The *Samhitas* form the first part of each of the Vedas. A Samhita is a collection of *mantras,* so the *Samhitas*are sometimes also referred to as the ‘*mantras*’. Most of the *mantras* or hymns were concerned with the nature and the deities. The ancient man worshipped the elements of nature as deities though it is believed that these deities are symbolic.

*Samhita* is a Sanskrit word from the prefix sam (सम्), 'together', and hita (हित), the past participle of the verbal root dha (धा) 'put'.The combination word thus means "put together, joined, compose, arrangement, place together, union"

Generally, the *mantras*are addressed to the Gods and Goddesses. Some Western scholars believe that the Vedic man used the *mantras* in sacrificial ceremonies and for performing mystic rituals. This may be true for a number of *mantras*. Apparently, many *mantras* or hymns were meant for devotional or ceremonial purposes. In fact, they seem to be symbolic and need exceptional scholastic efforts to decipher them.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati made extraordinary efforts to bring out the significance of the *mantras* of the Vedas. Shri Aurobindo also challenged the Western philosophers and opined that the *mantras* are found to express esoteric truths which the Westerners can not grasp. He strove hard to elucidate the cryptic meanings of the Vedic words and the hymns.

The *Samhitas* are named after the Vedas they belong to. For example, the *Samhita* of the Rig Veda is called the *Rig*-*Veda*-*Samhita* or the *Rig*-*Samhita*.

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The *Rig*-*Samhita* contains the *mantras* or the hymns known as ‘*richas’*. These hymns are metered verses. The Rigveda Samhita contains about 10552Mantras, classified into ten books called Mandalas. Each Mandala is divided into several sections called Anuvakas. Each Anuvaka consists of a number of hymns called Suktas and each Sukta is made up of a number of verses called riks.

The *Yajur*-*Samhita*  is a handbook for priests performing sacrifices.The *Yajur*-*Samhita*  contains verities of *mantras* composed in the poetical and the prose forms. Just as the Samaveda-Samhita is the song-book of the Udgata priest, so the Yajurveda-Samhitas are the prayer-books for the Adhvaryu priest. It is solely meant for the purposes of sacrificial rituals.

The *Sam*-*Samhita* contains *mantras* in the form of songs meant for liturgy or public worship,rituals

The *Atharva-Samhita* contains *mantras* meant for routine rites and rituals.

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The *Brahmanas* constitute the second part of the Vedas.

With the passage of time, the newer generations found the *mantras* of the *Samhitas* difficult to understand. An elaborate explanation of the *mantras* became necessary. The result was the *Brahmanas*. The *Brahmanas* are explanatory in nature.

The word ‘*Brahmana’* has its root in the word ‘*brahman’* which means ‘prayer’ or ‘devotion’. The word ‘*brahman’* is distinct from the word ‘*Brahman’* which means ‘the immanent Power’.

They are the prose texts that explain the hymns in the Vedas and are also the classification of Sanskrit texts that are embedded within each Veda, incorporating myths and legends to explain and instruct Brahmins on the performance of Vedic rituals. Brahmana literature also expounds scientific knowledge of the Vedic Period, including observational astronomy and, particularly in relation to altar construction, geometry.

The *Brahmanas* are also concerned with the religious rites and rituals.

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According to Apastamba, Brahmanas texts deal with the following six topics:

1. *Vidhi*means injunctions for the performance of particular rites.
2. *Arthavada* comprises the numerous explanatory remarks on the meaning of Mantras and particular rites.
3. *Ninda* or censure consists in criticism and, refutation of the opponents’ views.
4. *Prashansha* means eulogy, recommendation.
5. *Purakalpa* refers to the performance of sacrificial rites in former times.
6. *Parakriti* means the achievements of others.

The contents of Brahmanas can be summed to the following subjects

1. *Hetu* – reasons
2. *Nirvacana*– etymology
3. *Ninda* – censure ,condemn
4. *Prashansha* – eulogy, praise
5. *Sanshaya* – doubt,uncertainty
6. *Vidhi* – injunction,sanction
7. *Parakriya* – feats/deeds of others
8. *Purakalpa* – legendary background
9. *Vyavadharana*– Kalpana – managerial application
10. *Upamana* – illustration.

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The *Aranyakas*

The *Aranyakas* form the third part of the Vedas. However, it should be noted that the *Aranyakas* are sometimes considered as parts of the *Brahmanas*

The term Aranyaka is derived from the word ‘*Aranya*‘ meaning ‘forest’. The Aranyaka texts are so-called because ‘they were works to be read in the forest

The *Aranyakas* were developed by the hermits, living in the forests. Due to the limited resources in the forests, they could not perform the conventional sacrifices, nor could they adhere to the rituals. It was then that the *Aranyakas* were developed.

With the advent of the *Aranyakas*, the emphasis on the sacrificial rites seems to be diluting. The shift towards philosophic and spiritual interpretation of the rituals and ceremonials is so clear from this.

The *Aranyakas* reflect an explicit transition in the philosophy of life of man. The speculative and intuitive thinking seems to be developing. Meditative thinking is conspicuous. The Vedic man seems to be turning from the gross to the subtle. His quest for knowledge seems to be intensified.

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Aranyakas not only contain symbols but also other aspects, but the symbolism is considered as their main feature because it is mostly discussed in them.

The major contents of the Aranyakas are theosophy (*Brahmavidya*), meditation (*Upasana*) and knowledge of breath

They do not describe not only secret or mystic subjects but also daily rituals like sandhyopasanam, panchamahayajna, brahmopasanam, etc. for a common man or a householder. The study of these teachings of the Vedas which are known as Aranyakas not make any harm to the persons who studies them.

These Aranyakas do not lay emphasis on sacrifices but on meditation and are opposed to early rituals. The talk predominantly about moral values. Thus they form a bridge between the way of work (karma marga) which was the main point of the Brahmanas and the way of knowledge (gyana marga) which was advocated by the Upanishads.

**The Upanishads**

The Upanishads are the concluding portions of the Vedas. The Upanishads are at the end of the Vedas.

The Upanishads are referred to as the *Vedanta*. The word *Vedanta* is a compound word made up of two Sanskrit words: ‘*Veda’* and  ‘*Anta’*. The word ‘*anta’* means an end. *The Vedanta* essentially refers to the philosophy pronounced in the Upanishads, the final parts of the Vedas. The *Vedanta* broadly covers the philosophy enunciated by the holy Scriptural Trinity – the Upanishads, the *Brahma*-*Sutra* and the *Bhagavad* *Gita.*

Some scholars consider the Upanishads as the extended portions of the *Aranyakas* or the *Brahmanas*.. Some scholars treat the Vedas and the Upanishads altogether separately.

The word ‘Upanishad’ is derived from the Sanskrit root *Sad*. The Sanskrit verb *sad* refers to the knowledge or the *satya*. The words ‘*upa’* + ‘*ni’* suggests ‘sitting (before someone) with a determination’. The word ‘Upanishad’ can be understood as: To sit near (close to) a *guru* with an objective to acquire knowledge.

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Most of the Upanishads are in forms of dialogues between a master and a disciple. In Upanishads, a seeker raises a topic and the enlightened guru satisfies the query aptly and convincingly. Thus, the Upanishads contain the sublime knowledge that deals with the topic at great depth. The Upanishads enrich the human mind immensely as they discuss the Brahman, the *atman*, the existence, life and death, *moksha(mukti),* the *jagat*, the knowledge (the *para-vidya* and the *apara-vidya*), the *Brahma-gyana* (or the *atma-gyana*) and many other related issues elaborately.

* Each of the Vedas has many *Mahavakyas* or great sayings. But four *Mahavakyas* found in the Upanishads related to four Vedas are very important, thought-provoking and powerful.

It is not known how many Upanishads existed originally. We do not know who composed them. Some of the Upanishads are in the prose form and some others in the verse form. Some of them are partly composed in prose and partly in verse. Some of the Upanishads have been composed in recent times. It is difficult to ascertain the precise number of the original, ancient Upanishads. One hundred and eight Upanishads are believed to belong to the ancient times. Of the 108 Upanishads, ten Upanishads are considered exquisite by distinguished scholars.

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 The Vedas are split into four major texts and contain hymns, mythological accounts, poems, prayers, and formulas considered sacred to the Vedic religion.

The Rig Veda contains hymns about their mythology; the Sama Veda consists mainly of hymns about religious rituals; the Yajur Veda contains instructions for religious rituals; and the Atharva Veda consists of spells against enemies, sorcerers, and diseases