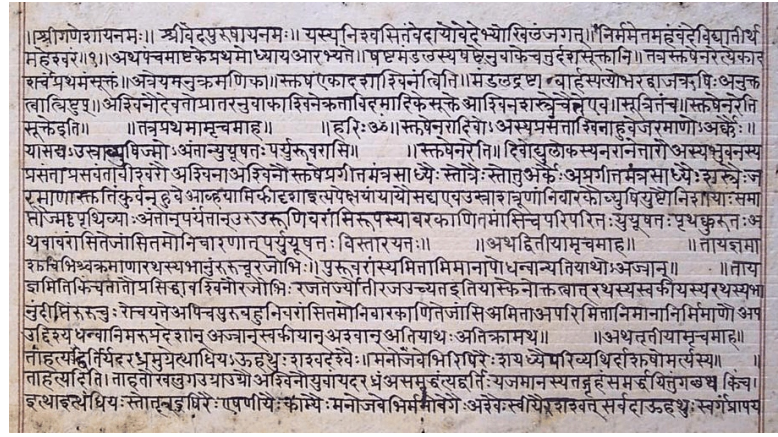


# वेद Veda

The *Saṁhitā* (Collections):



Rig Veda, 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscript

ऋग् वेद

Rg Veda  
Rig Veda

साम वेद

Sāma Veda  
Sama Veda

यजुर् वेद

Yajur Veda  
Yajur Veda

अथर्व वेद

Atharva Veda  
Atharva Veda

The *Rig Veda* is a collection of *mantras* or hymns of praise to the gods chanted by the priests during sacrificial rites. The *Rig Veda* is the oldest and most philosophical part of the *Vedas*. Composition of the *Rig Veda* probably began as early as 1500 B.C.E. and when completed consisted of 1017 separate sections or hymns.

The *Sama Veda* is collection of *Rig Veda* verses arranged for chanting in the form of a song.

The *Yajur Veda* is collection of sacrificial formula, rites and instructions, used in Vedic sacrifice.

The *Atharva Veda* is a later collection of spells and incantations, white and black magic formulas, for securing all sorts of goals. Composed between 800 to 500 B.C.E. It is widely believed that pre-Aryan Indus Valley cultural traditions come through in the *Atharva Veda*.

## Brāhmaṇas

The *Brahmanas* are commentaries which explain the meaning of the verses of the *Vedas*.

## Āraṇyakas

The *Aranyakas*, literally, the 'forest treatises,' are recitations to be chanted by the *rishis* in the forest.

## Upaniṣads

The *Upanishads* are philosophical commentaries on the *Vedas*. Composed between 800 - 200 B.C.E. Literally *upanishad* (from *upa*, "near," *ni*, "down," and *sad*, "to sit") means "to sit down near." These were the teachings one had to sit down near to the teacher and listen closely. The core of the orthodox systems of Indian Philosophy. The "secret teachings" of Hinduism.

इन्द्र

Indra  
Indra

*The Ruler of Heaven.* "In the Vedas, Indra appears as the deity of the sphere of space, the dispenser of rain who dwells in the clouds. Feared as the ruler of the storm, the thrower of the thunderbolt, he is also the cause of fertility. As the ruler of the sky world he is the companion of Vāyu, the wind, which is the life breath of the cosmos. In several hymns of the *Rg Veda* the highest divine functions and attributes are ascribed to him. In the triad of gods, Agni, Vāyu, and Sūrya, who hold preeminence above the others, Indra frequently takes the place of Vāyu as the ruler of the sphere of space. Agni, Indra, and Sūrya then represent the three forms of fire: the fire of the earthly world, the thunderbolt or fire of the sphere of space, and the sun, the fire of the sky. As the king of the gods, Indra is a prominent deity. In the *Vedas*, more hymns are addressed to Indra than to any other deity" (Daniilou, 106-107).



Agni &amp; Indra, Parshvanatha Temple, Khajuraho

अग्नि

Agni  
Agni

*Fire.* "The earth is the dwelling place of fire. Fire captured and tamed by man has been the greatest assistant in his progress, the instrument of his power. Every form of fire is worshiped as a deity, but the divinity of fire is more directly experienced in the ritual fire, born of two pieces of wood rubbed together to the accompaniment of ritual utterances and ceremonies. Agni is one of the most important deities of the Vedas. He is the mediator between men and gods, the protector of men and their homes, the witness of their actions, invoked on all solemn occasions. He presides over all sacraments, all the great events of life" (Daniilou, 87-88).

वरुण

Varuṇa  
Varuna

*The Mysterious Law of the Gods.* Varuṇa presides over the relationship of man with the gods. He is the ruler of the 'other side,' of the invisible world. The sudden favor of the gods and the elements, their unaccountable cruelty, cannot be understood. The behavior of Varuṇa, who rules over the invisible, cannot be foreseen; hence he appears a dangerous lord, a despot. 'He is the owner of the magic-power (*māyā*)' (*Rg Veda*) through which forms are created. He represents the inner reality of things, higher truth (*ṛta*), and order in their transcendent aspects, beyond the understanding of man. His absolute power is felt during the night and in all that is mysterious, while man-made laws, represented by Mitra, rule the day" (Daniilou, 118).

सोम

Soma  
Soma

*The Moon, the Cup-of-Offerings.* Soma was a drug, a medicine, producing powerful states of ecstasy and states of wildly expanded consciousness. There are a number of theories about what the source plant was; some contend the source plant became extinct, others suggest the source plant was a variety of mushroom that produces a compound similar to psilocybin. "In the later hymns of the *Rg Veda*, as well as in the *Atharva Veda* and in the *Brahmaṇas*, the Offering (Soma) is identified with the moon and with the god of the moon. Soma is the most frequently occurring name for the moon in the *Mahabharata*. The moon is the vessel of divine ambrosia drunk by Ancestors and gods yet ever refilled again" (Daniilou, 98).

<p>रुद्र Rudra Rudra</p>	<p><i>The Howler, the Red One, the Lord of Tears.</i> "The name Rudra, which can be translated as the 'howler' or the 'red one,' is also said to mean the 'cause of tears.'" (Daniilou, 102). A dark, fierce, stormy tempered god, almost the opposite of Usas. Like Indra, Rudra is associated with the storm clouds that brought the life-giving monsoon rains. Thought to be a Dravidian god of very ancient origin. Rudra represented the unconquered and unpredictable character of raw nature. Rudra will later be connected with Shiva, one of the three main gods of the Hindu pantheon.</p>
<p>विष्णु Viṣṇu Vishnu</p>	<p><i>The Pervader.</i> In Vedic mythology the Pervader is considered an Āditya [sovereign principle] and represents the perception of the cosmic law that pervades the three worlds. This law is revealed to man through the illumination called knowledge and is compared to the light of the sun striding in three steps across the seven regions of the universe. . . . In the Vedas, Viṣṇu is occasionally associated with Indra. Knowledge associates with Power. The priestly Viṣṇu helps the Sovereign, Indra, the embodiment of the Law, to kill the demon Vṛtra. With Indra he drinks the ambrosia. . . . In the <i>Rg Veda</i>, Viṣṇu does not appear in the first rank of gods. He does not have all the characteristics of the Viṣṇu of later times but he is already the unconquerable preserver" (Daniilou, 126).</p>
<p>सूर्य Sūrya Surya</p>	<p><i>The Sun.</i> "The Sun (Sūrya) is one of the three chief deities of the Vedas. It is envisaged under two aspects. As one of the spheres, one of the Vasus, the physical sun is the celestial form of fire, of Agni. As the source of light, of warmth, of life, of knowledge, the solar energy is the source of all life, represented in the twelve sons-of-the-Primordial-Vastness (Ādityas), the twelve sovereign principles. The sun is at the center of creation, at the center of the spheres. Above are the unmanifest spheres, those of the Self-born (<i>svayambhū</i>) and the Supreme-Ruler (<i>paramesthin</i>). Below are the manifest spheres, those of the moon and the earth. The sun represents the limit, the point, where the manifest and the unmanifest worlds unite" (Daniilou, 92).</p>
<p>पृथिवी Pṛthivī Prithivi</p>	<p><i>Earth.</i> "The first sphere is the earth, the support of all creatures, the 'nourisher' of all physical life. The earth is also represented as a goddess, or as a cow that feeds everyone with her milk. She is the mother of life, the substance of all things. Pṛthu, the "first king" and inventor of agriculture, forced the reluctant earth to yield her treasures and feed men, hence she is called Pṛthivī, the "domain of Pṛthu." . . . All the forms of the earth and of life on it are forms, the children, of this goddess, Earth. Mountains, trees, rivers, animals, have in them a common yet multiple life and are guided by conscious beings who are the attendants of the earth goddess" (Daniilou, 87).</p>
<p>द्यौस् Dyaus Dyaus</p>	<p><i>Sky.</i> The sky (Dyaus), the supreme firmament, is one of the oldest divinities of the Indo-Europeans. The Sky is the Father and, with the Earth, the origin of everything. All the gods, Sun, Moon, Wind, Rain, Lightning, Dawn, and the rest, are children of the Sky. Dyaus covers the Earth and fertilizes her with his seed, that is, with rain" (Daniilou, 92).</p>
<p>वायु Vāyu Vayu</p>	<p><i>Wind.</i> "Between the earth and sky, abode of the sun, is the intermediary sphere or sphere of space, the dwelling place of subtle beings whose king is the lord of wind, Vāyu. Just as fire, the devourer, was the mouth of the gods, wind is their breath. In the Upaniṣads, Vāyu appears as the cosmic life breath. The <i>Mahabharata</i> calls him the life breath of the world, the universal 'spirit,' the impeller of life and of the living. Vāyu also the substance and the essence of speech (<i>vāc</i>). A few Vedic hymns are addressed to him. . . . Vāyu is the purifier, the first to have drunk the ambrosia, the <i>soma</i>" (Daniilou, 90-91).</p>

उषस्  
Uṣas  
Usas

*Dawn.* "In the *R̥g Veda* the Dawn (Uṣas) is shown as a young woman who uncovers her breast for men to admire. Always young, she pushes back the darkness and awakens all beings. She moves about in a splendid chariot. She is the sister of Night, the wife or mistress of the Sun, the daughter of the Sky. According to the Brahmanas, she has incestuous relations with her father, the lord-of-progeny (Prajapati)" (Daniilou, 97).

मित्र  
Mitra  
Mitra

*Friendship.* "Among the sovereign principles of 'this' world, the first is human solidarity, the respect for laws and treaties, the sacredness given to all that links man to man. Friendship (Mitra) appears to have been the most important of the divinized virtues of the early Aryans, although, at the time of the *R̥g Veda*, its role had already played before the expectation of divine grace represented as Varuṇa. Only one hymn of the *R̥g Veda* is addressed to Mitra. . . . The comradeship of men and the favor of gods, Mitra and Varuṇa, are the complements of each other. The clear rules of human association and the mysterious laws of fate govern 'this' known world and 'that' unknown world, symbolized as the day and the night, between which man's life is divided" (Daniilou, 115-116).

यम  
Yama  
Yama

*Death.* "Yama is the god of death, the sovereign of the infernal regions. Sinister and fearful, he judges the dead whom his messengers drag before his throne. He is the embodiment of righteousness (*dharma*) and the king-of-justice (*dharma-rajā*). . . . In the Vedas, Yama is the First Ancestor and the king-of-Ancestors. He rules over the kingdom of the dead where the Ancestors dwell. He is the king-of-ghosts. He has the full rank of a god, for *soma* is pressed for him" (Daniilou, 132).

Daniilou, Alain. *The Myths and Gods of India*. Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1991.

The Four Social Classes (*Caturvarṇa*)

ब्राह्मण	क्षत्रिय	वैश्य	शूद्र
Brāhmaṇa	Kṣatriya	Vaiśya	Śūdra
<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Kshatriya</i>	<i>Vaishya</i>	<i>Shudra</i>
( <i>Brahmin</i> )			
<i>Priests</i>	<i>Warriors</i>	<i>Producers</i>	<i>Laborers</i>

The Four Ends of Man (*Caturpuruṣārtha*)

धर्म	अर्थ	काम	मोक्ष
Dharma	Artha	Kāma	Mokṣa
<i>Dharma</i>	<i>Artha</i>	<i>Kama</i>	<i>Moksha</i>
<i>Virtue, Duty</i>	<i>Wealth</i>	<i>Pleasure</i>	<i>Liberation</i>

The Four Stages of Life (*Caturāśrama*)

ब्रह्मचर्य	गृहस्त्य	वानप्रस्थ्य	समन्यास
Brahmacarya	Gṛhastya	Vānaprasthya	Samnyāsa
<i>Brahmacarya</i>	<i>Grihastya</i>	<i>Vanaprasthya</i>	<i>Samnyasa</i>
<i>The Student</i>	<i>The Householder</i>	<i>The Forest-Dweller</i>	<i>The Renunciant</i>

**KEY TERMS**

दर्शन darśana Darshana	*a view, doctrine, philosophical system *exhibiting, teaching *seeing, observing, looking *a vision, dream
वेद veda Veda	*N. Of certain celebrated works which constitute the basis of the first period of Hindu religion *knowledge, true or sacred knowledge or lore, knowledge of ritual
ऋत ṛta Rita	*fixed or settled order, law, rule *sacred or pious action or custom, divine law, faith, divine truth *truth in general, righteousness
ऋषि ṛṣi Rishi	*perhaps derived from root <i>drish</i> : to see; a seer, saint, ascetic *a singer of sacred hymns, an inspired poet or sage *were regarded by later generations as patriarchal sages or saints *the authors, or rather seers of the Vedic hymns
वर्ण varṇa Varna	*a cover, cloak *outward appearance, exterior form, figure, shape, color *color of the face *class of men, tribe, order, caste
यज्ञ yajña Yajna	*worship, devotion, prayer *offering, oblation, prayer *sacrifice (the meaning prevailing in the <i>Vedas</i> )
श्रुति śruti Shruti	*that which is heard, sound, noise *that which has been heard or communicated from the beginning, sacred knowledge orally transmitted to the <i>ṛṣis</i> —the <i>Vedas</i> .
स्मृति smṛti Smriti	*that which is remembered *the whole body of sacred literature or what is remembered by human teachers (all of the literature outside of the <i>Vedas</i> ).
माया māyā Maya	*art, wisdom, extraordinary or supernatural power (early usage) *illusion, unreality, deception, fraud, trick, witchcraft magic ( <i>Rig Veda</i> ) *an unreal or illusory image

1. According to Radhakrishnan and Moore, what are the four major periods in the development of Indian philosophy? What, according to Zaehner, are the four distinct phases in the development of Hinduism?
2. According to Radhakrishnan and Moore, what are seven distinctive characteristics of Indian philosophy? How is the word *darśana* significant in understanding the general spirit of Indian philosophy?
3. What is it, according to Radhakrishnan and Moore, which provides, excepting the Cārvāka *darśana*, a “fundamental unity of perspective” for all of Indian philosophy?
4. What is the basis for the distinction between the “orthodox” and “heterodox” *darśanas*? What is the distinction between *śruti* and *smṛti* in the sacred literature of Hinduism?
5. What might the archaeological evidence suggest about the contributions of the Indus Valley civilization to the later development of Indian culture and philosophy?
6. What underlying assumption about reality is expressed in the *Vedas* through the concept of *ṛta*?
7. What are the four social classes, the four ends of man, and the four stages of life established in Vedic culture which provides a common way of life or social philosophy within Hinduism? Why were the *Brahmins*, and not the *Kṣatriyas*, the highest caste?
8. What was the primary concern in early Vedic culture as expressed in the *Vedas* (the *Samhitā*)? How might the Vedic gods and goddesses be understood to be symbols rather than anthropomorphic beings?
9. Who was Soma and why was this god important in the Vedic pantheon of gods?
10. How can the development of the Vedic hymns be seen as leading from early polytheism, to henotheism, monotheism, and finally, monism? What is the significance of the Vedic Hymn of Creation (*Rg Veda* X.129)?