

انگلش مضامین

- (32) Literally meaning ‘old’ the Purānās are religious imaginative stories with a moral illustrative of Srutī. They are the adventures of gods and goddesses, saints and kings including the 10 avatars of Hinduism. They are said to be 18 in number.
- (33) A law book or code of laws. This term includes the whole body of Hindu law, but it is more applicable to the laws of Manu, Yajnavalkyā, and other inspired sages who first recorded the Smritis.
- (34) See N.T. Nair, *Ma! Who is a Hindu?* (Singapore: Print World Services Pvt. Ltd., 1991), 55.
- (35) See al-Bīrūnī, vol. 1, 93.
- (36) Al-Bīrūnī, vol. 1, 89 - 92.
- (37) Ibid, 93.
- (38) See Raja C. Kunhan, “Vedic Literature” in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, , vol. 1, 213.
- (39) A stage of life of a brāhman. Hindus believe that a brāhman has four stages of life.
- 1) Brāhmachāī- when he is a student
 - 2) Grihasthā- when he becomes a householder
 - 3) Vanaprāsthā- as an anchorite
 - 4) Sannyāsī- a mendicant.
- (40) Ibid. 213.
- (41) It is written in ‘The Fo Sho Hing Tsan King: “Sometimes the mountain dweller (i.e. the religious hermit) falls into ruin, sometimes the humble householder mounts up to be a *ṛishī*, the want of faith (doubt) is the engulfing sea, the presence of disorderly belief is the rolling flood.” See Bodhisattva Asvaghosiā, “The Fo Sho Hing Tsan King”, translated by Samuel Beal in *The Sacred Books of the East*, book IV, Varga 20, 1664.
- (42) Al-Bīrūnī, 28.
- (43) See Sharvanandā Swami, 182.
- (44) See “Srutarshi” in John Dowson.
- (45) See “The Bhagavatgita” in *The Sacred Books of the East*, chapter XXV.

- (23) “Samdhiyā” says al-Bīrūnī “is the interval between day and night, i.e. morning-dawn, called Samdhiyāudāyā, i.e. the Samdhiyāof the rising, and evening-dawn, called Samdhiyā-astamānā, i.e., the Samdhiyāof the setting. The Hindus require them for a religious reason, for the Brahmans wash themselves during them. As already mentioned Hindus are very particular about the recitation of the Vedas. But one of the conditions in the reading of the Vedas is its timings. There should be no break in the reading and the Brahmans should be careful not to interrupt it in any way.
- (24) Al-Qur’ān, Sūrah al-A’rāf 7: 145. “And we ordained for him in the Tablets in all matters, admonition and explanation of all things, (and said): “Take and hold these with firmness, and enjoin thy people to hold fast by the best in the precepts: Soon shall I show you the homes of the wicked,- (how they lie desolate).”
- (25) One is reminded of the Aḥādīth Qudsiyyah which are revealed to the Holy prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) in their meaning and the Holy prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) puts it in his own words.
- (26) See Fenton, Hein, Reynolds, Miller and Nielson, *Religions of Asia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 337- 328.
- (27) See al-Bīrūnī, vol.1, 128.
- (28) Ibid, 127.
- (29) Vedangā literally means ‘limb of the Veda’ and it constitutes the literature which is auxiliary to the study of the Vedas. It consists of the following sciences
- 1) Phonetics
 - 2) Ritual
 - 3) Grammar
 - 4) Etymology
 - 5) Metrics
 - 6) Astronomy
- It is much like what the Muslims call Uṣūl al-Tafsīr. Hindus do not categorise the Vedangās under the Srutī but neither is it a part of the *Ismirī* because Hindus believe that *Rishī* saw this discipline and it is not of human composition.
- (30) Literally ‘a thread or string.’ A rule or aphorism. Averse expressed in brief and technical language embodying and transmitting rules. But they generally signify those connected with the Vedas. Most of the Sutras are believed to precede the Manu Smṛti.
- (31) These are the two epics which embody almost the whole Indian culture. It is said about the Mahābhārtā that it was written by the sage Vyasa while the Ramayana is attributed to one sage Valmiki. Mahābhāratā constitutes that great war which came to be known as the wars of Kurukshetrā which were fought between the two clans of Pandavās and the Kauruvās. The Ramayana constitutes of the story of Rāmachandrā the seventh avatar of Vishnu and his adventures.

- (16) Hindus are very unanimous on the conditions that have been set for anyone who embarks on a study of the Vedas. Their requirements are so many that it is not in the capacity of one man to even remember them let alone execute them. But the following sources provide information on what conditions need to be fulfilled. Apastambā, “Aphorisms on the sacred law of the Hindus, The Sacred Laws of the Āryās”, *The Sacred Books of the East*, Prasnā 1, Patālā 3, Khandā 9, 32-48. “Sankhayānā- Grihyā-Sutrā, The Grihyā Sutrā, Rules of Vedic Domestic Ceremonies”, translated by Hermann Oldenberg, *The Sacred Books of the East*, Adhyāyā II, Khandā 7.
- (17) Gautama, “The Sacred Laws of the Aryas”, Translated by George Buhler. *The Sacred Books of the East*, chapter XVI, 1 - 49.
- (18) Now if he (a Sudra) listens intentionally to (a recitation of) the Veda, his ears shall be filled with (molten) tin or lac. If he recites (Vedic texts), his tongue shall be cut out. If he remembers them, his body shall be split in twain. For more details see ‘The Minor Law Books’, translated by Julius Jolly, *The Sacred Books of the East*, XX, 12.
- (19) See Sharvānandā Swami, 183-184.
- (20) Ibid, 183.
- (21) Ibid, 184. For more details see *The Essential Teachings of Hinduism*, edited by Kerry Brown (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1990. Also see an indispensable study by Max Muller, “The Upanishad”, translated by Max Muller, *The Sacred Books of the East*, Introduction, viii-lxxxv.
- (22) Al-Bīrūnī, *al-Bīrūnī’s India*, vol. 1, 129. Al-Bīrūnī says that through the third method a text can be read twice when it is finished. But it seems that there has been a miscalculation because in this way one can finish a text three times. The format is follows: A, AB, B, BC, C, CD, etc. But there are two or rather three more ways of recitation to which al-Bīrūnī could not get access. Sunti Kumar Chatterji, A.D. Pusalker and Nalinaksha Dutt have mentioned three more ways in their preface to *The Cultural Heritage of India* for the preservation of the Rig-Veda which merit mention here. They write: “This preservation of the text without corruption was ensured by introducing at least five modes of recitation of individual mantras from the Rig-Veda: The Sāmhītā-*pathā* (continuous recitation) was the normal text governed by the rules of metre and rhythm. In the *padā-pathā* (word recitation) each word in the Sāmhītās, text was recited without sandhi (compound) in its own specific accent. The third was *kramā-pathā* (step recitation), where each word of the *padā-pathā* was recited twice, being connected with both what precedes and what follows, e.g. ab, bc, cd, etc. The *jatā-pathā* (woven recitation) which was based on the *kramā-pathā*, recited each of its combinations twice, the second time in the reverse order, e.g., ab, ba, ab; bc, cb, bc; etc. In the *ghānā-pathā* (compact recitation) the order was ab, ba, abc, cba, abc; bc, cb, bcd, dcb, bcd; etc. The significance of the complete measure of success achieved by this system in preserving the text from interpolation, modification, or corruption will be realized when we find that in the entire text of the Rig-Veda, covering 1028 mantras or about 74000 words, there is only one variant reading...in VII.44.3.

REFERENCES

- (1) See 'Revelation', *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- (2) *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s. v. "revelation", accessed April 24, 1999, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/revelation>.
- (3) Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 24.
- (4) *Ibid*, 137.
- (5) See Sharvanandā Swami, "The Vedas and their religious teachings" in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, edited by Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Nalinaksha Dutt, A.D. Pulsalker and Kumar Bose Nirmal (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission, Institute of Culture, 1982.), vol. I, 182. See also V.M. Apte, "The Vedangās", 264. Also see "Srutī" in John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, Literature*, (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1993).
- (6) Much like in Islam the general word for revelation is *Waḥī* but when the word '*Waḥī*' is spoken on its own a Muslim will immediately relate it to the Holy Qur'ān rather than its general meaning. Similarly in Hinduism the word for revelation is *Srutī* but to a Hindu *Srutī* has stronger connections with the Vedas than the general word revelation.
- (7) See *The Laws of Manu*, translated by G. Buhler, *The Sacred Books of the East*, edited by Max Muller, vol. II (Delhi: Motīlāl Banārsidās, 1989), 10.
- (8) See *Teviggā Suttā, Buddhist Suttās*, translated by T.W. Rhys Davids, *The Sacred Books of the East*, edited by Max Muller (Delhi: Motīlāl Banārsidās, 1989), verse 13. See also *The Laws of Manu, The Sacred Books of the East*, 477 and 479. Also *The Vedānta Sūtras*, translated by George Thibaut, 213 and 223.
- (9) See Sharvanandā Swami, 182-183.
- (10) A celebrated sage, to whom is attributed the White Yajurvedā, the Satapatha Brahmānā, the Brihad Aranyākā, and the code of law called *Yājñavalkyā-Ismirtī*. He is said to have lived before the grammarian Katyāyānā and was probably later than Manu. See "Yājñavalkyā" in John Dowson.
- (11) See 'The Brihadaranyākā Upanishads', *The Upanishads*, translated by Max Muller, Adhyāyā no.II. Brahmana no. IV, verse 10.
- (12) See Sharvanandā Swami, 182-183.
- (13) See Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, *al-Bīrūnī's India*, translated by Edward Sachau, vol.1, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1992), 126.
- (14) See "The Buddha-Karita of Asvaghoshā, Buddhist Mahayana Texts", translated by E.B. Cowell, *Sacred Books of the East*, n.d.), Book1 and 47.
- (15) See Sharvanandā Swami, 183.

we can say is that inspiration is a form of revelation and continues to this day for if God had put a stop to that as well then the Hindu world, nay the whole world would very soon run out of wise and inspiring men and women who are already wanting in modern societies.

CONCLUSION

From the ongoing discussion it is then clear that Hindus believe in Vedas to be their revealed books which are the eternal word of God revealed to the *rishī*. The *Rishī* were pious sages who 'saw and heard' the Vedas directly from God. The Vedas were transmitted generation after generation until they were compiled around 1500 B.C., a date which has been moved further back to 2400 B.C. by contemporary scholars of Hinduism if not further. The notion that Hinduism is not a revealed religion is highly-contestable.

Hindus are adamant on professing the absolute authority of the *Sruti* literature and tolerate no compromise on its authenticity and prevalence over their thought. Any aversion to the Vedic thought ends up unmistakably in the folds of heresy. As mentioned earlier the historical examples of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism have borne witness to this fact as each of these religions was in one way or other challenging the authority of the Vedic literature and inviting people to an independent system.

Moreover if one has a look at the *Smrti* literature of the Hindus which conforms to the Vedic teachings in general, one finds the Hindus unanimous on the fact that if the *Smrtis* should contradict the *Sruti* in any way it should be abrogated or be given an interpretation conforming to the *Sruti*.⁽⁴³⁾ The reason being that *Smrti* is a literature of human composition which is not infallible and therefore subject to change whenever one is deemed necessary.

Although there aren't any texts in Hinduism which restrict the process of revelation to the Vedic or post-Vedic period yet there are two reasons which strongly suggest that practically there hasn't been any new revelation of the kind which could be termed as self-certifying (like the Vedas) after the Vedic period.

Hindus themselves claim that the *rishī* of the Vedic period had passed away and the *rishī* of the following ages (those of the Puranic period for instance) were called *Tarkā-rishī* or *Shrūtā-rishī*⁽⁴⁴⁾ (the Reasoners) i.e. these *rishī* didn't experience the word of God as did the *rishī* of the Vedic period but after contemplation on the Vedas developed the ability to see the truth.

Throughout history, Hindus have consistently maintained that any divergence from the Vedic thought necessitates heretical conclusions and therefore is not Hinduism. This amounts to terming Vedic teachings as the yardstick or standard by which one can determine how Hindu a certain thought or system is in the post-Vedic periods. It also invariably suggests that revelation, particularly of the *Shrūtī* kind has come to an end.

But the Hindus also believe in personal inspiration or illumination which depends upon the spiritual or intellectual endeavour of an individual.⁽⁴⁵⁾ As was mentioned earlier theoretically Hindus do not deny that *rishī* can't be born or their status not be reached but practically this hasn't happened. But what

“The pupil asks: “If He speaks because he knows, what then is the difference between him and the knowing sages who have spoken of their knowing?” The master says: “The difference between them is time for they have learned in time and spoken in time after having been not-knowing and not-speaking. By speech they have transferred their knowledge to others. Therefore their speaking and acquiring knowledge takes place in time and as divine matters have no connection with time God is knowing speaking from eternity. It was he who spoke to Brahman and to others of the first beings in different ways. On the one he bestowed a book; for the other he opened a door, a means of communicating with him; a third one he inspired so that he obtained by cogitation what God bestowed upon him.”⁽⁴²⁾

Here (emphasis mine), we are acquainted with three means God uses to communicate with men. On the one he bestowed a book clearly indicates that God has sent his agents whatever people call them with books. This should not be confused with the Vedas, as it is common knowledge that the Vedas were not revealed in the form of a book. Rather they were revealed to different *rishī* at different times but were compiled in book form later on.

The second means of communication is said to be ‘an opening of the door’. What it actually means is unclear but it certainly implies that it is a form of disclosing a hidden matter for someone who was looking for something.

And the third means of communication is through activating the mental faculty. Here one gets the feeling that the master is talking about what Muslims call non-prophetic inspiration which is relevant to mystics, poets, philosophers, thinkers etc.

There is also another mode of revelation which was not mentioned here. The mode of Avatars or incarnations. The sheer symbolism involved in this concept does not permit us to treat it here but it is an issue worthy of treatment and deliberation.

Revelation: Continuity or Termination

Finally it remains to be seen whether the process of revelation from god to man still continues or has stopped from a certain period of time.

Purānās. The Vedic *rishī* were advanced citizens of their age and gifted poets. They had not abandoned their interest in the problems of life in this world. They lived as members of the family propitiating gods with their sacrifices and with their prayers.⁽³⁸⁾

The Upanishadic and Puranic *rishī* lived with their families in forest settlements and had children. They had abandoned their attachments to world affairs. Some Hindu scholars have deduced from this that the *rishī* were not sannyāsins. In fact, the Ṛgveda as well as Brāhmaṇās literature are said to contain passages which suggest that the *rishī* didn't consider the world an evil place. Rather they condemned the sannāyassin and taught to live in this world according to ones āshramā⁽³⁹⁾ even after attaining realization.⁽⁴⁰⁾

In addition to this we have the following information about the *rishī*:

All the *rishī* were born before the Kali Yuga (the Hindus believe that we are presently living in the Kali Yuga) and that there will no *rishī* in this age.

Rishī attained this status through the severest austerities but it doesn't have to be taking to the forest. If one performs the rituals and sacrifices as ordained one could attain the status of a *rishī* as well.

The status of a *rishī* is theoretically accessible but practically very few people can reach it.⁽⁴¹⁾ In order to understand the concept of revelation in Hinduism fairly well there are two more issues which need to be cleared. Firstly, the different modes of revelation in Hinduism and secondly whether revelation is still continuing or has it come to a halt.

Modes of Revelation

After having understood the mode of *rishī* it would be interesting to know the different modes of communication that exist between God and man and whether they still exist or not.

Books on Hinduism have little to offer in this regard but once again al-Bīrūnī shows his mastery over this religion by asking this question and procuring an answer from the Hindus which is quite surprising. Quoting from the *Pathanjali*, al-Bīrūnī writes:

have divided all spiritual beings into different classes the highest of which is the Deva or angel and the lowest, Vidyādhara, the demon-sorcerer who exercises a certain witchcraft. All these spiritual beings numbering 8 according to the popular Hindu belief differ according to the primary force, which prevails on them. There are three primary forces and each depicts a different kind of nature. The primary force which prevails on any being is the result of the past actions that it had performed.

1. The first primary force is concerned with developing the intellect and purifying the senses and it leads to rest and liberation.
2. The second primary force is concerned with developing cupidity (greed) and leads to fatigue.
3. The third primary force is concerned with developing ignorance which leads to carelessness and eventually punishment which will lower him from the stage of humanity to animals and plants.⁽³⁶⁾

The angels or devas who are on the highest level of spirituality live in quietness and bliss and the predominant faculty of their mind is the comprehending of an idea without matter. But they attained this status through their actions. The *rishī* according to the Hindus then, excel the angels in their knowledge but the difference between them is that *rishī* are bound to their bodies and are lower to them in the spiritual hierarchy as al-Bīrūnī has pointed out.

He says that human beings who have attached themselves to the devās and stand in between them and mankind...but without being free from the body are called *rishī*.⁽³⁷⁾

This gives us three characteristics of the *rishī*.

- Firstly, that they were human beings who were exceptionally advanced spiritually.
- Secondly that they had immense knowledge of God so much so that even the angels had to learn from them.
- Thirdly that they could comprehend ideas even when they (the ideas) were not in matter form. This further explains what we shortly said that the Vedas were revealed to them but the words were theirs because they could comprehend what God wanted them to say and transferred that message into words and phrases.

Hindus differentiate between the *rishī* of different periods. There are the Vedic *rishī* and the *rishī* of the Upanishads and

The Vedangās⁽²⁹⁾, the Sutras⁽³⁰⁾, the two great Epics - Rāmāyānā and Mahabharata⁽³¹⁾, the Purānās⁽³²⁾ and the Dharma sastrās⁽³³⁾.

Although there are Hindus who on the basis of some Vedic texts believe the *Smṛti* texts to be absolutely divine yet the practice has been that many of them are thought to be commentaries on the Vedas and of human composition under divine inspiration rather than the direct word of God as the *Sṛuti*.

But the Bhagavatgītā which is in fact a part of the *Smṛti* literature of the Hindu holy books yet it is also the most loved and read book in India. The reason being that it contains the summary of the six schools of philosophy which are prevalent all over India namely Vaisesikā, Nyāyā, Mimāmsā, Yogā, Sāmkhyā and Vedantā. It is also thought to be the embodiment of the essence of the Vedas and the Shastrās.⁽³⁴⁾

Having understood that the Vedas are the word of God, according to Hindus, which was revealed to man, it remains to be answered through what medium does God communicate His word to man. For if there is revelation then inevitably there has to be a recipient of that revelation. When Hindus are asked who are those recipients in Hinduism they readily reply “the *rishī*”.

The Rishī

Most of the books on Hinduism including their revealed texts describe *rishī* as sages or seers, exceptionally gifted who intuited the truth from God and handed it down through a succession of disciples. Other than this piece of information we only find characteristics of the *rishī*. But this doesn't really tell us who the *rishī* were. Here, yet again al-Bīrūnī has very important additions to make which clarify the picture a thousand fold. He says:

“Rishī are the sages, who though they are only human beings, excel the angels on account of their knowledge. Therefore the angels learn from them and above them there none but Brahman.”⁽³⁵⁾

It is important to have a clear perception of what al-Bīrūnī calls ‘the different classes of being’ to be able to understand exactly who these *rishī* are. In a separate chapter titled ‘On the different classes of created beings and on their names’ he says that the Hindus

General beliefs about the Vedas

Hindus believe that the Vedas are the eternal word of God which was revealed to the *rishī* orally which means that it was not handed to them in the way Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) got his set of teachings written on a Tablet.⁽²⁴⁾ Rather the *rishī* could see the words of God through their pure souls which had undergone all kinds of austerities rendering them suitable to receive the word of God and giving it form in their own words.⁽²⁵⁾ That is why in many of the texts the *rishī* are called the utterers of the mantras or their makers.

Secondly Vedas exercise total control over the Hindu thought. Anyone guilty of learning non-Vedic knowledge before the Vedic one is threatened of dire consequences. Similarly anyone found challenging the authority of the Vedas can find a seat for himself anywhere except within Hinduism. For Vedas are the yardstick with which Hindus measure how Hindu is a certain thought. Beliefs which cannot stand the test of the Vedas are immediately reduced to heresy and thrown out of the Hindu expanse. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are bare proofs of this state of affairs. All were religions, which took birth in India but couldn't find haven in the open arms of India; the reason being that they had challenged the authority of the Vedas.⁽²⁶⁾

Thirdly, the Vedas were transferred to the later generations orally as well. This was because all the Vedas are recited in a particular way with differing modulations and styles. Unfortunately these different ways of recitation cannot be recorded. Moreover with written material the odds are that change may take place.⁽²⁷⁾

Hindus also believe that nobody can produce something like the Vedas for it is the Word of God. While a small number of them thinks that it is possible but one shouldn't try out of reverence for the Vedas because it will mount to rivaling God.⁽²⁸⁾

In addition to the *Sruti* literature there is another form which the Hindus regard as revelation though not of the same quality as the *Sruti*. It is what they call *Smṛti*. The literal meaning of this term is:

- Tradition
- The thing that was heard
- What was remembered

Smṛti constitutes the following books:

(ranging from a modest 108 to a massive 250) with different sects claiming allegiance to various Upanishads while leaving the rest, but the oldest known commentator of the Upanishads, Shankarachāriyā recognized only 16 to be authentic although the remaining Upanishads also claim attachment to one Veda or another.⁽²¹⁾

The word ‘Upanishad’ literally means ‘near-sitting’ which implies the close relation between the guru and the pupil and the mode of teaching. Upanishads also depict the philosophizing of the Vedic religion and answer questions pertaining to the attainment of salvation through knowledge of the Ultimate Reality by self-realization. Forming the last parts of the Vedas, the Upanishads are also remembered as the ‘Vedanta’ which means the end of Vedas.

Now, these Vedas have been preserved into the memory of the sages through generations in a very remarkable way. Each of the four Vedas were recited in a particular way and al-Bīrūnī has given an interesting account of their recitation. There are three ways to recite the Ṛgveda:

1. In a uniform manner of reading, just as every other book is read.
2. In such a way that a pause is made after every single word.
3. In a method which is the most meritorious, and for which plenty of reward in heaven is promised, first you read a short passage each word of which is distinctly pronounced, then you repeat it together with a part of that which has not yet been recited. Next you recite the added portion alone and then you repeat it together with the next part of that which has not yet been recited. Continuing to do so till the end you will have read the whole text twice.⁽²²⁾

The Yajurveda is recited like the Ṛgveda but it has to be read by the rules of Samdhiyā.⁽²³⁾

The Sāmaveda is recited in a tone like a chant and hence its name is derived because ‘samān’ means the sweetness of recitation.

The Atharva-Veda is connected by the rules of Samdhiyā and is recited according to a melody with a nasal tone.

Vaishayas are allowed to read the Vedas while the Sudras shouldn't as much as pronounce a word of it lest they have their tongues cut off or be subjected to any other punishment.⁽¹⁸⁾ This is because the Sudras aren't clean enough on account of their menial work which is to serve the other three castes in any way they desired.

After the Sāmhitās come the Brāhmaṇas, which are mostly descriptions of the sacrificial rites and the way they are done. They revolve around eight topics namely, history, old stories, esoteric knowledge about meditation, supreme knowledge, verses, aphorisms, explanations, and elaborations. Each of the Vedas possess one or more of the Brāhmaṇas.

The Sāmhitās and the Brāhmaṇas together are called the karma-kandā (the portion pertaining to the rituals). It is obvious that both the texts are related to the rituals and sacrifices as the name implies.⁽¹⁹⁾

The Brāhmaṇas were actually meant for the Brahmans because they contained details of the Vedic ceremonies, with long explanations of their origin and meaning; they give instructions as to the use of particular verses and metres; and they abound with curious legends, divine and human, in illustration.

The Aranyakas meaning 'forest-dwellers' are the teachings pertaining to those who left for the forests in the hope of meditation and finally receiving liberation. It is said that some Brahmans got tired of the stringent world of rituals and took to the forests in the hope of meditating. The teachings which took birth as a result of this move were the Aranyakas. That is why the Aranyakas have a very mystical nature much like the Upanishads and discuss lofty ideas as the nature of God philosophically. But most of the Aranyakas have been lost and only four texts survive which are attached to the first two Vedas. They are also called Upasana-kandā (pertaining to meditation).⁽²⁰⁾

Finally we come to the Upanishads. Most Hindu scholars tend to classify both the Aranyakas and the Upanishads under the common heading of Upanishads, because both display the same characteristics of deep mystical and philosophical approaches of attaining knowledge of the Transcendent Reality through meditation, away from the stringent rituals of the Brāhmaṇās. There is a difference of opinion as to the exact number of the Upanishads

to Paylā, Yajurveda to Vaysampayānā, Sāmaveda to Jaminī and Atharva-Veda to Sumantā. As this was a major achievement on his part, he came to be known as Veda-Vsāyā, i.e. classifier of the Vedas.⁽¹²⁾

Al-Bīrūnī says:

“Further, the Hindus maintain that the Veda together with all the rites of their religion and country, had been obliterated in the last Dvāparā yugā,...until it was renewed by Vyāsā, the son of Parāsarā.”⁽¹³⁾

It is written in the Buddhist Mahayānā Texts:

“Yea, the son of Sarasvatī proclaimed that lost Veda which they had never seen in former ages, - Vyāyā rehearsed that in many forms which Vasīshthā helpless could not compile.”⁽¹⁴⁾

Each of the four Vedas is classified into four divisions (some are of the view that there are three fundamental divisions while another view puts it at two but basically it all comes to the same result) i.e. Sāmhitās, Brāhmaṇās, Arayankas, and Upanishads.

The four major Sāmhitās are Ṛgveda Sāmhitās, Yajurveda Sāmhitās, Sāmaveda Sāmhitās and Atharva-Veda Sāmhitās. These are a collection of hymns and praises in honour of different gods and goddesses and are supposed to be recited during particular rituals and ceremonies. And since they are of divine origin, they are said to have a profound effect on one’s spiritual state.⁽¹⁵⁾ That is why Hindus are very particular about the prerequisites for Vedic study.⁽¹⁶⁾ A small glimpse would suffice to give the reader a good idea of the intricacies involved.

“The annual (term for studying the Veda) begins on the full moon of the month Sravānā (July-August); or let him perform the Upakarman on (the full moon of) Bhādrapada...Let him remain chaste, let him not shave nor eat flesh (during that period)...He shall not recite the Veda if the wind whirls up the dust in the day-time,...nor while (he suffers from) sour eructations, nor in a burial ground, at the extremity of a village, on a high-road, nor during impurity, while he is impure (he shall) not even (recite the Veda) mentally.”⁽¹⁷⁾

And that is also the reason why out of the four primary castes of the Hindus only three i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and

Srutī also means 'the thing that was heard' and the Hindus believe as we shall see that the Vedas were revealed 'orally' and not in written form.

As a religious terminology the word Veda is used to denote the sacred scripture of the Hindus which was revealed to the *rishī* or the sages of the ancient times orally. In the Buddhist Suttās it is written:

“Well then, Vasetthā, those ancient rishī of the Brahmans versed in the three Vedas, the authors of the verses, the utterers of the verses, whose ancient form of verses so chanted, uttered, or composed, the Brahmans of today chant over again and repeat; intoning or reciting exactly as has been intoned or recited...did even they speak thus, saying: “We know it, we have seen it...”⁽⁸⁾

Although strictly speaking Vedas apply to a set of four books namely, Ṛgveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda and Atharvaveda, it also constitutes the whole Vedic literature which comprises of the Sāmhitās, the Brāhmaṇās, the Aranyakās, and the Upanishads (the last two are sometimes classified together under the Upanishads) all of which are considered to be revealed from God.⁽⁹⁾ Hindus also reiterate the fact that knowledge embodied in the Vedas cannot be gained through any effort of the human mind so they like to call it 'apawrūsiyā' i.e. not of human origin. Yajñavalkya⁽¹⁰⁾ says:

“As clouds of smoke proceed by themselves out of a lighted fire kindled with damp fuel, thus, verily, O Maitreyī, has been breathed forth from this great Being what we have as Ṛgveda, Yajur-Veda, Sāmaveda, Atharvangirāsās, Itihāsā (legends), Purānā (cosmogonies), Vidyā (knowledge), the Upanishads, Slokās (verses), Sutrās (prose rules), Anūvyakhyānās (glosses), Vyākhyānās (commentaries). From him alone all these were breathed forth.”⁽¹¹⁾

When the Vedas were first revealed to the *rishī* they consisted of 100,000 verses in four divisions but with the passage of time some got lost and parts of it were forgotten as well. So in the Dvāparā Age, Krishna Dvaypayānā revived the Vedic study and classified them according to the ancient divisions of Ṛg, Yajur, Samā, and Atharvān. In order to perpetuate the study of the Vedas in a proper way he taught them to four disciples. He gave the Ṛgveda

Hinduism and Buddhism are included, as the divine manifests itself in the form of the cosmic order.⁽⁴⁾

This can hardly be right for as we shall see in the course of this article, in Hinduism, there is also revelation of the prophetic type manifested in their sacred scriptures. But the western notion does hold true in that most of the Hindus believe in that salvation lies in the realization of this order namely, that there is rebirth and the object of man's life is to somehow get rid of it, whatever way he/she chooses for that, from among the ways that are prescribed by Hindus.

Revelation in Hinduism

Strictly speaking Hindus have their own word for divine disclosure (revelation) and that is *Sruti*. By this word they mean literally:

- divine revelation
- revealed word
- that which was heard⁽⁵⁾

But at the same time *Sruti* is synonymous with their sacred book the Vedas.⁽⁶⁾

Manu *Smrti* says:

“But by Sruti (revelation) is meant the Veda, and by Smrti (tradition) the Institutes of the sacred law; those two must not be called into question in any matter, since from these two the sacred law shone forth.”⁽⁷⁾

So a proper understanding of the concept of revelation necessitates a sound understanding of the Vedas.

The Vedas

The word Veda comes from the root word ‘vid’ literally meaning ‘to know’. From that comes Veda which means ‘knowledge’ and ‘supreme knowledge’.

Once this is understood it becomes easy to see why the Hindus think the word ‘veda’ is synonymous to ‘*Sruti*’. Both imply knowledge. The one meaning supreme knowledge while the latter revealed word and since no knowledge is more supreme than the revealed word which in itself is the highest form of knowledge the two words are very comfortably interchangeable in the Hindu tradition. There is another connection between the two words.

Hinduism among other major religions of the world houses probably the richest collection of writings which it terms as sacred, yet it is largely seen as a religion – especially by followers of Semitic religions – which possesses no revelation. But a cursory glance at the great expanse of Hindu sacred literature would suffice to do away with any such notion as a miscalculated conjecture. For Hinduism is so strongly steeped in revelation that hardly a spectacle of human life outgrows its boundaries. For Hindus, not only are the religious teachings sanctioned by revelation, rather so-called secular teachings are with equal authority sanctioned by revelation with the result that astrology, grammar, medicine, law even postures and manners of sexual intercourse enjoy religious reverence.

Defining Revelation

The general meaning of ‘revelation’ as “*the making known of something which was a secret or hidden*,”⁽¹⁾ though applicable to almost all religions is far from satisfying any religion in particular. The reason being that every religion manifests its revelatory purpose in a way peculiar to itself. But as always one can detect small strings of similarities which help in classifying things to include as many of its components as possible. So we can begin with a definition of revelation that might at least include all the major religions of the world.

“Revelation is the disclosure of divine or sacred reality or purpose to man.”⁽²⁾

Keith Ward in his *Religion and Revelation* has defined it as:

“...a Divine communication shaped to the interests and values of a particular society at a particular time.”⁽³⁾

Although the second definition might fancy the reader’s mind yet most evangelical religions including Islam abhor any such definition because it restricts them to a certain time and place.

Western scholars have tended to classify revelation into two categories. The first, they call the ‘prophetic revelation’ and the second ‘cosmic revelation.’

In the prophetic revelation they include Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism on the grounds that these religions had known prophets as their source while in the cosmic revelation

Revelation in Hinduism: A Muslim Reading

Muhammad Modassir Ali*

ABSTRACT

Hinduism has been viewed by Semitic religions as a religion devoid of revelation. Early, Medieval and modern Muslim and Christian writings have often portrayed Hinduism as pagan even satanic while Hindus for millennia have claimed to be divinely revealed. Is Hinduism really a revealed religion and if so, what kind of a revelation does it have? In what manner does the divine reveal himself and who are the recipients of this revelation? To what extent is this concept different from ours? Does the process of revelation continue or has it been discontinued? These are some of the more significant questions that this article shall engage with. It clarifies that Hindus have books which they consider revealed and look upon much as Muslims look upon their Qur'ān. The most significant of these among a majority of the Hindus are called the Vedas, literally, knowledge. It goes on to introduce the Vedas with respect to their various parts and content, what Hindus largely believe about it and how they ensured its preservation and safe transmission to later generations through various intricate and elaborate memorization techniques.

The article highlights the importance of rishī, the recipients of these revelations, their kinds, characteristics and role in the process of revelation. The article contends that there is much in common between *Rishī* and Semitic prophets with respect to their characteristics but that the similarities do not end here. Rather there is much more common ground to be explored with respect to revelation and its contents and its conveyors than meets the eye.

Keywords: *Revelation, Qur'ān, Vedas, Upanishads, Rishī, Al-Bīrūnī, Sruti, Smṛti, preservation and transmission of Vedas.*

* Research Coordinator, Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, Ḥamad bin Khalīfa University, Doha, Qatar. Email: modassir@gmail.com