than their semantics. They are considered to be the “primordial rhythms of creation” that precede the forms to which they refer. By reciting these mantras, the cosmos is believed to be regenerated, enlivening and nourishing the very foundation of creation.

The Vedas have played a significant role in shaping various Indian philosophies and Hindu sects. Schools of Indian philosophy that recognize the importance and authority of the Vedas are classified as the six “orthodox” (āstika) schools. These schools include Vedanta, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, and Mimamsa.

However, there are also “heterodox” or “non-orthodox” (nāstika) schools, such as Charvaka, Ajivika, Buddhism, and Jainism, that do not consider the Vedas as authoritative. These śramaṇa traditions have their own unique perspectives and teachings.

In conclusion, the Vedas hold a revered position in Hinduism as the oldest scriptures and a source of spiritual knowledge. They are considered to be sacred revelations, passed down

through generations, and continue to shape the religious and philosophical landscape of India.