

Religion of India in 6th century BC (Part 1)--

- **Vedic dharma --**

- few important features of Arya philosophy developed in its early phases (also called **Samhita period**) --
 - Aryans **personified nature** and its elements. From the beauty of a sunset to the power of a storm, every natural phenomenon filled them with awe, fear, or wonder. They believed these forces were the work of gods.
 - Yet, they continued looking for a **unifying thread** through all these manifestations. They ultimately concluded that behind all these forms and expressions of nature, there was a single divine force, revealing itself through different godly presence like Indra, Varun, Agni, Vayu etc.
 - Another significant achievement of the Samhita period was the development of the **concept of Rita**. The sages of this era recognized that, just as a single unifying divinity underlies all divine forms, nature itself operates under a set of governing principles. They understood that natural phenomena, such as the cycles of day and night or the changing of seasons, are not random but are governed by a fundamental order.
- Following this came the **Brahman period**, often referred to as Brahmanism, in the post-Rigvedic times. During this time, extensive **Brahman texts** were composed for all the Vedas, and the **influence of priests grew** significantly. The **yajnas**, or sacrificial rituals, became increasingly complex, elaborate, and costly, leading to a growing sense of indifference among ordinary people. Many began to disdain the violence part of these sacrifices too. Additionally, the **Varnashrama** system—dividing society into distinct classes and stages of life—became deeply entrenched, fuelling simmering discontent among the populace.

- **Shraman Movement --**

- By the **6th century BC**, two distinct types of people began to emerge. On one side were those who meticulously adhered to the yajnas, performing them to perfection and generously donating wealth to Brahmins, aiming to please both the gods and the priests as instructed. On the other side were individuals dissatisfied with this ritualistic approach. They left their homes to live in the forests, embracing a life of asceticism as monks. They believed that by renouncing material possessions and dedicating themselves to meditation and yoga, they could uncover the true nature of reality. The insights they gained through this practice were shared with the broader community, giving rise to what became known as the **Shraman movement**. These movements affected both **Astik and Nastik traditions of Indian philosophy**. Among as many as 63 such heterodox sects, 6 were very popular --
 - **Amoralism or Non-action of Purana Kassapa (Puran Kashyap ka Akriyavaad)** -- This ancient school contended that there are **no moral laws**, nothing is inherently moral or immoral, there is neither virtue nor sin. If one kills all living beings on earth with one sharp edged disc, they wouldn't cause any true evil or harm.

- **Ajivika movement of Makkhali Ghoshala (Daivavaad)** -- Ghoshala believed in **fatalism and determinism**. He said that there is no free will, everything is a consequence of nature and its laws. Everything is predetermined.
- **Lokayata - Charvaka movement of Ajit Keshkambali (Jadvaad)** -- He believed in materialism. He said, everything, including humans, are **made up of 4 basic elements**, earth, water, fire and air and when someone dies, they return to those elements. He rejected the idea of an afterlife, reincarnation, karma, or the consequences of good or bad actions.
- **Atomism of Pakudh Katyaayan (Akritvaad)** -- Pakudh believed that everything is made up of **seven fundamental elements**. These basic building blocks are not created by any creator, these are **eternal**. These 7 building blocks are earth, water, fire, air, happiness, pain and soul. All actions, including death, are just the rearrangement and mixing of one set of substances into another. Hence, these 7 substances come together and get apart to create different forms and shapes.
- **Jain shraman movement of Niganth Nathputta also known as Mahavira** -- In Pali literature, 24th tirthankara of Jainism, **Vardhman Mahavira** is also referred as Niganth Nathputta. Jains believe that this world is eternal, made up of **6 elements**, Jeeva, Pudgal, Dharma, Adharma, Aakash and Kaal. Pudgal is visible matter and rest are invisible elements. These all elements are eternal too. Humans should strive to attain **Kaivalya Gyan** which roughly translates to complete understanding of reality. To kaivalya gyan, one must master **Triratna virtues**, **Samyak darshan**(right faith), **Samyak gyan**(right knowledge) and **Samyak charitra**(right conduct). Samyak charitra is obtained through observance of **5 vows**, **Ahimsa**(non-violence), **Satya**(truth), **Asteya**(non-stealing), **Aparigraha**(non-possessiveness) and **Brahmacharya**(chastity).
- **Agyaanvaad or Anishchitataavaad of Sanjay Belatthiputta** -- He was an evangelist of **absolute agnosticism**. He refused to have any opinion on the existence or non-existence of an afterlife, karma, good, evil, free will, a creator, the soul, or other related topics.
- **Upanishads** -- In the late Vedic era(800 BC), there were sages who lived in forests and were troubled by questions of reality and believed that mindlessly doing elaborate rituals might not lead one towards real knowledge. But at the same time, they didn't reject inherent wisdoms of Vedas. These sages began to seriously explore fundamental questions about reality, the self, the purpose of life, what happens after death, ethics and relationships. They started compiling their deliberations into textbooks now known as Upanishads. The Upanishads delved over key philosophical concepts that continue to be significant in Indian thought, including: atman (the individual self/soul), brahman (the ultimate reality), karma, yoga, samsara (the repeating cycle of birth and rebirth), moksha (spiritual liberation), purusha (the individual), and prakriti (the phenomenal world). Each Upanishad was associated with a particular Veda. They are often called "**Vedanta**"

(literally meaning "end of the Veda"), marking the conclusion of the Vedic period both chronologically and ideologically.

- There are 13 principal Upanishads -- **Brihadaranyak, Chandogya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Kaushitaki, Ken, Katha, Isha, Svetasvatara, Mundaka, Prashna, Maitri and Mandukya** Upanishad. The first 6 are much older than the later 7 Upanishads.
- In the Upanishads, **knowledge** takes precedence over the supreme Yajna of the Vedas, and **Prajapati** is now referred to as **Brahma**. The Upanishads teach that Brahma is present in every particle of the universe and that there is no difference between **Atma** (the individual self) and **Paramatma** (the supreme self). The **concept of Karma** has evolved too. Now instead of Yajna, Karma means all actions that lead to rebirth. The theory of Karma became central, individuals must account for their actions, with better karma leading to a more favorable rebirth and increased chances of achieving Moksha. **Moksha**, or spiritual liberation, became the ultimate goal, with knowledge being the key to attaining it. The **Varnashrama** system of the later Vedic period also became subservient for the authors of the Upanishads.