

Vedic and ...
then, shows the presence of dieties in
way that all the creatures should be in harmony with each other.

RTA

The Cosmic Order

In the Vedic religion 'Rta' is the principle of natural order which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it. 'Rta' is properly joined order, rule and truth. In the hymns of the Vedas 'Rta' is described as that which is ultimately responsible for the proper functioning of the natural, moral and sacrificial orders. The action of the individual in relation to those ordinances, referred to as 'Karma' - two terms which eventually eclipsed. 'Rta' in importance as signifying natural, religious and moral order in later Hinduism. 'Rta' is one of the most important religious conceptions of the 'RigVeda'.

'Rta' appears most frequently as representing abstract concepts such as "law", "Commandment", "Order", "sacrifice", "truth" and "regularity", but also occasionally or concrete objects such as the waters, the heavens or the sun as manifestations of the operation of 'Rta' in the physical universe, 'Rta' is also frequently used to reference to various Vedic deities.

While the concept of Rta as an abstract, universal principle generally remained resistant to the anthropomorphic tendencies of the Vedic period, it became increasingly associated with the actions of individuals deities, in particular with those of the god Varuna as the omniscient, all-encompassing sky. The connection of Varuna and Rta extended beyond the physical realm and into the sphere of ritual worship, with the sacrificial for itself being landed as that which "harnesses the steeds and holds the reins of Rta, becoming Varuna when he strives for 'Rta'.

Consequently, Rta finds a conspicuous place in the Mantras (Hymns). Expressions Like, 'guardians of Rta' (Rtasyagopa) and 'Practisers of Rta' (Rtayu) occur frequently in the description of the gods. This word originally meant uniformly of nature or the ordered course of things such as in indicated by the regular alter nation of day and night, while in Mantras is not only bears this significance but also the additional one of 'moral order'. The Vedic gods are accordingly to be viewed not only as the maintainers of cosmic order but also as upholders of moral law. This equal responsibility of divinity for the maintenance of cosmic as well as moral order is particularly dear in the conception of Varuna. He represents the sky and is the God of heavenly light. He is described as having fixed the laws of the physical universe which no one can violate.

The great importance given to Rta in the Vedas can be appreciated from the description of there laws in Rigveda 1-75-5 where it says, "ritam satyam vijnani" which would literally mean knowing of truth, which is Rta, is the only true knowledge. There laws are part of Vedic higher knowledge. According to these laws one is only free to do any action if he obeys and follow these commands of the God and without following them no individual can seek Moksha-the state of eternal bliss. It is also the state when one reaches the abode of God and avoid rebirth in the phenomenal world.

Vedic Metaphysicists have found that having created these laws God himself follows them sternly, lest a cosmic disorder or chaos may result in the destruction of the universe.

The Divine and the Human Realms

After the emergence of Rta as a cosmic order it is also supposed as the settled will of a supreme god, the law of morality and right eousness as well. Even the gods cannot transgress it. We see in the conception

of Rta a development from the physical to the divine. Rta originally meant the "established route of the world, of the sun, moon and stars, morning and evening, day and night". Gradually it became the path of morality to be followed by man and the law of righteousness observed even by gods. "The dawn follows the path of Rta, the right path; as if she knew them before. She never oversteps the regions. The sun follows the path of Rta". The whole universe is founded on Rta and moves in it. This conception of Rta reminds us of words worth's invocation to duty.

What law is in the physical world, that virtue is in the moral world. The Greek conception of the moral life as a harmony or an ordered whole is suggested here. Varuṇa who was first the keeper of the physical order, becomes the custodian of the moral order, *Rtasya gōpa* and the punisher of sin. The prayer to the gods is in many cases for keeping us in the right path. "O Indra, lead us on the path of Rta, on the right path over all evils."

So soon as the conception of Rta was recognised there was a change in the nature of gods. The world is no more a chaos representing the blind fury of chance elements, but is the working of a harmonious purpose. This faith gives us solace and security whenever unbelief tempts us and confidence in ourselves is shattered. Whatever might happen, we feel that there is a law of righteousness in the moral world answering to the beautiful order of nature. As sure as the sun rises tomorrow virtue will triumph. Rta can be trusted.

Mitra is the companion of Varuṇa and is generally invoked along with him. He represents sometimes the sun and sometimes the light. He is also an all-seeing, truth-loving god. Mitra and Varuṇa are joint-keepers of the Rta and forgivers of sin. Gradually, Mitra comes to be associated with the morning light and Varuṇa with the night-sky. Varuṇa and Mitra are called the *Ādityas*, or the sons of Aditi, along with Aryaman and Bhaga.

Features of Rta

Yajur Veda says that we get true knowledge of these cosmic laws from seven forces of the nature, i.e., the Sun, Moon, Firmament, Waters, Clouds, Fire and Earth.

It has been also said that by following these laws, you remain away from misery. These laws are regarded as part of Vedic higher knowledge. The Vedic dharma is entirely based on Rta. An ideal and noble living is based on Rta.

The lovers of wisdom is needed for the study of Rta. Rta is also known as Vratani. Dualist like dvaita Vedantist also advises that human beings should find more and more Rta because these cosmic laws will guide the individuals towards of path of material wealth and Moksha.

By following Rta, the entire mankind on this Earth can live as friends and even as spiritual brothers and sisters in harmony and unity. Each Vedic Rta is regarded as complete in itself. These are for once and ever. If any Rta is different for different periods of history then, it is not regarded as Rta.

The ancient seers had created symbolic and innocent mythology for conveying the message of "follow Rta and assist your supreme father as the formless and ineffable Brahma and supreme mother as the divine Prakrit".

Vedas

The Vedas are considered the earliest literary record of Indo-Aryan civilization, and the most sacred books of India. They are the original scriptures of Hindu teachings, and contain spiritual knowledge encompassing all aspects of our life. Vedic literature with its philosophical maxims has stood the test of

time and is the highest religious authority for all sections of Hindus in particular and for mankind in general.

"Veda" means wisdom, knowledge or vision, and it manifests the language of the gods in human speech. The laws of the Vedas regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs of the Hindus to the present day. All the obligatory duties of the Hindus at birth, marriage, death etc. owe their allegiance to the Vedic ritual. They draw forth the thought of successive generation of thinkers, and so contain within it the different strata of thought.

Origin of the Vedas

The Vedas are probably the earliest documents of the human mind and is indeed difficult to say when the earliest portions of the Vedas came into existence. As the ancient Hindus seldom kept any historical record of their religious, literary and political realization, it is difficult to determine the period of the Vedas with precision. Historians provide us many guesses but none of them is free from ambiguity.

It is believed that humans did not compose the revered compositions of the Vedas, which were handed down through generations by the word of mouth from time immemorial. The Vedas were mainly compiled by Vyasa Krishna Dwaipayana around the time of Lord Krishna (c. 1500 BC)

Classification of the Vedas

The Vedas are four. The Rig-Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda, the Rig Veda being the main. The four Vedas are collectively known as "Chaturveda," of which the first three Vedas viz., Rig Veda, Sama Veda and Yajur Veda agree in form, language and content.

Structure of the Vedas

Each Veda consists of four parts—the Samhitas (hymns), the Brahmanas (rituals), the Aranyakas (theologies) and the Upanishads (philosophies). The collection of mantras or hymns is called the Samhita. The Brahmanas are ritualistic texts and include precepts and religious duties. Each Veda has several Brahmanas attached to it. The Upanishads form the concluding portions of the Veda and therefore called the "Vedanta" or the end of the Veda and contains the essence of Vedic teachings. The Upanishads and the Aranyakas are the concluding portions of the Brahmanas, which discuss philosophical problems. The Aranyakas (forest texts) intend to serve as objects of meditation for ascetics who live in forests and deal with mysticism and symbolism.

The Four Vedas

The Rig Veda

The Rig Veda is a collection of inspired songs or hymns and is a main source of information on the Rig Vedic civilization. The Rig-Vedic 'samhita' or collection of mantras consists of 1,017 hymns or 'suktas' covering about 10,600 stanzas, divided into eight 'astakas' each having eight 'adhayayas' or chapters, which are sub-divided into various groups. The hymns are the work of many authors or seers called 'rishis'. There are seven primary seers identified: Atri, Kanva, Vashistha, Vishwamitra, Jamadagni, Gotama and Bharadwaja. The Rig Veda accounts in detail the social, religious, political and economic background of the Rig-Vedic civilization.

The Sama Veda

The Sama Veda is purely a liturgical collection of melodies ('saman'). The hymns in the Sama Veda, used as musical notes, were almost completely drawn from the Rig Veda and have no distinctive lessons of their own. Hence, its text is a reduced version of the Rig Veda. As Vedic Scholar David Frawley puts it, if the Rig Veda is the word, Sama Veda is the song or the meaning, if Rig Veda is the knowledge, Sama Veda is its realization, if Rig Veda is the wife, the Sama Veda is her husband.

The Yajur Veda

The Yajur Veda is also a liturgical collection and was made to meet the demands of a ceremonial religion. The Yajur Veda practically served as a guidebook for the priests who execute sacrificial acts muttering simultaneously the prose prayers and the sacrificial formulae ('yajus'). There are no less than six complete recensions of Yajur Veda – Madyandina, Kanva, Taittiriya, Kathaka, Maitrayani and Kaphishthala.

The Atharva Veda

The last of the Vedas, this is completely different from the other three Vedas and is next in importance to Rig-Veda with regard to history and sociology. A different spirit pervades this Veda. Its hymns are of a more diverse character than the Rig Veda and are also simpler in language. The Atharva Veda consists of spells and charms prevalent at its time, and portrays a clearer picture of the Vedic society.