UNIT 3   VEDAS-I

Contents

3.0   OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to introduce:

* the essence of pre-philosophical sources of Indian philosophy. Just as history is preceded by pre-history and pre-history provides the background knowledge so also knowledge of pre-philosophy provides an insight into the spirit of philosophy and the direction in which it developed and why it developed in a particular direction;

* various misconceptions that cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations. With the help of this unit, you will be able to dispel all such negative elements so that a beginner like you can approach the discipline without any preconceived notion;

* in order to distinguish Indian philosophy from the western philosophy where it has to be distinguished and highlight similarities where there are;

* in order to distinguish philosophy from religion. This task is of paramount importance given the misplaced belief that philosophy is religion and religion is philosophy. If this is not erased in the beginning itself, a study of philosophy proves to be counterproductive;

* to be in a position to grasp the essence of Indian philosophy.

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Historians agree that the Indian civilization (and culture) is the oldest one. It is, therefore, natural that the earliest product of an ancient civilization should be the oldest thought, though found expression in written form much later (in the present case due to strange reasons) A refined civilization, if it is truly refined, does not spring from vacuum. It should emerge from primitive form of civilization and

the latter from more primitive form. In other words, history has its roots in pre-historic age. But, then, we have to initiate our study from somewhere. When this 'somewhere' itself dates back to the earliest age, we begin from the threshold of human civilization. It is sufficient if we are conscious of the roots of what marks the beginning of our study.

The Indian civilization, in its infancy, is characterized by 'nature-worship'. This feature constitutes the base of our future study. The development of the *Vedic* thought carries with it this particular germ. We are more pre-occupied with what germinated from this seed than with history-oriented controversies.

DATE OF THE *VEDIC* AGE

At the outset, it should be borne in mind that the *Vedic* age is not restricted to one particular year as in the case of the birth of any individual or a few decades as in the case of a few philosophical schools. Most surprisingly, the *Vedic* age spans over a very long interval of several centuries. What is shrouded in mystery is the exact century, let alone year, in which the *Vedic* thought took its birth. With great difficulty, scholars have pieced together all known evidences only to arrive at varying results. It is impossible to accept any result with certainty. The beginning of the *Vedic* age stretches incredibly from 1200 B.C……. Second aspect is that the *Vedic* age is characterized by continuous flow of thought. It is, rather, more like a stream of thought than like flashes of insight. Why is it so difficult to fix the beginning? One reason is that ancient Indians never thought of maintaining records what they did or, what they achieved. Secondly, the *Vedic* tradition is characterized by oral tradition for reasons, which will become clear later (3.2). Nor is there any reference to any thinker. Neither date nor authorship can be fixed with certainty in such a tradition.

GENESIS

The most important feature of the *Vedic* tradition is mentioned at the end of the previous section. Indeed, the word authorship is itself a misnomer because this vast literature does not have its beginning in written form. Traditionally, the *Veda* is regarded as '*apaurusheya*'. This word can be construed in two different senses. In the first place, it may be taken to mean that the *Veda* is a message from the god in the sense in which the 'Ten Commandments' of Moses are. In the second place, it may be taken to mean as what is 'revealed'. If we accept the first one, we are likely to be caught in an argument jam. Surely, it will be quite awkward to face this situation at the early stage. Hence, let us consider the second alternative. *Veda* is literally 'seen'; not constructed brick-by-brick. The opinion is that '*rishayah mantra drishtarah na tu kartarah*' (the Rishis, i.e., philosophers, never constructed, but 'saw'). Seeing is not through eyes, but it is through intuition. Perhaps ancient Indians thought that what is intuitively grasped or revealed must be independent of human. What is independent of human may not necessarily mean 'God-given'. In this sense the *Vedas* are *Apaurusheya,* just as the laws of physics are. Philosophy, generally, regards knowledge as objective. Thereby it regards knowledge as independent of human. Hence there does not seem to be any reason to contest the *apaurusheya* character of the *Vedic* literature. *Apaurusheya* can be taken to mean that the said text is objective.

Earlier we mentioned that the *Vedic* literature spreads over a long interval of time, at least a millennium, if S. Radhakrishnan is to be believed. Evidently, the literature is not the handiwork of any one person but it is the outcome of several generations. Hence there is lot of divergence in thought. Further, change of environment also contributes to variation. Not only thought, even language varies from generation to generation. The language of *Vedas* is said to the very ancient, so ancient that even the language of classical Sanskrit literature differs from the *Vedic* language. Consequently, the *Vedic* grammar differs from the grammar of classical Sanskrit. This has resulted in lot of hermeneutic controversies.

While we are not in a position to establish the founders of the *Vedic* tradition, at least we know philosophers who compiled what was preserved till then orally. At this stage, the literature acquired a definite form fit for a systematic study.

3.2   MEANING AND CLASSIFICATION OF THE *VEDAS*

THE MEANING

The word *Veda* is derived from the word '*Vid*' which means 'knowledge.' *Veda* is supposed to be boundless because knowledge is boundless. Earlier (3.1.3), we mentioned that since knowledge is objective and impersonal, *Veda* also is objective and impersonal. Being impersonal is the same as saying *apaurusheya*. It clearly shows that whatever epithet describes knowledge also describes the *Veda*.

At the outset, let us introduce two terms, *sruti* and *smriti*. *Sruti* means to hear and *smriti* means to remember. Of course, *sruti* does include *smriti*, a point, which will become obvious very shortly, though the converse does not hold good. The *Vedic* literature came down from generation to generation in the most unusual manner for extraordinary reasons. The ancient Indians believed that the *Vedas* should be transmitted only orally because they are convinced that to put the literature in the form of writing amount to sacrilege. It is likely that the technique of preserving any document was invented much later. Whether the ancient Indians knew the art of writing or not is a different question. But it is something different to ask this question; did they know the technique of preserving any written document for prosperity? In the absence of any such technique the only way was to communicate orally. What is listened has to be remembered. In this sense, *sruti* includes *smriti*.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE VEDAS

In two different ways, the *Vedic* age can be divided; collection of material and development of thought. It is commonly known that the *Vedas* are four in number; *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*. This particular division is based on the first system of division. The *Atharvaveda* alone belongs to a different age. It differs from the rest in all respects and only this *Veda* is independent in all respects. In the second system of division, we have *Mantras*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. These two systems of division are not distinct. At every stage, the first three *Vedas,* according to first division and all four components, according to, second division intersect. The whole scheme can be represented as follows.

	1	2	3	4
	Rigveda →	Yajurveda →	Samaveda ↓	Atharvaveda ↓
1	Mantras (M1) ↓	Mantras (M2) ↓	Mantras (M3) ↓	Mantras (M4) ↓
2	Brahmanas (B1) ↓	Brahmanas (B2) ↓	Brahmanas (B3) ↓	Brahmanas (B4)
3	Aranyakas (A1) ↓	Aranyakas (A2) ↓	Aranyakas (A3) ↓	
4	Upanishads (U1)	Upanishads (U2)	Upanishads (U3)	Upanishads(U4)

The case of *Atharva Veda* is slightly different. It has only one extant *Brahmana* called G*opatha Brahman.* The table indicates that the Aranyakas are associated with the first three *Vedas* only and in the case of the *Atharva veda,* there is a sort of quantum jump from the age of *Brahmanas* to the age of *Upanishads*. It may be noted that both horizontal and vertical developments are essentially of temporal order. While the *Mantras* of the *Rigveda* (M1 – R1) belong to the earliest age, the *Upanishad of the Atharvaveda(U4-* A4) belongs to the latest age. All other combinations vary within this range. While a discussion of individual *Vedas* become our focuss in the next unit, the other mode of development shall engage us presently.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What do you understand by *Veda*?

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2) Write a short note on the classification of Vedas

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3.3 AGE OF THE *MANTRAS*

Why did the *Aryans* compose *Mantras*? When these *Mantras* number several thousands, it was not for nothing that they did so. No matter what they said or did not say about the other world, unknown and unseen, the external world in which they lived occupied the center stage of their activity. The Aryans never thought that they could live independent of nature. Nor did they even believe that the external world had submitted itself to their will. This is an essential characteristic of the age of *Mantras* and the age of *Mantras* alone. They were convinced that they were an integral part of nature. The power of nature came to be regarded as far superior to their ability. One consequence of this attitude is that they came to believe that they are parasites of nature.

This being the case, the *Aryans* ought to have developed only sense of fear. They developed mixed emotions when they had to face gods. Gratitude and fear played a major role in this case. At some point of time gratitude turned into a deep sense of love. This is because their very survival, not just existence, depended upon nature and in turn, nature itself was deified. The *Vedic* literature in its entirety is, therefore, nature-centric and life-centric. Awareness of this simple fact propelled the *Aryans* to take several strides far ahead of others, which shaped the Indian Society (for good or bad) for a very long duration.

The Aryans took seriously two major issues: agriculture and protection from enemies. There is no sense in talking of agriculture when life is restricted to the bounds of forest. Depleting animal strength due to continuous hunting must have forced tribal people to graduate from predation to cultivation. Evidently, cultivation, then, was totally at the mercy of nature. By this time, the *Aryans* had changed, or were driven to change, their life style. So they became nature-dependent humans (or animals). Psychology is such that what is supportive of one need is taken as supportive of any other need. If deified nature bestows all its mercy in the form of food, then the very same nature may as well destroy enemies. The *Mantras* were composed in order to pray to the nature-gods. Prayer was the mark of gratitude. This is the birth place of the *Vedas*. Now we stand on the threshold of learning the nuance of the *Vedic* literature.

The *Vedas* are the collection of *Mantras*. Collection in Sanskrit means '*Samhitaa*' (*sam* = together, *hita* = put). Therefore, the *Rigveda* is actually the *RigVeda Samhitaa* and so other *Vedas*. The collection of *Mantras* is not a random one. There is a definite design, which determines every collection. To be precise, *Samhitaa* stands for order (in biological sense), which has been clearly divided, and each division is further divided and this process is very much akin to the kind of classification and division, which take place in biology. Before understanding this process we have to return to the *Vedic* literature.

The *Vedic* pantheon included many gods, because there were too many natural forces, which they worshipped. But all these gods were characterized by one particular quality. In Sanskrit, god means '*deva*'. According to the *Nirukta*, which is *Vedic* dictionary, '*deva*' means, two things: one which gifts and one which shines; i.e., the source of light. Life depends upon light. So, naturally, life depends upon the gods. These *Vedic* gods are classified differently. Hiriyanna M. classified them as: (i) gods of the sky, (ii) gods of the mid-air and (iii) gods of the earth. Bloomfield classified them as (i) gods of prominent aspects of nature, (ii) gods

of action and (iii) gods of concept. While according to first classification, *Agni* belongs to the third group, according to the second classification it belongs to the first group. The difference between two types of classification is that in the first type only natural forces find the place where as in the second type, in addition to natural forces, abstract notions also find place. For example, *Savitru* (one who stimulates) and *Brahmanaspati* (the source of prayer), which are gods of action, form a sort of link between men and nature-gods.

The number of gods, it is said in the *Vedic* tradition is indefinite. However, it is desirable to make a list of very important gods, numbering thirty-three, who hold key portfolios. The list includes both types of classification.

Table A

i)   gods of Sky (gods of *Dyuhu*): *Mitra* (the sun), *Varuna*, *Dyuhu*, *Savitru*, *Pushan*, *Ashwin*, *Ushas*, *Aadityaha*, *Vishnu*

ii)   gods of mid-air (gods of *Antariksha*): *Indra*, *Vayu*, *Apaamnapaat*, *Rudra*, *Marut*, *Parjanya*, *Aapaha*.

iii) gods of the earth (gods of *Prithivi*): *Agni*, *Prithivi*, *Soma*, *Brihaspati* (*Brahmanaspati*)

Table B

i)   gods of nature: *Agni*

ii)   gods of action: *Tvashtru* (the architect), *Savitru* (one who stimulates), etc.

iii) gods of notions: *Shraddha* (faith), *Manyu* (anger), etc.

All *Mantras* are composed only with the intention propitiating these gods. Now we can understand the principle or motive behind the collection of *Mantras*. All *Mantras* propitiating one particular deity are classified together and this collection is called '*Sukta*'. The collection of all such *suktas* is '*Samhita*'.

Nature of the *VEDIC* GODS

It is very important to note this difference. In the *Vedic* tradition, we can only find either impersonal gods (like all nature gods) or quasi-personal gods. In many respects, the *Vedic* gods resemble human beings, like gender difference, procreation, etc. However, it is wrong to think that gender difference, procreation, etc. are restricted to human beings. Surely, they characterize life as such. Gods ought to have life. Admittedly, it is impossible to imagine lifeless gods. When every natural force or agency (including day and night) is animated, the whole universe (nature = universe) becomes animated.

What is the philosophical significance of this conclusion? The manner in which the *Aryans* conceived nature gods was such that it demanded that the gods must be live-gods. The striking aspect here is that even impersonal gods are animated.

The *Mantras* had two-fold function to perform at different stages. During the age of *Mantras*, the method and the motive were quite simple. The motive was either to express gratitude or to make a request. At this point of time, there was no place for sacrifice. The element of sacrifice dominated the next stage, i.e., *Brahmanas*. When mere prayer, accompanied by freely available commodities like milk, ghee, etc., was enough to propitiate any number of gods, there was no

need of any expert, i.e., priest. However, there was change in environment and the change was not necessarily for better. This change takes us to the next stage of *Vedic* thought.

Before we pass on to the age of *Brahmanas*, there are two more philosophical aspects which remain to be considered. When the *Aryans* conceived every natural force as something divine, they inadvertently accepted that the external world is not final and that there is some unseen and unknown force, which controls the visible world. This will lead us to the conclusion that if we choose the path set by the *Aryans*, then we have to search for ultimate reality. This is possible if we go beyond the bounds of senses. Hence speculation plays a major role. Just as, all experimental sciences have their origin in philosophy and mythology, so also pure philosophy has its origin in pure speculation. Speculation is an intellectual activity. If our understanding is limited to what can be termed as elementary sense experience, then neither philosophy nor science is possible. To refine there should be something, which is in need of refinement. Initially, that which is crude is refined. The process of refinement is endless. Therefore what was refined at one stage is further refined. This process is common to both science and philosophy.

Second aspect explains the origin of nature worship. Philosophy of religion considers three types of religion; tribal, national and universal. There is no need to study the characteristics of these types. It is sufficient to know that the feeling of identity with nature is a characteristic mark of tribal religion alone. The idea of sacrifice also characterizes only tribal religion. Since these are hallmarks of *Vedic* thought, we ought to conclude that the *Vedic* thought is more tribal in its nature than what it is made out to be. Surely, what is tribal is primitive. If so, is it inferior to other kinds of religion? The question of superiority or inferiority may arise anywhere else, but not in the case of religion. This is so because all religions differ only in kind, but not in degree. Secondly, earlier form of religion does not give rise to later form of religion; one religion may influence another. That is very different. We are only concerned with the origin of religion. We do not indulge in the qualitative comparison of religions.

3.4   AGE OF THE *BRAHMANAS*

The tribal character of *Vedic* thought is explicit in the *Brahmanas*. What distinguishes this particular phase from the earlier one is the prominence that the sacrificial cult received. It is interesting to know how this transition took place. It is also necessary to peep into human psychology. M. Hiriyanna comments in his work 'Outlines of Indian Philosophy', that the idea of sacrifice was not altogether alien to the initial phase. Evidently, it had not yet become a cult at that point of time. If so, why did it become a cult at later stage? During the course of evolution, the 'animal instinct' or to 'expect' – to borrow the phrase from David Hume –might have come down to man. Apparent order in nature is understood as inscrutable law of nature thanks to this particular instinct. Again, the very same instinct prompts man to 'demand'. Obviously, the demands are endless. To ensure that the expectation or demand does not hit dead end, he ingeniously manipulates. His ability to manipulate events creates an impression or firm conviction that he can dictate terms. This mindset worked behind the attitude of *Aryans* at this stage. It also explains why and how the *Aryan* mind

switched from one end to the other. An act of gratitude or request, which marked the age of *Mantras* was explicitly replaced by 'command'. This change reflects the spirit behind *Brahmanas*.

The age of *Brahmanas* is marked by the institutionalisation of rituals, which came to be known as *yaga* and *yagna*. Since the spirit of *Brahmanas* died a premature death thanks to the onslaught of the *Upanishads* and the *Buddhism*, its influence on the development of philosophy came to be restricted to the birth of *Purva Mimamsa* only. This phase has to be considered only because it stands for deviation from the mainstream of philosophy in the very beginning itself.

The institutionalisation of rituals brought into effect two major changes; first the very existence of gods, in addition to their powers, became questionable. Secondly, it gave rise to a new class, i.e., the priestly class. Though the *Brahmanas* did not question the existence of gods per se, their attitude, in a way, downgraded gods and second, new forces or entities were added. They came to believe that the rituals performed as per specifications have innate ability to yield the desired results. Hence, gods became mere puppets. If they yield, then what man puts forth is not request, but demand. Further, due to accurate performance of rituals if gods are forced to yield, then it shows that the power really is vested in rituals. This was enough to sideline gods. Consequently, the *Purva Mimamsa,* much later, denied altogether the very existence of god.

Earlier, a reference was made to new forces or entities. The equipments required to perform rituals gained priority at this stage. They were treated nearly on par with gods. Thus it was not just mechanism that played pivotal role. Thereby a new dimension was added to rituals. Gradually, rituals came to be treated as a sort of magic. The course of transition is now complete; from expression of gratitude to demand or command and from technique to magic. Consequently, an expert who conducts rituals turns out to be a magician in the last phase. Symbolic presentation is another addition, which destroyed the spirit of veneration that was prevalent in the preceding phase.

However, the disastrous addition, which damaged the very structure of ancient Indian society, was that of priest-class. Most probably, this addition gave rise to the caste system later. In other words, if *chaturvarnya* system degenerated into caste system, it may be due to a sort of superiority, which the priest class acquired rightly or wrongly.

3.5   THE AGE OF *ARANYAKAS*

This phase marks another transition from the spirit of *Brahmanas* to the spirit of the *Upanishads*. While the *Brahmanas* are called *Karma Kanda* (*Karma* is another word for *yajna*) because of total emphasis upon rituals, the *Upanishads* came to be known as *Jñāna kanda* because here knowledge becomes primary. Since the shift involved total change in attitude, it needed a link. This phase is called *Aranyanka* because it became relevant when men retired to forests due to old age. Why should old people retire to forests? Surely, this is a provoking question. Forest was the dwelling place for tribes. If old people retired to forest, then it must be due to strong affinity to the place of origin, which prompted them to choose so.

That apart, we should consider other changes which forest life brought into. Even in those days life in society (it is not clear whether the urban- rural divide, which is now a commonplace phenomenon characterized life then) was more comfortable because all requirements could be met. This was not so in forest where one has to lead secluded life. Non-availability of required material came in the way performing rituals. Hence the need arose to replace rituals. At this point of time, mechanism gave way to creativity. Routine performance of rituals did not require any insight. What was required was merely practice. However, creativity is required when replacement has to be decided. This thought itself was enough to notice the undesirability of rituals. Reflection followed by realisation paved the way for the pursuit of knowledge in the form of the *Upanishads*.

This change is, admittedly, a revolution. The *Aryans*, hitherto, concentrated only on procuring facilities to lead a trouble-free life. To be sure, there was literally no philosophy in their endeavour. Their lifestyle only laid the foundation for future philosophy. Hence, proper study of philosophy begins only from the *Upanishads*.

In this connection, one question remains to be answered. The *Aranyakas* constitute a phase in the life of an individual. There is no doubt about it. In what sense can it be regarded as a phase in the *Vedic* thought? This question is relevant because only older generation belonged to *this phase*, whereas younger generation belonged to the *Brahmanas*. It means that the *Aranyakas* mark a stage in the life of individuals, but not in the development of *Vedic* thought. There is only one way of answering the question. The thoughts of old people might have influenced the younger generation during interaction. If this possibility is not accepted, there is no other reason to accept the *Arayakas* as a phase in the development of *Vedic* thought.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

  b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Why did the *Aryans* compose *Mantras*?

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2) What are two major changes brought into effect by the institutionalisation of rituals?

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3.6   THE CONCEPT OF *RITA*

Earlier (3.3.1), reference was made to several gods who were propitiated by the *Aryans* but no mention was made about their role in the life of the *Aryans*. Since in the next unit there will be a detailed discussion, only passing reference to this aspect here is enough. *Indra* was regarded as god of *Valour*. He was venerated during war. *Surya* was the source of life. Obviously, he occupied center stage. The twin gods *Dyava-Prithivi* shower rains and through rains food. The role played by *Varuna*, another *Vedic* god, is crucial. *Varuna* is held to be the guardian of *Rita*. This word has two meanings; natural order and moral order. *Varuna* enforces order not only on nature, but also on human beings. He is the guardian of order and also one who practises moral principles (*Ritavari*) Not only *Varuna*, *Surya* also is regarded as the practitioner of morality. Concern for morality, both personal and social, is another aspect of the *Vedic* thought.

3.7   THEORIES OF THEOLOGY

Since the *Vedic* pantheon included many gods (around thirty three), a question naturally arises; who is most important among them? It is difficult to say that all are equally important. If only some gods are very important, there must be some reasonable grounds to say so. In this light, we can discern three streams of thought. In the strict sense of the term, the word theory cannot be used. First two streams have only religious significance, whereas the last one is philosophically significant. A brief consideration of these streams of thought follows.

POLYTHEISM

Ostensibly, the *Vedic* thought admits polytheism simply because several gods are propitiated. This belief is further strengthened when we consider the fact that the same *sukta* includes more than one name. However, in reality, the case is different. Polytheism was never a dominant trend in the *Vedic* literature despite the presence of so many gods. It became a stepping-stone to another trend. It ought to be so because if God (not god) is taken as omnipresent and omnipotent, then the presence of even two gods (not too many) defies common sense, forget logic. Only tenacity and dogma should resist any thought contrary to belief. The very fact that at the initial stage itself the *Aryans* renounced polytheism speaks of their reflective temperament. Willingness to accept defect is the first step in the direction of correcting the mistake. This is what is called progressive thought. Hence, the obvious conclusion is that though the *Vedic* literature has very little philosophy, the *Vedic Aryan* had developed philosophical acumen, which paved the way for the birth of vast philosophical literature.

This is one aspect. The very prevalence of polytheism at any point of time anywhere in *Vedic* literature was seriously questioned by Max Müller. If we follow his argument, then polytheism is a misnomer. At any given point of time, 'one' god was worshiped. Gods differed in accordance with needs. The *Aryan* exercised choice in worshiping one god which is surely peculiar or unique form of democracy within the domain of religion. No pressure was exerted on them to worship 'this' or 'that' god. They enjoyed religious 'voluntarism'. This is what is called freedom of thought. Max Müller used the word 'henotheism' to explain this trend.

MONOTHEISM

M. Hiriyanna makes a subtle distinction between 'henotheism' and monotheism. While, according to him, the former is characterized by belief in one god, the latter is characterized by belief in 'one only' god. Evidently, some sort of process of reduction is involved in bringing down the number of gods from thirty-three to one. This is choice exercised with reason which is similar to some kind of thought experiment. In the *Rigveda*, the *suktas*, which declare oneness, are in plenty. Let us consider one such *sukta*:

indram mitram varunam agnimaahu

ekam sadvipraa bahudha vadanti

Before they arrived at this conclusion, the *Aryans* were troubled by a genuine problem, who should be invited to receive the gift (*havis*)? *kasmai devaaya havishaa* vidhema, The *Aryans* went on experimenting speculatively (so it is called thought experiment) to exercise their choice. Several names cropped up' *vishwedevaaha*, *vishwakarma*, *prajaapati*, *hiranyagarbha*, etc. *Yaska*, in his *Nirukta,* has resolved this issue in a very simple manner. 'one God acquires different names corresponding to different actions.' In other words, the problem of 'many' gods was not solved but simply dissolved by *Yaska*.

MONISM

Monotheism is as much theistic as polytheism. The real leap – a kind of quantum leap – is to monism. This stream of thought is of critical importance for two reasons; one, the *Vedic* thought caught up, finally, with philosophical speculation and two, it freed itself from the clutches of primitive religion. The idea of god as the architect of the universe and guardian of morality was set aside and instead search of primeval substance began. Philosophy begins with doubt. Promptly, monism begins with fundamental question; when and how did the universe come into existence. The search for primeval substance is the search for unitary principle. Cosmology is the subject of *Vedic* monism. Before quoting from the *Rigveda*, we should know what monism means. Monism does not distinguish between creator and created. Otherwise, it amounts to dualism. If 'creator' is the cause and what is created is the effect, then it leads to dichotomy of cause and effect. Monism denies this dichotomy of cause and effect. This is the bottom line of the development of monism.

There is one *sukta* in the *Rigveda* called *Nasadiya sukta*. This *sukta* begins with the assertion that there was neither being nor non-being. Only *tadekam* (that one) was and is. Further, it continues to say that 'no gods had then been born'. It means that the gods are 'younger' than this universe. Then, in any sense, philosophical or mythological, these gods are not gods at all. Only the last line may pose a problem. It begins with these words; 'its Lord in heaven'. How can any *sukta* talk of heaven when it said earlier, '*novyomaa paroyat* (no sky beyond). In this context, 'sky' means celestial, thing in deep space, etc. It may be reasonable to assume that heaven means deep space and Lord means the 'primeval substance'. Irrespective of the correctness or incorrectness of interpretation what can be concluded with certainty is that the *Vedic* monism is germane to philosophical tradition.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a)   Use the space provided for your answer

b)   Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1)   What do you understand by *Rta*?

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2)   What is the difference between 'henotheism' and 'monotheism'?

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3.8   LET US SUM UP

The earliest civilization in India began with the *Vedic* civilization. The *Vedas* are four in number; Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva. Every *Veda,* with the exception of the Atharva, is divided into four phases in its development of thought. The age of Mantras is supposed to be the earliest phase. All Mantras are composed with the intention of offering prayer to gods. The *Vedic* gods are known as nature gods because natural forces were worshiped by the ancient Indians. Gods are 33 in number. The most important among them are Agni, Indra and Surya. The *Vedic* thought, later, developed on philosophical lines giving birth to monotheism and monism. Monism is the beginning of Indian philosophy.

3.9   KEY WORDS

Intuition   :   Intuition is the ability to sense or know immediately without reasoning.

Hermeneutics   :   Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. Traditional hermeneutics – which includes Biblical hermeneutics – refers to the study of the interpretation of written texts, especially texts in the areas of literature, religion and law.

3.10   FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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3.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1) The word *Veda* is derived from the word '*Vid'* which means 'knowledge.' *Veda* is supposed to be boundless because knowledge is boundless. Earlier (3.1.3), we mentioned that since knowledge is objective and impersonal, *Veda* also is objective and impersonal. Being impersonal is the same as saying *apaurusheya*. It clearly shows that whatever epithet describes knowledge also describes the *Veda*.

2) In two different ways, the *Vedic* age can be divided; collection of material and development of thought. It is commonly known that the *Vedas* are four in number; *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*. This particular division is based on the first system of division. The *Atharvaveda* alone belongs to a different age. It differs from the rest in all respects and only this *Veda* is independent in all respects. In the second system of division, we have *Mantras*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. These two systems of division are not distinct. At every stage, the first three *Vedas,* according to first division and all four components, according to, second division intersect.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1) The Aryans never thought that they could live independent of nature. This is an important reason for the composition of *Mantras*. The *Mantras* were composed in order to pray to the nature-gods. Prayer was the mark of gratitude. This is the birth place of the *Vedas.* The *Vedas* are the collection of *Mantras*. Collection in Sanskrit means '*Samhitaa'* (*sam* = together, *hita* = put). Therefore, the *Rigveda* is actually the *RigVeda Samhitaa* and so other *Vedas*.

2) The institutionalisation of rituals brought into effect two major changes; first the very existence of gods, in addition to their powers, became questionable. Secondly, it gave rise to a new class, i.e., the priestly class.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1) This word 'rta' has two meanings: natural order and moral order. *Varuna* enforces order not only on nature, but also on human beings. He is the guardian of order and also one who practises moral principles (*Ritavari*). Not only *Varuna*, *Surya* also is regarded as the practitioner of morality. Concern for morality, both personal and social, is another aspect of the *Vedic* thought.

2) There is a subtle distinction between 'henotheism' and monotheism. While the former is characterized by belief in one god the latter is characterized by belief in 'one only' god.