

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*Upaniṣads* form a part of Vedic literature. They are the concluding portions of Vedic literature and hence known as *Vedānta*.

The *Ṛgvedic Saṁhitā* is the collection of hymns of praise i.e. *ṛcās* : ऋच्यते स्तूयतेऽनया इति ऋक् । The *Yajurveda Saṁhitā* is the collection of the sacrificial formulas i.e. *Yajus* : यजुर्यजतेः (निरुक्त-७.१२) or इज्यतेऽनेनेति यजुः । The *Sāmaveda Saṁhitā* is the collection of the melodies (*Sāman*). *Sāman* means *ṛcā* + singing : गीतिषु सामाख्या । पू.मी.-२.१.१६ ॥ While the *Atharvaveda Saṁhitā* is the collection of the knowledge of the magic formulas i.e. Atharvan. “Originally the word Atharvan means Fire-Priest”, opines M. Winternitz.<sup>1</sup>

AV is known by nine different names as *Atharvaveda*, *Brahmaveda*, *Aṅgiroveda*, *Atharvāṅgīrasa Veda*, *Bhṛgvāṅgīrasa Veda*, *Kṣatra Veda*, *Bhaiṣajya Veda*, *Chandoveda* and *Mahī Veda*. The *Atharvaveda* mentions itself a number of times under different names, but every time it is in association with the names of the venerable sages of the *Veda* viz. Atharvan, Aṅgīras and Bhṛgu.<sup>2</sup> The later works like the *Sūtras*, the *Epics*, the *Smṛtis* etc. mention the *Atharvaveda* as *Atharvāṅgīrasa*.<sup>3</sup> *Nirukta* (XI.18.13) derives the word Atharvan from root √थर्व् अथर्वाणोऽथर्वणवन्तः, थर्वतिश्चरतिकर्मा तत्प्रतिषेधः । न थर्वाणः इति अथर्वाणः – one who does not move and is of stable nature is called Atharvā. Aṅgīrā is said to be produced from ash (*Aṅgāra*) (RV-VIII.2.1.5) (and Bhṛgu from fire) according to *Nirukta* (III.17) : अर्चिषि भृगुः संबभूव । भृगुर्भृज्यमानो न देहे, अङ्गारेष्वङ्गिराः । Aṅgīrā is derived from root √अगि गतौ – अङ्गयते अन्विष्यते इति अङ्गिराः । We find the reference to Atharvā, Aṅgīras and Bhṛgu together in RV (VII.6.15.6).

According to Karambelkar V. W.<sup>4</sup> “The contents of *Atharvaveda* show that it is made up of two parts – the Atharvaṇa which is *Śāntika*, *Pauṣṭika* and *Bheṣaja* (XI.6.14) and the Aṅgīrasa which is *Yātu*<sup>5</sup>, *Abhicāra* and *Ghora*. This internal division of the *Atharvaveda* recognised even by the non-Atharvaṇic texts<sup>6</sup>, is responsible for its title – “*Atharvāṅgīrasaḥ* . . .” The Atharvan stands for *Bheṣaja* (XI.6.14; GB-I.3-4) and Aṅgīrasa for *Yātu* (VIII.5.9; X.1.6). The *Atharva Pariśiṣṭas* too (46.9,10) refer to these

<sup>1</sup> Winternitz M. — A History of Indian Literature, page 104.

<sup>2</sup> AV-IV.3.7; 37.1; V.19.1; X.6.20; 7.20; XI.6.14; XIX.54.5 etc.

<sup>3</sup> Baud. Dh.-III.5.19.14; Manu Smṛti-XI.33; Yāj. Smṛti-I.312; MBh.-III.305.20; VIII.40.33

<sup>4</sup> Karambelkar V. W. — History in the *Atharvaveda* page 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Śat. Br.-X.5.2.20

<sup>6</sup> Śat. Br.-XIII.4.3.3; Āś. Śr.-X.7.1.1ff; Sām. Sr.-XVI.2.9.1ff; Pañ. Brāh.-XII.9.10; XVI.10.10.

two component parts of the AV.

The *Atharvaveda* might have remained unrecognised for a long time but the Atharvan<sup>1</sup> and Aṅgiras types of charms and incarnations were there from the most ancient times. Even the *R̥gveda* contains spells against vermin (I.191), or disease Ukṣma (X.163), to bring back to life one who is apparently dead (X.58; 60.7-12), to destroy enemies (X.166), to procure children (X.183), to destroy the demons who kill offspring (X.162), to induce sleep (V.55) and even to oust a co-wife from the husband's affections (X.145, 159), which are all definitely Atharvan in character."<sup>2</sup>

One of the reasons why AV was not included in *Trayī* is its character i.e. the Aṅgiras *mantras* of *Jāraṇa*, *Māraṇa*, *Vaśīkaraṇa*, *Uccāṭana*, *Stambhana* etc. which is also reflected in the *Dattātreya Upaniṣad*, a minor *Upaniṣad* of AV.

According to Karambelkar V. W.<sup>3</sup> : "The *Upaniṣads* attached to the AV and even those that belong to the other *Vedas* allude to the Atharvan.<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact the theme of the *Upaniṣads* is such that they have little interest in referring to the AV either by way of praising or condemning. According to their standpoint the entire *Veda* is merely 'Nāma'. Even the Atharvaṇic *Upaniṣads* do not attach special importance to the AV and mention it only as a literary form (*Nṛ. Tāp. Upa.*-I.2.4; *Atharvaśikhā*-1; *Mukti*-12-14; *Mahā*-3; *Muṇḍaka*-I.1.5) and at times neglect even that.

The prominent references of *Atharvaveda* are found in ṚV (I.83.5; VI.16.14; X.14.6); AV (X.10.17; XVIII.1.58) and *Gopatha Br.* (I.29); of *Brahmaveda* are found in AV (X.2.30, 31, 32; XV.5.6; XV.6.8) and *Gopatha Br.* (I.2.16); of *Aṅgiroveda* in AV (XI.4.16); *Śat. Br.* (XIII.4.3.8); *Gopatha Br.* (I.8); *Chā. Upa.* (I.2.10) and *Bṛhad Upa.* (I.3.8); of *Atharvāṅgirasaveda* are found in AV (X.7.20); *Śat. Br.* (XI.5.6.7); *Tait. Br.* (III.12.8.2); *Praśna Upa.* (II.8) and *Maitrī Upa.* (VI.33); of *Bhṛgvāṅgirasaveda* in ṚV (VIII.43.13; X.92.10); AV (X.7.20) and *Gopatha Br.* (I.3.1; III.4); *Śat. Br.* (I.2.113); of *Kṣatra Veda* in *Śat. Br.* (XIV.8.14.1-4) and *Bṛhad Upa.* (V.13.1-4); of *Bhaiṣajya Veda* in AV (XI.6.14); of *Chandaveda* in ṚV (X.90.9); YV (XXXI.7); AV (XI.7.24) and of *Mahīveda* are found in AV (X.7.14).

<sup>1</sup> The liturgical texts mention Atharvan as a literary form also : ŚB-XI.5.6.4-8; XIII.4.3.3; TB-III.12.8.2; III.12.9.1

<sup>2</sup> Karambelkar V. W. — History in the *Atharvaveda*, page 19, 20

<sup>3</sup> Karambelkar V. W. — The Atharvavedic Civilisation, page 221

<sup>4</sup> Bṛ. Upa.-II.4.10; IV.1.2; VII.11; Chān. Upa.-III.1-4; VII.1.2.4; Mait. Upa.-VII.32,33.

According to V. G. Rahurkar<sup>1</sup>, the AV is associated with the mystic fire-priests of pre-historic antiquity, Atharvan and Aṅgiras (and later on also Bhṛgu). This has resulted in that *Veda* being known by several names, such as, *Atharvāṅgīrasa*, *Bhṛgvāṅgīrasa* and finally *Atharvaveda* (X.7.20). According to *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* (I.2.22 and I.3.3), Atharvan and Aṅgiras are the eyes of Bhṛgu. That is why *Bhṛgvāṅgīrasa* is another name of AV. AV (I.9.10.107) refer to AV as *Bhṛgvāṅgīrasa*.

The Atharvans are identified with Bhṛgus in the Minor *Upaniṣads* like *Cūlikā Upaniṣad* of AV and in the *Mantrikā Upaniṣad* of YV :

मन्त्रोपनिषदं ब्रह्म पदक्रमसमन्वितम् ।  
पठन्ति भार्गवा ह्येतदथर्वाणो भृगूत्तमाः ॥

It is very likely that the families of the Atharvans and the Bhṛgu are the subdivisions of the more ancient family of the Aṅgiras. That is how we get the names *Atharvāṅgīrasa* and *Bhṛgvāṅgīrasa*.

If we go through the *mantras* of AV, we find that out of the 6000 *mantras* of AV, 1768 *mantras* belong to Ṛṣi Atharvan, 967 to Ṛṣi Brahmā and 670 to *Bhṛgvāṅgīrasa*. While the number of *mantras* belong to other Ṛṣīs are less. So, looking to these figures, the first chief name of this *Veda* is 'Atharvaveda, then secondly 'Brahmaveda' and thirdly 'Veda of Aṅgīrasa – अङ्गिरसां वेदः ।'

The AV has nine *Śākhās* according to the Carañavyuha and Sāyaṇa<sup>2</sup> in the introduction on the commentary on AV : Paippalāda, Tauda, Mauda, Śaunakīya, Jājala, Jalada, Brahmavada, Devadarśa and Cāraṇavaidya. Patañjali (Mahābhāṣya, Āhnika-I) refers to the nine recensions of AV as : नवधाऽथर्वणो वेदः । At present it is preserved in two *Śākhās* viz. the Śaunaka and the Pippalāda. A reference to the *Upaniṣad* of the third *Śākhā* is found in the *Tri. Mahā. Nār. Upa.* : ब्रह्मन् देवदर्शीत्याख्याथर्वणशाखायां परमतत्त्वरहस्याख्याथर्वणमहानारायणोपनिषदि . . . . . ।

According to Dr. R. C. Majumdar<sup>3</sup>, "The AV is the first book that makes use of magic mixed up with theosophy, though it is priestly and not purely popular magic." The term *Atharvāṅgīrasa* is a combination of Atharvan + Aṅgiras. Atharvan signifies 'holy magic' while Aṅgiras is 'unholy magic'. This might be one of the reasons why AV is not included in *Trayī*. The

<sup>1</sup> Rahurkar V. G. — The Seers of the *Rgveda*

<sup>2</sup> Sāyaṇa — Atharva Bhāṣya Bhūmikā, page 23

<sup>3</sup> Majumdar R. C. — The History and Culture of Indian People (Vedic Period) Vo. I, page 509.

purpose and nature of AV, are fundamentally different from those of the *Trayī*.

We find the reference to the four *Vedas* in the Vedic literature. For e.g. in RV (IV.5.8.6) the term चत्वारि शृङ्गा refer to the four *Vedas* : चत्वारि शृङ्गाश्चत्वारो वेदा एव चत्वारि शृङ्गाणी ।सायण भाष्य। Secondly in RV (I.83.5) there is a reference to sage Atharvan : यज्ञैरथर्वा प्रथमः पयस्तते । Thirdly in RV (X.71.11), Brahmā, the priest of AV, is referred to : ऋचा त्वः पोषमास्ते ..... गायत्रं त्वो गायति ..... ब्रह्मा त्वो वदति । Similarly in Ch. Upa. (IV.17.8), there is a reference to Brahmā : भेषजकृतो ह वा एष यज्ञो यत्रैवंविद् ब्रह्मा भवति ।

When it is said that the word *Trayī* refers to the three *Vedas* only, excluding AV, Dr. Kapildev Dwivedi<sup>1</sup> remarks that it is not right because there the word *Trayī* refers to the three different classes of literary works in which AV is included and not the three *Vedas*, as per *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā Sūtra*. Hence there is no independent reference to AV : तेषामृग् यत्रार्थवशेन पादव्यवस्था । गीतिषु सामाख्या । शेषे यजुः शब्दः ॥ पू.मी.-२.१.३५-३७ ॥ There are three types of divisions or compositions found in ancient times : Prose (*Yajurveda*), Poetry (*Rgveda*) and *Gīti* (melody i.e. *Sāmaveda*). We find reference to *Trayī-Vidyā* in the sense of three *Vedas* in the *Upaniṣads* like *Ch.* (I.1.9; I.4.2; II.21.1; II.23.3; IV.17.3,8); *Bṛhad.* (V.14.2,6); *Kauṣ.* (II.6) and *Mahānār.* (XII.2; XXII.1).

“While mentioning *Trayī-Vidyā* in *Śāñ. Gr. sūtra* (I.24.8), AV was intentionally passed over, perhaps to prove its late-origin. But the fact remains that the *Tait. Sañ.* (VII.5.55.2) refers to the plural of Aṅgiras in the sense of AV, which shows that AV is not of late origin”, opines Winternitz.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly we find the reference to the word Atharvā, *Atharvānaḥ* etc. in RV almost 15 times.<sup>3</sup> This shows that not only the sage Atharvan was known in those days, but also his successors. Here Atharvā is mentioned as the founder of fire. Thirdly in RV the Atharvanic sages like Bhṛgu and Aṅgirā are the seers of 12 and 45 *sūktas* respectively. Fourthly we find the reference of the four *Vedas* in the texts like *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Upaniṣads* like *Chāndogya*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Muṇḍaka*, *Muktikā*, etc. as referred to earlier.

<sup>1</sup> Dwivedi Kapildev — Vaidic Sahitya evam Samskṛti (Vedic Literature and Culture), page 50-51.

<sup>2</sup> Winternitz — A History of Indian Literature, page 110, 111

<sup>3</sup> Atharvā — I.80.16; I.83.5; VI.15.17; VI.16.13; Atharvāṇā — X.21.5; VI.47.24

It appears that there arose, in the long run, a strong wave of aversion against this *Veda* whose salient teaching is sorcery. This can be inferred from the conscious efforts of the later Atharvan writings to vindicate its character and value.<sup>1</sup> “Thus before the rise of the *Vaitāna Sūtra* and the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*, the *Atharvaveda* was not recognised as the fourth *Veda*” “Moreover the *Atharvaveda* was not recognised as the fourth *Veda* for a long time for want of interest in the *Śrauta* ritual, yet there is no trace for repugnance for this *Veda* in the *Trayī* and its literature. On the contrary, magic, the forte of the Atharvan is found blended with every activity of the Vedic religion”, states V. W. Karambelkar.<sup>2</sup>

*Dharma-sūtras* like Baud. (II.8; IV.5,29; XIV.4,5); *Gaut.* (XVI.21) and Vā (XIII.20) also exclude the reference to the *Atharvaveda*. Some *Dharma-sūtras* condemn the *Atharvaveda* openly making its knowledge only a supplement for women and children.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, BG (IX.20,21) also refer to *Trayī-Vidyā* and *Trayī-Dharma* respectively. Dr. Radhakrishnan, Shri B. G. Tilak, Dr. R. D. Ranade, S. K. Belvalkar, Swami Chinmayanand etc. all have stated that the word *Trayī* refers to three *Vedas* excluding AV. It might be due to the late origin and nature of AV, which is quite different from the earlier three *Vedas*. Moreover, majority of the *mantras* in AV are borrowed from RV. so this might be the reason why the word *Trayī* was taken here in the sense of the three *Vedas* excluding AV and not the three types of divisions, as mentioned earlier. Shri J. S. Pade in his review<sup>4</sup> on a book<sup>5</sup> opines : “Both the *Samhitās* of the AV consist of hymns which are a collection either of *Rks* or of *Yajuses* or of both. The AV is, therefore, a part and parcel of the *Trayī*. In the pre-*Samhitā* period the present Atharvan *mantras* were identified as *Rks* and *Yajus* and they were read in the respective collections of *Rks* and *Yajuses* in the single *Veda* existing at that time. In the *Samhitā* period *Rk* and *Yajuses* which are not useful for any sacrificial purpose, but were meant only for obtaining material prosperity, were collected together in the fourth *Veda* named the AV. This is the reason why Vedic texts composed before the *Samhitā* period refer to the *mantras* as *Rks*, *Yajuses* and *Sāmans* only and not to the *Vedas* as *Rgveda*,

<sup>1</sup> Some *Gṛhya-sūtras* refer to the AV in a more familiar way, like Āś. Gr.-III.3.1-3; Śān. Gr.-I.24.8; I.16.3; Hir. Gr.-II.16-19; II.3.9; XX.9; XVIII.3; Pā. Gr.-II.10.7; II.10.21.

<sup>2</sup> Karambelkar V. W. — History in the *Atharvaveda*, page 17, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Āp. Dh.-I.9.26.7; Bau. Dh.-II.1.2.16; Gau. Dh.-XXV.7; Vi. Dh.-XXXVII.26 (Karambelkar V. W. — History in the AV, page 17)

<sup>4</sup> Published in vol.XI, pages 185-187 of the Journal of Oriental Institute, 1961-62

<sup>5</sup> Karambelkar V. W. — The Atharvavedic Civilisation : Its Place in the Indo-Aryan Culture

*Yajurveda* etc. Naturally, therefore, they are silent about the AV, which had no existence at that time. Vedic texts composed after the *Saṁhitā* period not only refer to RV, YV and SV but also mention without fail the AV as the fourth *Veda*. Dr. V. W. Karambelkar<sup>1</sup> opines : “*Atharvaveda* is as priestly as the *R̥gveda* with the only difference that while the *R̥gveda* and the *Trayī* in general were entirely devoted to the *Śrauta* performances, the *Atharvaveda* was reserved for homely practices. The picture of the Vedic society cannot be complete unless *Trayī* and the *Atharvaveda* are studied side by side. The spectacular aspect of the great *Śrauta* sacrifice was presented by the *R̥gveda* and the other two *Vedas*, and the homely aspect of fire practises was represented by the *Atharvaveda*. These two sets are complimentary to each other and indivisible parts of the one complete whole.”

In the words of Winternitz<sup>2</sup> – “The sacredness of the AV was not recognised by the Indian themselves for a long time and even today is frequently disputed. The reason for this is to be found in the character of this *Veda*. The purpose of AV is, as the Indians say, “to appease (the demons), to bless (the friends) and to curse (the enemies).”

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<sup>1</sup> Karambelkar V. W. — History in the *Atharvaveda* Part I, page 26.

<sup>2</sup> Winternitz — History of Indian Literature, page 109.