Vedas Agamas
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Windows To Timeless Truths

Hinduism is the most ancient religion on planet Earth today. No other religion, living or extinct, even approximates the distance in time Hinduism has traveled. The earliest known discovered evidence of the Hindu religion - temples, fire pits, ceremonial baths, Siva Lingams, dancing Siva-like figures, Sakti figures, yogi statues and seals - from the Saivite Indus Valley empire in Northwest India, is over 60 centuries old. That is 200 generations of human souls, a continuity of historical religion that is twice that of any other faith.

What of the unrecorded evidence, the traces and tracks of Hinduism receding into the glacial period? It is to be noted that the Indus Valley civilization seems to have appeared in full bloom. There are no signs of slow, urban/agrarian maturation. Archeology may never dig up the true age of Hinduism, at least not through lost artifacts. Hinduism silently recedes into pre-ice age, civilized epochs that have left no known sign other than legend: the continents of Lemuria and Mu. Though Hinduism has spawned a legion of mystic personages who radiate God's light and guide men, the religion itself is ageless, founderless. No single man or group of men founded Hinduism. It exists, in its fullness, in the superconscious depths of mind itself.

And is Hinduism confined to the boundaries of this planet? As early as the 2nd century A.D. Hinduism was broadcast throughout Asia and motifs of its touch appear in Greece, Persia, Russia and Baltic Europe. Today, it is global. Yoga has been practiced in a space vehicle at low earth orbit. Truly, Hinduism's knowledge, laws and values could be transplanted anywhere in the vast stretches of the universe and it would fully function. Hinduism is applicable anywhere in space and anywhere in time. It is a path to cosmic Godness lived 20 billion years in the future or past. The oldest known and most evocative word for our religion is Sanatana Dharma, "Eternal Path."

The Sanatana Dharma is woven into the societal fabric of our world in our time. We have a 6,000-year history and possess the world's largest, most detailed and profound scriptural pattern. Though we have no decipherable writings from Hinduism's oldest known civilization, Indus Valley, we sec its imprint in two scriptures that beautifully encode our religion. These are the Vedas and Agamas, injected into the consciousness of mystic man between 1,500-500 B.C. and 1,000-300 B.C. respectively. Together these are mankind's oldest living sacred writings, a remarkable window into life 2,500-4,000 years ago and a valid template for life today.

In the press and technology of modern life, those seminal scriptures may seem, even to pious Hindus, archaic, wrinkled with age or too high in the spiritual mountains of knowledge. They are alluded to, but seldom fully embraced. Sadly, they have been withheld from the general populace, though they were originally intended for wide broadcasting. Hinduism's secondary scriptures - the puranas, shastras, philosophical treatises and bhakta outpourings - have, by default, become virtually primary. This is ironic, because it is the sublime beauty and knowledge of the Vedic Upanishads that opened the late 19th century West to Hinduism via the European Orientalists and American Transcendentalists.

Veda: Memory and Realization

Veda is a Sanskrit word meaning "knowledge;" "a boundless pool of bright, glowing intelligence." It's the knowing of the illumined mind. Actually, veda, as the scripture itself states, is two dimensions of knowledge: mental knowledge and superconscious realization. The former was memorizing and understanding what the hymn collection voiced and pointed toward. The latter was personally experiencing absorption through yoga into the Void of Parabrahman and manifest infinitude of Brahman: God. It was this realized God-knowing veda that was the vessel to contain and transmit the words of the Vedas. The spoken books, in turn, became a cosmological map and terrestrial handbook for achieving the Brahman state.

This mental/enlightened division is also described as apara vidya, "lower knowledge" and para vidya "higher knowledge." To memorize all 16,000 Vedic verses is estimable, but lower, learning. To realize Brahman is transformational intuitive knowing. "You are That," the Vedas persistently proclaim. The oral Vedas then are a time-frame window into the timeless truths of Brahman. The words

themselves aren't eternal, except in the sense that every creation of God is eternal because the essential Being of every form and force is God. But the spiritual path revealed is eternal and the realized knowledge of Brahman or Siva is eternal, indeed beyond eternality, for time itself begins and ceases in God.

The Vedas, some 2,500 years ago, were codified into the form of four books, the so-called four Vedas: Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva. Each of these is comprised of four sections: Samhitas, "hymn collections" Brahmanas, "ritual instructions," Aranyakas, "forest teachings," and the Upanishads, "sitting devotedly near." It is often stated that the Upanishads represent the pinnacle of Hindu mystical inquiry. True, they tower high, yet the Aranyakas and many of the Rig and Atharva hymns are equally as vaulting in profundity.

Sri Rudram and Atharva Bridge

The Rig is the earliest, foundation work. It contains 10, 552 verses. The Yajur's 1,975 verses are primarily for ritual purposes. Embedded in the Yajur like a fiery diamond is the famous Sri Rudram, the preeminent hymn to Lord Siva invoking His intimacy and majesty as Rudra, the Destroyer. In a wonderful bridging process, we see Sri Rudram arching out to theologically connect with the Atharva Veda, the Svetasvatara Upanishad and Saiva Agamas. The Sama Veda houses 1,875 verses of which 90% are a copy of Rig verses. The Sama contains rules to melodically sing (sama means "melody"), rather then chant, these duplicates. Finally, the Atharva's 5,987 verses express everything from magical charms to universal dissolution. It is the youngest and in some respects most mystical collection. Like the Sri Rudram, the Atharva is a metaphysical bridge between Vedic and Agamic thought.

Originally and for many untold centuries, the early Vedic hymns and prayers (composed in the powerful, phonetic language of Sanskrit, "well-formed") were memorized and orally transmitted from generation to generation. The power of the spoken word, as in all ancient cultures, was sacredly regarded. Words were not mere symbolic sounds, but actual tools for manipulating nature and calling forth or repulsing otherworld beings, depending on whether they were friend or foe. So powerful were many chants, that they were kept rahasya, "hidden or secret," by the Vedic masters until a student was physically and psychically fit to wield them.

Until the Vedas were codified and written into devanagiri, "city of devas," script, they were much more organic. New hymns of invocation or praise could be and often were added, which accounts for the amazing range: how the earthy songs mix so naturally with the cosmic poetry. Indeed, much of the Vedas are concerned with bucolic and domestic life. Several hymns were composed by woman bards. Specific priest families were custodians of certain Vedic hymn-and-rites collections. This made accurate memory transmission possible. And, when all the historical dust settled, there were three main rescensions or variations available. Generally, the sakala rescension is used. It may seem prodigious to us today to conceive of memorizing the Vedas, but the total number of verses, when all repetitions are substracted out, is a managable 16,000. Still, this is akin to memorizing Tolstoy's epic War and Peace. And we have no idea how many verses or hymns have been lost. Surely, there were many.

Kundalini Loom of the Agamas

Agama, in Sanskrit, means, "that which has come down." It refers to knowledge coming from God's and the Gods' minds into man's intuitive consciousness. Possibly it means wisdom propogated from the past and thus coming down from history or our forefathers - perhaps from the Indus Valley, as it exhibits great similarity to the Agamic religious patterns. The Agamas, in effect, would amplify, like an electronic signal booster, the Vedic worldview and spiritual disciplines. They would also in many ways overshadow (not eclipse) Vedic knowledge, as in temple/icon worship supplanting yajna "fire-medium" worship. Fire pits, even from Indus Valley, are incorporated into the temple precincts. The Vedas express a great deal of yogic practice, but it is simply stated and casually referenced. It is as if yoga is so sacred, it demands being taught secretly in person and its details were kept out of the general Vedic rendering. The Agamas dedicate thousands of detailed verses to yoga, though these, too, are subject to personal guidance by a qualified guru.

Another profound term used interchangably with, and revealing the nature of, the Agamas, is tantra meaning "loom" or "methodology." As this suggests, tantra is the esoteric fabric of Hinduism. It contains copious detail on the spiritual and physical bodies of man and how they relate with the interior universes and beings. Essentially, tantra states that man is a microcosmic vessel of the macrocosmic universes. The inner bodies of man with their chakras (consciousness force centers), nadis (psychic nerve channels) and the primal kundilini force have direct counterparts in the human body: its higher brain functions and nerve system, its glands and hormonal secretions. Chakras, nadis and kundalini, in turn, are the

gates, pathways and consciousness/energy into the totality of God's universes. Even the Agamic temple floor plan resembles or follows the outline of a man lying on his back. In Agama/Tantra the deepest worship is achieved by yogic identification with the Gods and God prior to and during the puja ceremony. In Veda, the worship is powerful, gravitational invocations of the Cods and God through mantras and fire ceremony. The Agamic priest draws himself into the universe of the deities. The Vedic priest draws the deities close to our universe. One fine perception is that the Vedas are "man becoming God," the Agamas are "God becoming man." Both achieve the same result: intimate communication between man and God Beings interior to our universe.

Chariya, Kriya, Yoga, Jnana

Less is historically known of the Agamas than the Vedas, because the latter provide extensive poem-pictures of Vedic life. The original Agamas are twenty-eight in number. They are called Saiva Agamas as they focus on establishing a relationship with and ultimately realizing the Supreme Being Siva. They carry names like Vira, "Hero," Siddha, "Perfected" and Swayambhuva, "Naturally revealed."

The Agamas are divided into four parts called padas, "feet," a reference to their literary meter. The first two padas - Chariya, "good conduct," and Kriya, "external worship," - include all the details of personal home life, house planning, town planning, personal worship in temples, the architectural plans for temples and sculpture as well as the intricacies of temple puja. The final two padas - Yoga, "internalized worship and union," and Jnana, "enlightened wisdom," - vividly describe the processes and stages of kundalini yoga and the Cod-like cosmological and philosophical vistas reached when Sivahood is attained. In the actual texts, the padas are ordered with jnana first, yoga second, then kriya and chariya - unfurling from a God-state to a human state.

The Agamas contained tens of thousands of verses, much more prolific than the Vedas. Though the Vedas stayed strictly in Sanskrit, the Agamas proliferated across India and other countries through many languages. But they fared poorly over the millenium, particularly the Yoga and Jnana Padas, so high and rich, which the custodian Saiva priests sadly neglected. Many padas of entire Agamas were lost or destroyed.

Vedas are General, Agamas are Specific

Popular attempts have been made to portray the Vedas and Agamas as wholly distinct, as two separate, even conflicting records. Truly they are not. Twenty-two hundred years ago, one powerful Siva yogi - Sundaranatha (Tirumular) - who lived much of his life immersed in Cod consciousness, insightfully stated that the Vedas are general, and the Agamas are specific. There are a few differences, but those differences are in method, not in understanding. The Agamas and Vedas are more a one body than two, sharing a common circulatory system, a one heart: man's superconsciousness identity with and evolution into the personal Supreme Being who is simultaneously the void of Thatness and the infinite existence of space, time, souls and worlds. They acknowledge the innate goodness of man, beauty of culture, spiritual structure of society and the precious opportunity of human life.

One of the looming questions to ask and answer on these two primary Hindu scriptures is how did they come to man? How did they evolve? In studying the above dates for their recording, which at best are sketchy, we can see that the Vedas took 1,500 years to coalesce; the Agamas 700 years. It is also apparent that the later period of the Vedas overlaps the early period of the Agamas by about 500 years. Actually, it is important to realize that the whole Vedic-Agamic recording process could have taken a far shorter time. Scholars assume a long, linear evolution for these scripture. One section led to a successor and so on: the earliest Vedic collection - the Rig - led into the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads: the three latter categories of the Vedas. This hints at a progression of enlightened knowledge, whereas there is a distinct levelness of contemplative expression throughout all the Vedas, often peaking here and there in great bursts of superconscious insight. Thus, the Upanishads, rather than being recorded after the Aranyakas or later Samhitas (such as the Atharva) may have been chronicled simultaneously or fairly close in time. Scholars propose a linear progression because they look at the Vedas as the product of man searching in ever larger circles for the divine. Definitely, there were progressive adjustments in language and the ritual yagna, and rebellions against blind ritualism by the Upanishad authors. But this was man adjusting the mechanics of a powerful spiritual system given from God, not man creating religion.

Rishis Listening to the Breath of God

The problem with the purely scholastic approach to the question of Vedic/Agamic

genesis is threefold. First, it is an intellectual route to a mystical process that transcends the human mind. Second, the vast cosmological plataeus expressed in the Rig and Atharva Veda match and often surpass the Upanishads, considered the conclusive, philosophical portion. So, the beginning and middle are often higher than the end. And third, the Vedas themselves don't speak in terms of linear evolution. They express timeless revelation, a process known as sruti, "that which is heard." The rishis called it "the Breath of the Eternal," or "the breath of God blowing on us," certainly a moving, bhakti-like expression of God's love brushing upon our minds, lives and planet.

In Hindu music, sruti is the prime note (heard by the external ear) from which all raga scales grow. Sruti, in scripture, is superconscious revelation: clariaudient hearing via psychic faculties with accompanying visual images flaring across the interior screen of the rishi, "the one who sees." They are a projection of Cod, Gods and devas (disincarnate beings of shining light) into the awakened minds of rishis. Simply stated, sruti is the solution to the above question on how the Vedic/Agamic genesis. And so it is that these two scriptures alone bear the title of sruti, indicative of their God-to-man origins. All subsequent scriptural texts would be classified as smriti, "that which is remembered," indicating an origin in man's own inquiries.

This classification is somewhat artificial - the Vedas and Agamas never said that sruti was a one-time process. The rishis themselves stated that the cosmic visions they experienced - and more - were available for any man in any time to participate in and record for men of their times. And further, that the realization of Brahman was the great on-going quest for all mankind. Thus, many scriptures after the Vedas and Agamas approach or equal them in superconscious vision and instruction.

Quotes From the Vedas & Agamas

What will he do with the hymn of the Veda who does not know its theme - the Eternal in the supreme region, in which the devas dwell? But those who have come to know That are perfect. - Rig Veda I. 164.39

Universal order and truth were born of blazing tapas and thence was night born, and thence the billowy ocean of space; and from the billowy ocean of space was

born time - the year ordaining days and nights, the ruler of every moment. In the beginning as before, the Creator made the sun, the moon, the heaven and the earth, the firmament and the realms of light. - Rig Veda X. 190

May Earth With people who speak various tongues, and those who have various religious rites according to their places of abode, pour for me treasures in a thousand streams like a constant cow that never fails. Whatever I dig from you. Earth, may that have quick growth again. O purifier, may we not injure your body or your heart. - Atharva Veda XII, I

This whole world is Brahman, from which man comes forth, without which he will be dissolved and in which he breathes. Tranquil, one should meditate on It. Now verily, a person consists of purpose. According to the purpose a person has in this world, so does he become on departing to the other worlds. So let him frame for himself a purpose. - Chandogya Upanishad

Where the arteries of the body are brought together like the spokes in the center of a wheel, within it this Self becomes manifold. Meditate on Aum as the Self. - Mundaka Upanishad

Higher than this is Brahman, the supreme, the great hidden in all creatures according to their bodies, the one who envelopes the universe, knowing Him, the Lord, men become immortal.

I know the Supreme Person of sunlike lustre beyond the darkness. Only by knowing Him does one pass over death. There is no other path for going there. - Svetasvatara Upanishad

Having finished the mantra invocations, the worshipper infuses himself in his true state, his original being, feeling thus, "I am Shiva." Then he should trance-like engage in deep meditation. Then he should cause Siva to appear, tender and pure, by means of the divine nectar produced from the kundalini awakening and traversing the five chakras. - Karana Agama

Yoga must proceed along the eight steps. There are five ways to follow: purification, serenity, asceticism, study and devotion to the Lord. For success, the three-fold mastery of breath must first be attained: inhaling, retaining and exhaling. When the particular form of the subject of concentration has been elaborated, one is in meditation. - Subrabheda Agama

Pure consciousness, taking form as knowledge and action, is present in the soul everywhere and always,...for the soul is universal in its unfettered state. - Mrgendra Agama

The yogi, seated in a favorable posture,...first salutes the Great Lord, the Uma, Skanda and Ganapati. These lords, of whom it is said that, on the pure path, they attend to various duties deriving from a higher realm of maya, are at the prow of the effects of the higher realm of maya. - Mrgendra Agama

Like a torchbearer, the soul (through many incarnations) holds itself in readiness on the very edges of the realms of triple bondage. Then, on Siva's command, it traverses all the three worlds. - Parakhya Agama

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