



UNDERSTANDING VEDAS AND AGAMAS - AN OVERVIEW OF OUR SCRIPTURES

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Hindu scriptures do not teach any particular doctrine. They teach various doctrines suited to different people at different stages of spiritual evolution. They look contradictory to each other for the one who approaches them superficially. Truly they are not contradictory but are based on the layers of understanding of the TRUTH as per the individual maturity and fitness (**adhikári bhéda**) for it. The aspirants are taken step by step to the ULTIMATE REALIZATION OF THE TRUTH.

Hence the religions and teachings with the totalistic claim that exclusively their path or religion alone is the right one does not reflect the TRUTH in the scriptures. As such their views are met and refuted critically in **Saiva Siddhánta**. **Saiva Siddhánta** does not endorse the superficial spiritual concept that all religions are different paths to the same destination. **Saiva Siddhánta** is the core that proceeds on the footing that every religion or belief system has a place in the schema evolution to the ULTIMATE REALIZATION OF THE TRUTH (᠘ᠮᠤᠢ). Each religion or belief system is a rung in the ladder as life is a growth from truth to TRUTH.

Studying these scriptures will make us comfortable with the ultimatum of all the scriptures of the past, present and future. But it is not possible merely by self reading or academic studies but only by the studies combined with **spiritual sádhana** (practice) under the guidance of a realized Guru who personally experienced and envisioned the TRUTH and absorbed in it.

If identifying and reaching out for such a realized Guru is not possible due to our personal spiritual barriers and immaturity, a bona-fide spiritual master with one hundred percent faith in God and in our scriptures is another choice.

We are giving an overview of our scriptures for a beginner to start his journey of scriptural reading from a comfortable conflict free view. In our religion, we have our scriptures classified as,

1. Vedas,
2. Agamas,
3. Auxiliary vedas,
4. Sub-vedas and
5. Sub-auxiliary vedas

VEDAS

What is Veda?:

The word **vEdas** comes from the root word **vidh**, which means knowledge. God is the embodiment of knowledge – **GnAna**, Knowledge Totalis. The root word **Gna/jna** in Sanskrit means to know, to perceive or to understand. From this came the word **Gnosis** in Greek and knowledge in English.

As the God is the Supreme Intelligence, as the Supreme Knowledge – **GnAna**, every knowledge comes from Him. As such **vEdas** are considered as the revelations of knowledge/ Truth to the seers or seekers – **Rishis** from the God. The truth exists eternally and discovered by seekers time to time. They are revealed again by Siva in each and every cycle of creation. The knowledge is transmitted in oral tradition initially and we started documenting them probably from about 5000 BCE in our time. The transmitted knowledge written down and documented in Sanskrit are classified into four **vEdas**. **Vedas** are classified into four, **rig, jayur, sAma** and **atharvaNa** by Sage **ViyAsa**. **rig vEda** is one of the oldest if not the oldest literature of the world available for us now.

What is there in the vedas?

vEdas are general texts instructs the four goals of human life

1. **dhArma** - the righteous way of life,
2. **arttha** - resource management,
3. **kAma** - enjoyments of life and
4. **mOksha** - the ultimate spiritual liberation.

We can say that any text instructs on these goals can be considered as **vEda**.

In addition to that, vedas have thousands of songs of praise of God in the personalized form of the seer, the Rishis. They also describe various rituals to help to internalize and personalize the Almighty God in our day-to-day life as per our socio-cultural affiliations and afflictions.

Is that all? No. Vedas have the documentations of intimate discussions and discourses of the seers about the Ultimate Truth. This part of the Sanskrit Veda is called **gnana kAnda** which explains the philosophical truth for spiritual liberation. This **gnana kAnda** is also called **Upanishats** or **vEdAnta**. **Upanishats** are many, among them 108 are well known.

Tamil Vedas:

The Tamil text **ThirukkuRaL** is considered as **Tamil maRai** or **vEda** as it explains the four goals of human life as **Aram, poruL, inpam** and **veedu**.

18,000 plus Songs of praise of God including **thEvaaram** and **thiru vaasakam** are in twelve **Saiva Thiru muRais**. These are our **Tamil vEdas** as they are the songs of praise by the realized souls – **GnAnis**.

SIX AUXILLARY VEDAS

Pre-requisite understanding of the six auxiliary **vEdas** called **shad-angAs** are important for the correct interpretation and application of **Vedic** scriptures in our daily life. **shad** means six. These six auxiliaries are,

1. **shiksha** - phonetics, pronunciation, and accent,
2. **vyakarana** - grammar,
3. **nirukta** - philology and etymology,
4. **chanda** - metre and prosody,
5. **gyotish** - astronomy and astrology and
6. **kalpa** - method of rituals.

Rituals as per these six auxiliaries are called **shadangu**. Unfortunately, many of the current interpretations and translations of these scriptures are done by those

who are not well versed in these auxiliaries. As such there are many misinterpretations and misconceptions about vedas. We need to approach them carefully.

FOUR SUB- VEDAS

Four **sub-vEdas** are

1. **Ayur vEda** - medical science,
2. **dhanur vEda** - weaponry and military science,
3. **gAndarva vEda** - arts and music and
4. **arddha vEda** - resource management. Some classifications states **sthapata vEda** - architectural science as the fourth sub-vEda instead of **arddha vEda**.

FOUR SUB-AUXILIARY VEDAS

Four sub-auxiliary texts of **vEdas** are called **upa-angAs**. They are

1. **purANas** - the narrative documentation of 18 **purANas** and 18 **sub-purANas**,
2. **Niyaya** - the application of logic and science,
3. **meemAmsa** - ways to actualize our goals through rituals and
4. **smirutis** - the basic application of rules and laws outlined in eighteen **smiritis**.

Two **ithikAsa** (means thus it happened) **Ramayana** and **Maha Bharat** are also considered as **purANas**. Some consider **Siva Rakashya** also as an **ithikAsa**.

AGAMAS

AgamAs are special scriptures further elaborates on **mOksha**, the ultimate spiritual liberation explained in **upanishats** through God centric four step path of **chariya, kriya, yOga** and **gnana**. The essence of **Védás** is given in **Upanishads**;

called **Védánta**. The essence of it as a practical understanding and approach to **Védánta** in our day-to-day life is given in 28 **Ágamas** AND 107 Upa-Agamas.

These are the ways to personalize and internalize the Almighty and all-pervasive God to ourself, by which moving towards the ultimate non-dual **advaita** union.

As such, unlike **vEdas**, these are intended for serious spiritual seekers. Any scriptures elaborate on God centric ways to reach Him can be considered as **Agamas**, though is rare to find them as exclusive texts in other religions.

Tamil Agamas:

The essence of **TRUTH**, explained in **Ágamas**, is given in fourteen texts of **Mei KaNda Sástrás (The Texts of TRUTH revealed)** in Tamil. Among these fourteen texts the crown is **Siva Gnána Bódha** by **MeikaNdAr**. **Siva Gnána Siddiyár** is the poetic commentary by **AruL nanthi sivam** for the primary text **Siva Gnána Bódha**.

These scriptures are not well-known to the public as they are only studied in closed circles in a secluded traditional way. Their words and phrases thoroughly permeate in understanding of **Saiva Siddhánta**.

References:

1. அருமறை ஆகமம் முதனூல், அனைத்தும் உரைக்கையினால்;
அளப்பரிதாம் அப்பொருளை அரன் அருளால் அணுக்கள்
தருவர்கள் பின் தனித்தனியே, தாம் அறிந்த அளவில்
தர்க்கமொடு உத் தரங்களினால் சமயம் சாதித்து;
மிருதி, புராணம், கலைகள் மற்றும் எல்லாம்
மெய்நூலின் வழி, புடையாம் அங்கம்,வே தாங்கம்
சுருதி, சிவாகமம் ஒழியச் சொல்லுவது ஒன்று இல்லை
சொல்லுவார் தமக்கறையோ சொல்லொ ணாதே.

As they all expound the Truth,
The *vEdas* and *Agamas* are called "Revealed texts."
These unbiased texts are called primal texts - *muthal nool*.
Their immeasurable meanings are given out
Duly by those who possess the grace of God.
Others try to interpret them

According to their own sense
And found various schools.
Smirtis and *puraNas* and the texts of arts and sciences - *kala sastras* etc.
Form guide texts called *vazi nool*.
The six auxillary texts of *vEdas* called *vedaanga* or *shadaanga*
And the four sub auxiliary texts of *vEdas* called *upaangaas*
Form aid texts called *saarbhu nool*.
Nothing is comparable to the messages in the *vEdas* and *Aagamas*.
We cannot find anything to say
To those who would assert otherwise.

- Siva Jnána Siddhiyár 266

2. வேத நூல், சைவ நூல் என்று இரண்டே நூல்கள்;
வேறு உரைக்கும் நூல் இவற்றின் விரிந்த நூல்கள்;
ஆதிநூல், அநாதி அமலன் தரு நூல் இரண்டும்,
ஆரண நூல் பொது; சைவம் அரும்சிறப்பு நூலாம்;
நீதியினால் உலகர்க்கும், சத்தி நிபாதர்க்கும்
நிகழ்த்தியது; நீள்மறையின் ஒழிபொருள், வேதாந்தத்
தீதுஇல் பொருள் கொண்டு உரைக்கும் நூல் சைவம்; பிற நூல்
திகழ்பூர்வம்; சிவாகமங்கள் சித்தாந்தம் ஆகும்.
Revealed scriptures are two only, *vEdas* and *Aagamas*;
All other scriptures are derivatives of these;
These were revealed from the time eternal by the unblemished God;
Of them the *vEedas* are general, graced for general public,
The *Agamas* are special, intended for the serious spiritual seekers;
These *Agamas* contain the secrets of the sacred Truth
As it is revealed in the *vEdas* and its essence *vEdAnta*
Hence all other texts are *pUrva - paksha*, the penultimate scriptures,
Siva-agamas alone are *Siddhanta*, the ultimate scriptures.

- Siva Jnána Siddhiyár 267.

3. பேணித் தொழுமவர் பொன்னுலகு ஆளப் பிறங்கருளால்
ஏணிப்படிநெறி இட்டுக் கொடுத்து

For those worshipers to reach the eternity of golden world, He puts the step
ladder path with the rungs of different belief systems.

- Théváram song by Saint Appar, Thirumurai - 4.092.16

4. முத்தியை முற்ற வைத்தார்; முறை முறை நெறிகள் வைத்தார்

He kept the liberation as the ultimate destiny; and several intermediate steps and paths until then.

- **Théváram song by Saint Thiru naavukkarasar (Appar) - ThirumuRai - 4.038.7**

5. அறுவகைச் சமயம் வைத்தார்

He has made six- fold religions (to reach Him)

- **Théváram song by Saint Thiru naavukkarasar (Appar) - ThirumuRai - 4.030.5**

6. சட்சமய பேதங்கள் தான்வகுத்துப் பின்னுமொரு

உட்சமயம் உண்டென்று உரைத்தனையே பராபரமே

You graced these different religions of six categories.

And further instructed the Ultimate as the core of all.

- **Song by mystic Saint Paddinathaar**

7. ஆறு சமயத்தும் அதுஅதுவாய் நின்றியங்கும்

வீடு பரைத் திருத்தாளை மேவுநாள் எந்நாளோ?

When will I be able to reach the feet of the Lord

Which is the ultimate of each and every religion that falls into six folds?

- **Saint Thaayumaanar song**

8. அறுவகைச் சமயத்தோர்க்கும் வீடுபேறாய் நின்ற விண்ணோர் பகுதி

You the Heavenly Ultimate for the worthy six-fold religions.

- **Thiru vaasagam, the 8th ThirumuRai by Saint MaaNikka vaasakar**

9. ஒன்றது பேரூர் வழியதற்கு ஆறுள

என்றது போல இருமுச் சமயமும்

நன்றிது தீதிது என்றுரை யாளர்கள்

குன்று குரைத்தெழு நாயை ஒத்தார்களே.

One is the destination, ways are six

Like this are the six-fold religions

People who quarrel as 'this is good, that is bad'

Are like the street dogs

barking towards the hill in the moonlight

-**Thiru manthiram, the 10th ThirumuRai**

by Saint Thiru Múlar - song 1543

10. Life is the soul's nursery, the training place for the destinies of eternity.

11.- Thackery