

## \* EVOLUTION OF SCRIPT AND LANGUAGES IN INDIA \*

\* LANGUAGE - A language usually refers to the spoken language, a method of communication.

\* SCRIPT - A script refers to a collection of characters used to write one or more language. Scripts are writing systems that allow the transcription of a language, via alphabet sets.

\* INDUS SCRIPT (HARAPPAN SCRIPT) - After the pictographic representations of early man, the first evidence of a writing system can be seen in Indus Valley civilization. The earliest evidence of which is found on the pottery and pot shreds of Rahman Dheri and are similar to those appearing in the Mature Indus symbol system. Later the writing system can be seen on the seals and sealings of Harappan period. Most inscriptions containing symbols are extremely short (5 symbols). It is not clear if these symbols constitute a script used to record a language. The long inscriptions are found in Gujarat particularly Dholavira where slabs of stone are inscribed with inscriptions which might represent name plates of the houses with 24 to 34 symbols. The characters are largely pictorial. The inscriptions are thought to have been written mostly from right to left. The number of principal signs is about 400. The average inscription contains five signs and the longest inscription is only 17 signs long.

\* BRAHMI SCRIPT — Brahmi is the originator of most of the present Indian scripts, including Devanagari, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam etc. It developed into two broad types in Northern and Southern India. In the Northern one being more angular and the Southern one being more circular. It was deciphered in 1838 by James Prinsep. The best known Brahmi inscriptions are the rock cut edicts of Ashoka in north-central India dated to 250-232 BC.

Brahmi is usually written from left to right. Brahmi is an abugida, meaning that each letter represents a consonant, while vowels are written with obligatory diacritics called matras in Sanskrit. In the early Brahmi period, the existence of punctuation marks is not very well shown. The use of a dash and a curved horizontal line is found in the middle period. A flower mark seems to mark the end and a circular mark appears to indicate the full stop. There seem to be varieties of full stop. According to the epigraphers, all Indian scripts are derived from Brahmi. There are two main families of scripts —

- (i) Devanagari — It is the basis of the languages of northern and western India — Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Marathi, Dogri, Punjabi etc.
- (ii) Dravidian — which shows the formats of Grantha, Vatteluttu script (Tamil and Malayalam), Kadamba (Kannada and Telugu).



## \* THE VEDAS \*

The Vedas are the earliest literary records of Sanskrit literature in India. The Vedas compiled by Rishi Vyasa are believed to be the oldest holy books in Hinduism. The Vedas are the large body of vast knowledge and text, the religious and spiritual teachings of which encompasses all aspects of life.

\* Definition — Veda simply means—Knowledge. It is a Sanskrit word from the root—Vid, which means finding, knowing, acquiring or understanding. There are 4 Vedas—Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda and all of them together are attributed to as Chaturveda. Each Veda consists of Brahmanas, the Upanishads and the Aranyakas.

\* RIG VEDA — Oldest texts of the Indo-Aryan Civilization.

Rig—Praise or shine, Veda—Knowledge.

It is a collection of 1028 hymns and 10600 verses, organised into ten different mandalas. Each Mandala is associated with a certain deity. There are hymns praising gods and asking for benefits such as health, long life, wealth protection and victory in battle. Rigveda was composed in an ancient form of Sanskrit about 1500 BC, though a wider approximation of 1700-1100 BC was also given by experts. Rig Veda has hymns that sing the praises of the Rig Vedic deities like Indra, Agni, Isoma, Varuna, Surya and other Gods. Rigveda provides almost complete information about the old Vedic civilization. It shows the picture

of oldest Aryan Civilization and their religion, way of life, thought and modes of behaviour. Rigveda has been a reminder of the ancient cultural heritage and point of pride for Hindus, with some hymns still in use in major rites of passage ceremonies.

\* SAMA VEDA - Sama Veda, known as the Veda of Melodies and Chants, is the second Veda. In Sama Veda, the words of Rig Veda put to music, and are to be sung rather than to be read or recited. It is divided in two major parts - First is the melody collections or the Saman - the songs and the second part is the Arika or the verse books - a collection of hymns and verses. The total no. of verses in the Samaveda is 1875. Amongst these, 1771 verses are from the Rigveda and 99 verses of this Samhita are not found in the Rigveda.

The Sama Veda has served as the principal roots of the Indian classical music and dance tradition. It also mentions instruments and the specific rules and regulations of playing them, so as to preserve the sanctity of ancient instruments.

\* YAJUR VEDA - Yajur Veda is composed Yajus and Veda. Yajus means mantras dedicated to religious reverence or Yagna (Yagya) and Veda means knowledge. Yajur Veda is also called the book of rituals. It is a compilation of ritual offering formulas or the prose mantras to be chanted repeatedly by a priest while an individual



performs the ascertained ritual actions before the sacrificial fire or the Yajña. It has served as a practical guidebook for the priest, or the Purohita who execute the acts of ceremonial religion.

Yajurveda has been a reminder of the ancient cultural heritage and point of pride for Hindus. The text is a useful source of Information about agriculture, economic and social life during the Vedic era.

#### \* ATHARVA VEDA -

Atharva Veda is depicted as Knowledge Storehouse of Atharvanas. Atharvanas meaning knowledge, formulas and spells intended to counteract diseases and calamities or the procedure for everyday life. It is called as the Veda of Magic formulas. It is a mixture of hymns, chants, spells and prayers and involves issues such as healing of illness, prolonging life, and as some claim also the black magic and rituals for removing maladies and anxieties.

Atharva Veda is a collection of 730 hymns, 6000 mantras, divided into 20 books with three Upanishads embedded to it - Mundaka Upanishad, Mandukya Upanishad and Prashna Upanishad.

The Samhitas in the Atharva Veda have written accounts of Surgical and Medical speculations, it includes mantras and verses for treating a variety of ailments.

## **THE UPANISHADS**

The concluding part of the Vedas are called as Upanishads. The Upanishads are also called Vedanta. Literally, Vedanta means the end of Veda, Vedasya antah, the conclusion (Anta) as well as the goal (Anta) of the Vedas. Chronologically they came at the end of the Vedic period. As Upanishads contain difficult discussions of ultimate philosophical problems, they were taught to the pupils at the end of their course. The chief reason why the Upanishads are called the end of the Veda is that they represent the central aim of the Veda and contain the highest and ultimate goal of the Veda as they deal with Moksha or Supreme Bliss.

### **Meaning of the word Upanishad**

The word Upanishad has been derived from the root Sad (to sit), to which are added two prefixes: Upa and Ni. The prefix Upa denotes nearness and Ni totality. Thus, this word means sitting nearby devotedly. This no doubt refers to the pupil's sitting down near his teacher at the time of instruction. The word in course of time gathered round it the sense of secret teaching or secret doctrine (Rahasya) which was imparted at such sittings. Due to secrecy and mystery of the teachings, a teacher refuses to impart instruction to a student who has not proved his worthiness to receive the instruction.

### **Number of the Upanishads**

It is difficult to ascertain the exact number that should be regarded as authentic Upanishads. Different estimates of their number have been given by scholars and they have been put by some scholars at as many as 200. One hundred and eight Upanishads are enumerated in the Muktikopanishad and a popular edition contains them. However, among these Upanishads, ten Upanishads, the names of which have been mentioned in the Muktikopanishad, are considered the most important Upanishads from the point of view of Vedantic Philosophy. Ten Principal Upanishads known as Dashopanishad are: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Munda, Mandukya, Taaittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka.

Besides, Shvetashvatara, Kaushitaki and Maitrayaniya Upanishads are often listed in old Upanishads.

### **Division of the Upanishads**

According to the Muktikopanishad, 108 Upanishads are divided according to four Vedas as follows: 10 Upanishads from the Rigveda, 19 Upanishads from the Shukla-Yajurveda, 32 Upanishads from the Krishna-Yajurveda, 16 Upanishads from the Samaveda and 31 Upanishads from the Atharvaveda.

The Principal **thirteen Upanishads**, related to the Vedas are:

**(A) Upanishads of the Rigveda:**

- (1) Aitareya Upanishad,
- (2) Kaushitaki Upanishad

**(B) Upanishads of the Shukla-Yajurveda:**

- (3) Brihadaranyaka Upanishad,
- (4) Isha Upanishad

**(C) Upanishads of the Krishna-Yajurveda:**

- (5) Taittiriya Upanishad,
- (6) Katha Upanishad,
- (7) Shvetashvatara Upanishad,
- (8) Maitrayaniya Upanishad

**(D) Upanishads of the Samaveda:**

- (9) Chandogya Upanishad,
- (10) Kena Upanishad

**(E) Upanishads of the Atharvaveda:**

- (11) Mundaka Upanishad,
- (12) Mandukya Upanishad,
- (13) Prashna Upanishad.

Thirteen known Upanishads were composed from the middle of the 5th century through the 2nd century BC. The first five of these—*Brihadaranyaka*, *Chandogya*, *Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, and *Kaushitaki*—were composed in prose interspersed with verse.

The middle five—*Kena*, *Katha*, *Isa*, *Svetasvatara*, and *Mundaka*—were composed primarily in verse. The last three—*Prasna*, *Mandukya*, and *Maitri*—were composed in prose.

**Major Theme of the Upanishads**

The Upanishads are religious and philosophical treatises. They constitute the last phase of the Vedic revelation. They represent the knowledge of Brahman (*Brahma-Vidya*). **What is this world? Who am I? What becomes of me after death? – Such questions are asked and answered in these Upanishads.** The essential theme of the Upanishads is the nature of the world and God. Already in the hymns of the Rigveda, we notice here and there a shift of emphasis from the innumerable gods to the one Infinite. The doctrine of true knowledge and salvation are major subjects of the Upanishadic philosophy.

In the Upanishads, we get an intelligible body of verified and verifiable spiritual insights mixed with a mass of myths and legends and cosmological speculations relating to the nature and origin of universe. The principal contents of the Upanishads are philosophical speculations. The spirit of their contents is anti-ritualistic. Although the subject-matter of most of the Upanishads is almost the same, yet each Upanishad has its own unique ideas.

### **Importance of the Upanishads**

- 1) The Upanishads occupy a unique place in the development of Indian philosophical thought. They contain the highest authority on which the various systems of philosophy in India rest. So, Vedanta Philosophy is directly related to the Upanishads. Not only the Vedanta philosopher professes his faith in the ends and objects of the Veda, but the Sankhya, the Vaisheshika, the Nyaya and Yoga philosophers, all pretend to find in the Upanishads some warranty for their tenets.
- 2) The Upanishads are associated with the Vedas and make the entire range of Vedic knowledge as complete. The Upanishads generally mention the Vedas and their study with respect. Certain verses from the Vedas, such as the *Gayatri*, form the subject of meditation here.
- 3) *Brahmavidya* or the knowledge of Brahman, the Supreme Reality is the great kingdom of the principal Upanishads. They give importance to Knowledge alone. Anyone having knowledge may be Guru or Acharya. Even kings approached to them for the attainment of knowledge. The story of Satyakama Jabala, who though unable to give his father's name, was yet initiated into spiritual life, shows this fact. In the Chandogya Upanishad (4.1-3) Raikva a Brahmana not by caste but by his knowledge, instructed king Janashruti. This shows that for Upanishads knowledgeable person is the most important and not the Brahmana, Kshatriya or anyone else.
- 4) 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. These spells out the non-duality of the *Jiva* and the Brahman - *Prajnanam Brahma-Rigveda*, *Aham Brahmasmi – Yajurveda*, *Tattvamasi – Samveda*, *Ayatmatma Brahma – Aharvaveda*
- 5) Without understanding the Upanishads, it is impossible to get an insight into Indian history and culture. Every subsequent development of philosophy and religion in India has drawn heavily on the Upanishads.
- 6) They are concerned with the contemplative-realizational rather than with the ritualistic-ceremonial aspect of the spiritual life of the people.
- 7) The Upanisads gave the people a philosophy but not a religion.