

VEDAS AS GREAT LITERATURE BASED ON PHILOSOPHIC THOUGHT

Kuntal Dutta

Assistant Teacher

Purba Barddhaman , West Bengal

ABSTRACT

India is rich for the contribution of literature from the ancient period. Various types of literature flourish from the then period for the all round development of the civilization .The Vedas are one of them. The whole topic centers round the Vedas as a valuable treasure in the history of Indian literature. From the literary point of view Vedas has immense popularity. Veda is derived from the root word of Sanskrit word 'VID', meaning knowledge. The Vedas are a large body of religious texts originating in ancient India .The Vedas believed in the concept of one God and one world. The Vedas consists of Rigveda (consisting of 1028 hymns), Yajurveda (lays down the procedure of sacrifices), Samveda (history of Indian music), Atharvaveda (deals with musical sciences)

The purpose of the study is to investigate the Vedas as great literature from philosophic point of view .Vedas are representative of the Indian society and culture and point to a unique socio – economic civilization where all are equal irrespective of status and gender .Worshipped one God whom the wise described as many . It was a religion of nature which held man central. Education must aim at self – fulfillment and provide freedom from material desires and attachment. Education must provide knowledge for creativity and pursuit of culture and civilization .According to Vedas, Education should make life worthwhile, purposeful and relevant. The major findings of the study, we can find that the Vedas are the fountain of knowledge which is based on philosophic thought.

KEYWORDS : Vedas , Education , Philosophy , Literature .

Introduction :

The Vedas , Upanishads , puranas and epics are the sources to know the ancient Indian philosophy and education . With a view to understand the philosophy of Vedas, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the word VEDA .The word Veda is derived from the Sanskrit word 'VID' .

VID means to

- To know (God, soul, nature and mind)
- To be (one with God)
- To obtain (salvation)
- To consider (various relationships)
- To tell (glories of God)
- To dwell (into the mysteries of universe)

Vedas believe in

- The concept of one God and one world
- God is one and only one (omniscient, omnipotent and ever present)

- There are three entities in this universe – God, Soul and Matter
- Ultimate aim of life is to obtain salvation (moksha) in union with God
- Actions are followed by their results .The ‘Law of Karma is an important teaching of Vedas .
- This universe is formed by God .
- The theory of rebirth and immortality of soul .
- Universe is real , universal fraternity should be promoted .
- Knowledge of truth should be acquired and disseminated.
- Justice should be done to all creatures and we should live in peace and harmony..

Each Vedas was divided into further three broad sections:

Mantras

Brahmans

Aryanakas

THE VEDIC LITERATURE :

It consists of four Vedas .They are Rig veda ,Sama veda , Yajur Veda , Artharva Veda .

a) **Rig Veda :**

- Rigveda is regarded as the sacred text of Hinduism .It has fascinated the scholars and historians due to its significance .It is a collection of ancient Indian collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns.
- The Raigveda is further divided into ten parts known as Mandalas .
- Rigveda has a collection of 10600 verses and 1028 hymns .
- It is the oldest text in any Indo – European language .
- Its origin can be dated to 1700 BCE- 1100 BCE .
- Rigveda hymns were collected by Paila under the guidance of Vyasa
- The Rishi family of Angira has composed 35% of the hymns and a family composed around 25%
- Many verses of the Rigveda are still being used as a very significant part of Hindu prayers and rituals.
- Asper the Rigvedic hymns, the entire universe has originated from Prajapati ,(the initial God can be composed to Zeus in Greek mythology) and this forms the principle basis of creation .
- The hymns are known as Suktas which are generally used in rituals .
- Indra is the chief deity (king of kingdom of heaven) cited in the hymns of Rig veda
- There is a lot of emphasis in lord Shiva but Lord Vishnu who is one of the Trimurti of Hindu Pantheon of Gods is cited as a minor deity , according to the Rig veda .

- It contains the famous Purushasukta that explains that the four varnas (castes) (Brahmana , Kshtriya , Vaishya and Shudra) were born the mouth , arms , belly and the legs of the creator .This was the origin of the caste system which is still practiced in modern Hindu society with some modifications .

b. Sama Veda :

- It is also called as the book of prayers or “storehouse of knowledge of chants “
- It is a mixture of poetry and verse
- It is divided into two parts : Shukla Yajurveda and Krishna Yajurveda
- The maximum number of commentaries is written on Yajur Veda
- The Sam veda consists of 1549 unique verses, taken from Rig veda , except for 75 verses which are new
- Its Samhita , or metrical portion , consists chiefly of hymns to be chanted by the Udgatar priests at the performance of ay important sacrifices in which the juice of the Soma plant is mixed with milk and other ingredients are offered to various others .
- There is no exact date when the compilation of the Sam Veda Hymns was done, nor as to who has composed it .It was deemed unnecessary in the early times when the Aryans first invaded India, but was required for guidance and use after their expansion and settlement in their new homes.

c. Yajur Veda :

- The Vedic collection of sacrificial prayers used by the Adhvaryu priest. It reflects the Vedic sacrifice in its ritual character and full scope.
- The Yajur Veda prescribes the procedures to be adopted at the time of performing different sacrifices.
- The Yajur Veda has two major divisions: the Black Yajur Veda (Krishna) existing in four versions and the white Veda (shukla) existing in two versions . The term “black“ implies “ the un – arranged collection “ of verses in contrast to the “ white “ which implies the well arranged and clear “ Yajurveda”.

d. Atharva Veda :

- It is the ; knowledge storehouse of atharva as , the procedures for everyday life .”
- It was a late addition to the Vedas in later Vedic age .
- The Atharva Veda is composed in Vedic Sanskrit and has 730 hymns with about 6000 mantras which have been divided into 320 books.

The Vedangas : Vedangas are sort of help books to pronounce and understand correctly the words contained in the Vedas .

- i .Shiksha (science of phonetics)
- ii. Chandas or metres

- iii. Vyakarna
- iv. Nirukta or Etymology
- v. Jyotish or astronomy
- vi. Kalpa or rituals

The Upvedas : There are four upvedas each deal with four subjects viz

- i. Ayurveda (deals with medicine)
- ii. Dhanurveda (Military science)
- iii. Gandharvavea (Music)
- iv. Shilpaveda (Architecture and Arts)

Brahmana Granthas :

They provide supplementary matter .Brahmana Granth are written in prose and composed by Rishis and Acharayas .Some of known Brahma granths are Satpath Brahman , Gopath Brahman , Sam Brahmana , Aitareya Brahmana etc .The Satpath Brahman is a voluminous prosework and provides valuable information about the Geography , History , Philosophy and Rituals etc of vedic age .

PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS IN VEDIC LITERATURE:

We can focus the vedic literature from the view point of metaphysics, epistemology and a theory of ethics.

METAPHYSICS:

Vedic thought is meta – physical to the core .Its important feature is the recognition of one single principle running through the whole of existence, the unity of all and being .The primal source of the universe and the ultimate reality is Brahman . Reality is one and it is spiritual and not matter and it is Brahman. Brahman is Nirguna and Nirakara , has no attributes and is absolute and eternal .Brahman is ultimate , unconditioned and absolute reality .Brahman is inner self of man and is its inmost essence .Atman and Brahman is one and the same .Brahman is one without a second from the paramarthika or transcendental standpoint . Realization of the spiritual oneness of the Brahman sand the atman is the highest goal of life.

From the question of the relationship between God and the World , there emerged two major traditions within Vedanta namely theistic (Dvaita – dual) and the non – theistic (Advaita – non – dual) .The theistic traditions took the cosmic (saprapanca) view of the bnature of the Absolute where as the non – theistic tradition of Advaita took the acosmic (nisrapanaca) view of its nature .The cosmic view implies that God is an Extra- cosmic agent who created the world .The acosmic tradition believes that God is essentially immanent in the world or that the world is not independent creation of God but only a manifestation of the ultimate Absolute reality .Both theist and non – theist traditions consider the realization of this truth in one’s own experience as the supreme goal of human existence

EPISTOMOLOGY:

Epistemology deals with origin , sources and locus of knowledge .Indian philosophy and its various schools of thought identify the following sources of knowledge .Sources of valid knowledge are called Pramanas .There are six Pramanas of valid knowledge .They are : Pratyaksha (Perceptions) , Anumana (inference) , Upamana

(Comparison) , Arthapatti (postulation) , Anupalabdhi (Non – appreciation) and Sabda (Testimony)

Pratyaksa (perception) is the first and the prime source of knowledge .Direct knowledge that is caused by the contact of a sense organ (indriya) with its object is Pratyaksa knowledge (perpetual knowledge) .

Anumana (inference) is the indirect way of inferring from known premises .This source goes beyond perpetual knowledge. Through reasoning it explores the unseen with the help of perceived facts .

Upamana (comparison) is the indirect way of ascerting the relationship of similarity between objects .It is the process by which knowledge of Ram’s similarity to Shyam is gained from the perception of Shyam ‘s similarity to Ram which has been perceived elsewhere. **Sabda** refers to verbal testimony.

Anupalabdhi (non – appreciation) is the means through which the knowledge of non- existence of a thing is appended by its non – perception .Postulation is also taken as Pramana. The Vedic tradition recognizes six source of knowledge , it holds that knowledge of ultimate reality is possible only through Sabda , hat is , testimony of the Vedas .This spiritual knowledge is absolute , eternal and a priori ; no empirical proof is required to establish its truthfulness. It is knowledge acquired through revelation.

AXIOLOGY:The ideal of life according to Indian thought comprises the values of unselfishness, service, insight into the ultimate nature of the universe and abiding enlightenment exemplified in the Jivanmukhi ideal .In order to explain what constitutes the right way of living or the good life Indian philosophical systems makes use of the concept of purusharthas.Purushartha is based on the realization that desires constitute the source of human action .Purusharthas literally means ‘what men live for ‘. Arranged in a hierarchy there are four purusharthas : artha) (wealth) , kama (physical well being) , dharma (righteousness) and moksha (spiritual freedom) .

AIMS OF EDUCATION DURING VEDIC PERIOD AGE:

1. **Citta – Vtitti i- Nirodh** : Education must aim at self – fulfillment and provide freedom from material desires and attachment i.e. salvation , Moksa .
2. **Education of Mind:** Education must provide knowledge for creativity and pursuit of culture and civilization.
3. **Make living worthy** : Education should make life worthwhile , purposeful and relevant
4. **Tamso – ma – Jyotirgamaya** : Knowledge should dispel doubts, dogmas and darkness .
5. **Religion centred** : Religion dominated every aspect of life all national , personal , social and educative procedures and practices , hence education should be wedded to religion .

6. **Individual – centred** : Education was for individual which was its chief – concern .Education should therefore aim at overall development of an individual .
7. **Natured – Oriented**: The centres of education were located from the populated and crowded areas, more in natural and sylvan surroundings .Education should make one with nature.

Education system:

Primary: Education was first provided at home then a ceremony (vidya Arambha Sanskar) before beginning education was performed .Education period was upto age of five years .

Child was made to pronounce vedic mantras , knowledge of sandhis (collective rules), elementary grammar , elementary arithmetic .

After primary education children were sent to Gurukulas and ashramas for higher education .

Higher education:

Entry age varied between 8 to 12 for different varnas and completed by the 25 the year of age .Upanayan ceremony was performed to enable the child to enter into studentship.

Curriculum : According to Kathoupanishad , the subjects fell into two categories :

Para- vidya or spiritual learning

Apara – vidya or worldly learning

Para – vidya :

Into this study fell the essential study of 4 vedas .

They are vedangas , Upanishads , puranas , Pitrya (rules for sacrifices for ancestors) , vakovakya (logic) , Ekayana (ethics) , Devavidya (etymology) , Brahavidya , sense of peace , humanity , universal brotherhood etc .

Apara- vidya :

This included subjects like History , Ayurveda , Economics , Astrology , Physics , Zoology , Chemistry , Science , Kalpaidya , the Rashi (science of numbers) , Bhutvidya (science of Demons) .

Vedic literature emphasized on self – sufficiency also .In addition with Intellectual part of education , students got the scope of knowledge of agricultural science , veterinary science , sericulture and other vocations of life . Gandhiji's concept of Basic education or Craft centred education based on the Life – long education or Continuing education of Vedic Literature.

METHODS OF TEACHING:

Two methods of teachings were being practiced during vedic period .The first was Maukhik (oral) and Second was based on chintan (thinking or reflection), .In oral method students were to memorize the mantras (vedic hymns) and Richayas (verses of Rigveda) .

The process of education passed through three stages of comprehension i.e. Shraavan (Hearing), Manan (meditation) and Nidhi- dhyasan (realization sand experience) . Methods of teaching were based on apprenticeship and were psychologically sound. Teaching followed some strategies such as simple to complex, activity and skill oriented procedures .Questions – Answer and illustration, self – study (Swandhyaya) was considered more important .

DISCIPLINE ACCORDING TO VEDIC LITERATURE:

- Rules for conduct of both teachers and pupils were listed down
- Rules for respect due from pupils to teachers were framed.
- Rigid rules were laid for conduct of pupils
- Code of dresses were observed
- Observation of Brahmacharya or celibacy was compulsory for all pupils.

GURU AND GURUKULAS:

In the Vedic period, education was used to take place at teacher's home .The oral transmission of verses within the homes marks the beginning of ancient Indian education. The home was the centre of education for centuries .The important educational institutions of the period were: Gurukula, Parishad (Academy) and Sammelan (Conference) .

Guru (the Vedic teacher) and the Gurukula (home /family of the guru) represent the most important educational ideals of the ancient Indian educational system .The guru was a spiritual receptor ; a deity incarnate without whose grace salvation was out of question .

The Gurukula was an institution where the teacher and the students lived together in common quest for spiritual bliss .It underscored the deeper values underlying teacher – pupil relationship .In fact , the teacher was considered as the spiritual parent of the disciple .To learn the sacred knowledge , the students had to submit themselves completely to the teacher . The disciples were required to fetch fuel , tend the fire , beg and tend cattle alongside their spiritual quest .The Guru or Acharya was respected as a god by the students as well as the society .Even the king did not enjoy so much respect as the teacher enjoyed .

Conclusion:

Dr. Radhakrishnan has rightly said, “**A civilization is not built of bricks, steel and machinery, it is built with men, their quality and character** “. So the true aim of education is to develop in the body and in soul all the beauty and all perfection of which they are capable .The Vedic system of education was aimed at molding the young pupils into individuals capable of living a perfect and full life – based on the principles of Dharma. Vedic students were taught to respect their elders , namely father , mother , teachers , guests .

The basic aim of ancient education was installing into the minds , of people a spirit of being pious and religious for glory of God and good for man .

In this study I try to highlight the basic features of Vedic literature based on philosophic view point .There are significant relations between philosophy and literature. I can conclude with the quotation of RIGVEDA :

“When there is harmony between the mind, heart and resolution .Then nothing is impossible” which is the most notable teachings of Vedic Literature and this is the basic philosophy for the all round development of the civilization.

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