Vedangas literally mean the limbs of the Vedas. Just like the limbs of the body, they perform various supportive and augmenting functions in the preservation and protection of the Vedas and the Vedic traditions. The Vedangas are six auxiliary disciplines in Hinduism that developed in ancient times, and has been connected with the study of the Vedas.

1. The Vedangas are the last treatises of the Vedic literature. Paniniya Shiksha narrates two verses on the importance of the Vedangas which describe Veda as a Purusha having six limbs as six Vedangas

They are :

* Chandhas are his two feet,
* Kalpa are his two arms,
* Jyotisha are his eyes,
* Nirukta is his ears,
* Shiksha is his nose and
* Vyakarana is his mouth

2 . They symbolically represent the organs of the Veda Purusha. Thus the Vedas are imagined to possess six limbs in the form of the six Vedangas as mentioned in the following Sanskrit verse.

**1. Shiksha:**

This auxiliary discipline has focussed on the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, accent, quantity, stress, melody and rules of phoenic combination of words during a Vedic recitation.

It intends to train the students in the art and science of articulation of words and syllables so that they can chant the Vedic hymns perfectly, producing the desired sound vibrations and maintain the ritual purity and efficacy of the ceremonies they perform. Shiksha really means instruction, then in particular „instruction in reciting „i.e., in correct pronunciation, accentuation etc. of the samhita texts.

Thus, the Shiksha-sutras are treatises on phonetics.

* As the mother tiger carries its young gripping it by its teeth firm, so that cub does not fall, but gentle, so that it does not harm, the mantras must be chanted lucidly, unblurred, un-faded and not too loud. Neither should they be casually mouthed nor spat in different tones. The Sanskrit language has 51 letters, called Matruka. Maatru is the cosmic Mother .The Siksha Sastra says that these 51 letters represent the various parts of Her body and even define which one represents which.

The teachings of the Shiksha are contained in the ancient texts known as Pratisakhyas, each attached to a particular Samhita, providing instructions for the recitation of the hymns contained in it.

Some important Prati shakhyas are:

* (i) Rigveda – Prati shakhya of Rigveda.
* (ii) Taittiriya – Prati shakhya of Krishna Yajurveda.
* (iii) Vajasaneyi – Prati shakhya of Shukla Yajurveda.
* (iv) Atharvaveda – Pratishakhya of Atharvaveda.

The Pratisakhyas was probably composed by many grammarians like Saunaka before Panini and they were revised from time to time.

Shiksha played an important role in Vedic India at a time when there was no written script and the knowledge of the Vedas.

**2. Kalpa:**

: The second Vedanga is Kalpa (ritual which is called the arms of the veda Purusha. Kalpa literally means sacred rule or law or ordinance and sutra means a thread. Sutras are threads of knowledge or short statements used as memorical rules. In the absence of written language, the sutras acted as mental hooks and helped the students remember the intricacies of performing Vedic sacrifices and observing the daily rituals.

Kalpa deals with the practical ceremonial, sacrificial and ritual aspect of the Vedas. Technically it is the applied science of the Vedas.

* Kalpa Sutras are usually divided into Srauta Sutras and Smartha sutras.
* Srauta Sutras as prescribe rules for the performance of different types of sacrifices and rituals, the amount of fees to be paid to the priests and the type of penances to be practiced in case of violation.
* The Srauta Sutras were probably composed around the 6th century BC, the same time during which some of the smartha sutras were composed.
* The latter are divided into Grihya sutras and Dharma sutras. The Grihya sutras prescribe domestic rites and rituals for the three upper castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas), in additions to the duties and responsibilities meant for them.
* The Dharmasutras are the first four texts of the Dharmasastra tradition and they focus on the idea of dharma, the principal guide by which Hindus strive to live their lives.
* The Dharma sutras can be called the guide books of dharma as they contain the rules of conduct and rites as practiced in the Vedic schools.

**3. Vyakarana :**

The third Vedanga is Vyakarana or grammar, which is necessary for the understanding of the Veda. It is called the mouth of the veda Purusha. The word, Vyakarana, is formed by prefixing “vi” and “aa” to the root “Kri”.

Vyakarana deals with Sanskrit grammar or the analysis and decomposition of words, word formation, root words and complex sentence structures, providing useful insights into the usage of words and sentences leading to the mastery of the language.

Actually The old Vedanga texts on Vyakarana are entirely lost today.

* As we know Formation of the word is the main subject of grammar.
* So It discusses root (that is - Prakriti) and suffix (that is - Pratyaya) of a word to study its meaning. Panini‟s Vyakarana is in the form of sutras or aphorisms. The fourteen sutras are referred to here, as Maheswara sutras. They were originated from Nataraja‟s damuru sound.

The Ashtadhyayi contains about 4000 sutras or aphorisms divided into four parts.

* **Shiva sutras** deal with phonetics or the accent and intonation of distinctive units of sound that form part of the word and letter sounds.
* **Ashtadhyayi** deal with the structure of words and sentences and their construction.
* **Dhatupata** deals with list of root words (words that give rise to other words).
* **Ganapatha** deals with groups of nominal words (nouns or noun phrases).

**4. Nirukta:**

Nirukta Vedanga is called the ears of the veda Purusha. „Nirukta‟ means „etymology‟ and it explains the reason why a particular word has been used that is, the meaning of usage.

Nirukta is the science of etymologies. It explains the word-roots and derivation of meaning of words in different context.

* The most authoritative exponent of this branch of study is Yaska, a Sanskrit grammarian and master of Sanskrit etymology, who lived before Panini. He is remembered for his monumental work called Nirukta, which is an excellent commentary of the obscure words found in the Nighantu (dictionary) of his time.
* The Nighantus are five lists of words, which are again divided into three sections.
* The first section consists of three lists, in which Vedic words are collected under certain main ideas. The second section contains a list of ambiguous and particularly difficult words of the Veda, while the third section gives a classification of the deities according to the three regions, earth, sky and heaven.
* Since many Sanskrit words can be split into more than one way and the Vedas contain many obscure and unknown words, an in-depth study of Nirukta will help students discover the latent or hidden meaning of the Vedas and understand their linguistic and philosophic significance.

**5. Chandas :**

Chandas is the science of metres. Chandas deals with the analysis of the types of meter used in the construction of various Vedic hymns.

* In Sanskrit, the word “ Pada” is used as the metrical unit. The measurement is made depending on the number of syllables used. Syllables are classified into two categories, Guru and Laghu.
* A string of Guru – Laghu sequence of a particular length is called a meter.
* The chhandas of a mantra determines its usage, such as its purpose and context. But is acts more as an error-correcting mechanism.
* So, Chhanda helps us to ensure the form of the Mantra (by meter count).
* Chhanda Shastra of Pingalanaga is considered to be the oldest text available on the subject.
* The knowledge of the Chhanda proved useful in the composition of the smriti literature. It also played an important role in the emergence of classical Indian music and Sanskrit poetry.

**6. Jyotisha:**

The last Vedanga Jyotisha is called eye the organ of sight, of the Veda purusha. Jyotisha deals with the astronomical and astrological aspects of fixing auspicious date and time to perform various Vedic rites and rituals including the sacraments or rites of passage.

* The auspicious time is usually determined based on the position of the luminous bodies (Jyotisha) namely the Sun, the Moon, the Stars and other heavenly bodies.
* According to tradition, Sage Bhrigu is said to be the first person who perfected the knowledge of Jyotisha and built a record of the natal charts of every human being who was to be born earth.
* According to some historians, much of our knowledge of Jyotisha came from Egypt, Persia and Greece through traders, sailors and travelers.
* It is unfortunate that there is no work available at present dealing with ancient Vedic astronomy (Jyotisha) in the sutra style. Only we have a small text –book called Jyotisha of Vedic astronomy in verses in two recessions.
* This is a very difficult text and, therefore, is not clear on several points to Scholars even today.
* Also Bhaskaracharya, Varahamihira and Aryabhatta are known ancient scholars conversant with these scientific subjects.
* The Jyotisha of the Vedic world played an important role in the development of Vedic calendar, in the preparation astrological charts for the purpose of performing various sacraments or rites of passage and determining the date, time and place for the performance of the sacrificial ceremonies and daily rituals.

**So, to a certain extent the Vedangas were responsible for the popularity of Sanskrit as the main language of communication in ancient India and for its emergence as the language of the elite.**

Many principles and practices of the Vedangas were taken up by other religious traditions such as Buddhism and Jainism which relied upon Sanskrit as their medium of communication and included in their education systems and religious practices.