

### Philosophy of the Vedas:

The Sanskrit terms for philosophy are 'darsanas' and 'tattva', which means 'vision of truth and reality'. 'Know the self' (Atmanam Viddhi) is the keynote of all Schools of Indian Philosophy. And this is the reason why most of the Schools of Indian Philosophy are also religious sects. Annihilation of the three kinds of pain – adhyatmika, adhibhavitika and adhidvaivika – and realization of supreme happiness is the end and Sravana, Manana and Nididhyasana are the means – in almost all Schools of Indian Philosophy.

According to the Indian tradition the various philosophical ideas that were developed in the philosophical systems originated in the Vedas. The Vedas are considered as the earliest document. The name Veda (knowledge) stands for the **Mantras** and **Brahmanas**. Mantra means a hymn addressed to some god or goddess. The collections of the Mantras are called '**Samhita**'. There are four Samhitas – **Rk, Sama, Yajur** and **Atharva**. These are said to be compiled for the smooth performance of the Vedic sacrifices. The Brahmanas unlike the Mantras, are written in prose. They are the elaboration of the complicated ritualism of the Vedas. They deal with the rules and regulations laid down for the performance of the rites and the sacrifices. Their name, 'Brahmana' is derived from the word 'Brahma' which originally means a prayer. There is little philosophy in these, though some philosophical ideas flash here and there in the course of some speculative digressions. The appendages to these Brahmanas are called '**Aranyakas**' mainly because they were composed in the calmness of the forests. The Aranyakas mark the transition from the ritualistic to the philosophic thought. We find here a mystic interpretation of the Vedic sacrifices. The concluding portions of the Aranyakas are called the '**Upanishads**'. These are intensely philosophical and spiritual and may be rightly regarded as the cream of the Vedic Philosophy. The hymns are the creation of the poets; the Brahmanas are the work of the priests, and the Upanishads the meditations of the philosophers. The religion nature of the hymns, the religion of law of the Brahmanas and the religion of spirit of the Upanishads, correspond in a very close way to the three great divisions in the Hegelian conception of the development of religion.

The Mantras and the Brahmanas are called the **Karma-Kanda** or the portion dealing with the sacrificial actions, and the Aranyakas and the Upanishads are called the **Jnana-Kanda** or the portion dealing with knowledge. Since people include the Aranyakas in the Karma-Kanda. Really speaking, they represent a transition from the Karma-Kanda to the Jnana-Kanda. The Upanishads are also known as '**Vedanta**' or 'the end of the Veda'. Firstly because they are literally the concluding portion, the end of the Vedas, and secondly because they are the essential, the cream, the height, of the Vedic Philosophy.

In the Vedic hymns, we find religion and Philosophy more or less intermixed. But along with it the seeds of the important philosophical trends might be easily traced. Moreover,

there has been a gradual development of the philosophical thought from the Mantras and the Brahmanas through the Aranyakas to the Upanishads. It is said that we can notice a **transition** from the **Naturalistic** and **anthropomorphic 'Polytheism'** through **transcendent 'Monotheism'** to **immanent 'Monism'** in the pre-Upanishadic philosophy. Polytheism, Henotheism and Monotheism are the three different stages in the evolutionary history of the Vedic gods. The personified forces of nature first changed into real gods and these later on, became mere forms of one personal and transcendental God; **'the custodian of the cosmic and moral order'**. They maintain the physical order of the cosmos known as **Rta**.

The law of which **Varuna** is the custodian is called the Rta. Rta literally means "the course of thing". It stands for law in general and the immanence of justice. This conception must have been originally suggested by the regularity of the movement of Sun, Moon, and Stars, the alternations of day and of night, and of the season, Rta denotes the order of the world. Everything that is ordered in the universe has Rta for its principle. The tendency towards the mystic conception of an unchanging reality shows its first signs here.

When the early Vedic Aryans who were primitive, settled down and began to wonder at the charming and the tempting and to fear the terrible and the destructive aspects of nature, they personified them in an anthropomorphic fashion and called them gods and goddess and began to worship them. This was the stage of naturalistic and anthropomorphic polytheism. In Vedic polytheism natural occurrences are attributed to supernatural causes. Polytheism yielded place to monotheism and the latter to monism. **Max Muller** introduces **Henotheism** as a transitional stage from polytheism to monotheism. Henotheism means 'belief in one only God'. The Vedic Aryans regarded any god they were praising as the most supreme and the only god. According to MacDonnell henotheism is an appearance rather than a reality, an appearance produced by the indefiniteness due to undeveloped anthropomorphism. But whether we call it henotheism or mere exaggeration of the powers of the deity in question, it is obvious that this stage can neither be properly called polytheistic nor monotheistic but one which had a tendency towards both of them.

Now let us see the stages of development of thought from polytheism to monotheism in the early parts of the Vedas. When polytheism leads to monotheism, the most powerful god among the hierarchy of gods is enthroned as the ruler of this universe. In monotheism, Varuna at one time and **Indra** at another time were treated as the supreme. The supreme can only be one. We cannot have two supreme and unlimited beings. Everywhere the question was asked whether a god was himself the creation of another. A creator god is no god at all. With the growing insight into the workings of the world and nature of godhead the many gods tended to melt into one. The perception of unity realized in the idea of Rta waked in support of monotheism. Trust in natural law means faith in one God. Rg Veda declares that reality is one and that sages call it by many names such as **Agni, Yama**, etc.

Experiments on the concept of God continued and now monotheism gives way to

monism because the seers were not satisfied with an anthropomorphic or personalistic conception of the Godhead. This tendency towards the **One** culminates in monism. In monotheism many Gods were reduced to one God, but in monism the whole of existence is reduced to one fundamental reality, which the wise regard him as many. There are mantras in the Vedas which allude to monism eg: '**sat (reality) is one**'. To Israel the same revelation came: "The Lord, thy God, is one". Plutarch says: "There is one sun and one sky over all nations and one Deity under many names."

Thus the highest spiritual truth is expressed in two forms in Vedic hymns - **Personal Theism** (Monotheism) and **Absolutism** (Monism). Theism here means the belief in a personal deity whereas Absolutism is the view that recognizes an absolute impersonal reality as the ground for all existence.

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