

Om, Sri Gurubhyo Namaha
The Vedangas (Organs of the Vedas)
Dr. S. Yegnasubramanian

The six Vedangas (organs of the Vedas) are glorified as an essential subset of the 14 Vidyasthanas – the abode of true knowledge and wisdom. They help to understand Veda mantras completely and in depth. For the Veda Purusha, the 6 limbs are:

1. शिक्षा	<i>Siksha</i>	Phonetics	Nose
2. व्याकरणं	<i>Vyakarana</i>	Grammar	Mouth
3. छन्दस्	<i>Chandas</i>	Vedic Meter	Feet
4. निरुक्त	<i>Nirukta</i>	Etymology	Ears
5. ज्योतिष	<i>Jyotisha</i>	Astrology/Astronomy	Eyes
6. कल्प	<i>Kalpa</i>	Vedic action	Arms

1. शिक्षा - *Siksha* lays down the rules of phonetics – pronunciation / sounds / duration of utterance of each syllable – euphony. The goal is to achieve correct pronunciation and articulation through, *akshara suddhi* (syllable purity); *svara suddhi* (tonal / pitch purity – discussed in Vol. 1.2) and *maatras suddhi* (durational purity), *balam* (force of articulation), *samam* (evenness) and *santana:* (continuity). Phonetics are most critical in the case of Vedic language, because, as was discussed in the article of the previous issue of the Journal (Vol. 1.2), we see that a change in sound results in completely different effects. Because of its importance, the first chapter of *Taittiriya Upanishad – siksha valli* - describes these six attributes in its very first section in the following verse:

शिक्षां व्याख्यास्यामः । वर्णस्वरः ।
मात्रा बलं । साम सन्तानः ।
इत्युक्त शिक्षाध्यायः ॥

(Refer to Vol. 1.2 for details of this mantra)

That is why sage *Panini* , the grammarian, gives in his "*paanineeeya siksha*", how much care should be exercised when chanting vedas:

व्याघ्री यथा हरेत् पुत्रान्
दंष्ट्राभ्यां च न पीडयेत्।
भीत पतनादेताभ्यां
तद्धत् वर्णान् प्रयोजयेत् ॥

As the mother tiger (cat family) carries its young gripping it by its teeth (firm, so that cub does not fall, but gentle, so that it does not harm), the *mantras* must be chanted lucidly, unblurred, unfaded and not too loud. Neither should they be casually mouthed nor spat in staccato tones !

The Sanskrit language has 51 letters, called *Maatruka* (मातृका). *Maatru* is the cosmic Mother and the 51 letters are in Her image. The *Siksha Sastra* says that these 51 letters represent the various parts of Her body and even define which one represents which part !

2. **व्याकरणं** - *Vyakaranam* – The most important exposition of Grammar is that of sage *Panini* which is in the form of sutras or aphorisms. It is known as *ashtaadhyayi*, because it has 8 chapters. There is an interesting story relating to the origin of the *Panini Sutras*. At the end of the Cosmic Dance, Lord *Nataraja (Siva)* clicked his *damaru* 9 times and 5 times (14 times). The dance was witnessed by *Sanaka* and other rishis. Sage *Panini*, also witnessed the dance through his "*divya dhruшти*". With the 14 sounds produced from His *damaru*, Lord *Siva* gave birth to the *vyakarana sutras* or *Mahesvara surtras* Refer Sanskrit Lesson of Vol. 1.1) . They are recited during the observance of *Upakarma* on *Sravana Poornima*.

The commentary on the *Vyakarana* is called *Maha Bhashya* written by Sage *Patanjali*. The other commentary was written by *Vararuchi*. These three - the *Vyakarana* and the two commentaries - are important texts in *Vyakarana Sastra*. *Vyakarana* propounds the *Sabda Brahma Vaada* – that Sound and *Brahman* are One - which is the basis of *Nada Brahma Upasana* (Vol. 1.2) – Music !

3. **छन्दसः** - *Chandas* : Though the word *chandas* also means vedas themselves, the meaning here refers to the meter of vedic poetry. *Rig* and *Sama* vedas are fully in the form of verses, whereas, *Yajur Veda* has prose and poetry. A sloka or veda mantra is generally a quartet with four quarters or *paada* (पाद). Depending on the number of syllables in each of the *paadas*, we have different meters

– *anushtup* (8 syllables), *brihati* (9), *pankti* (10), *trishtup* (11), *ushnik* (4 *paadas* of 7 syllable each = 28 syllables) – like that up to even 26 syllables to a *paada*. (Any meter beyond 26 syllables to a *paada*, is called *dandakam*.) The well known *Gayatri Mantra* has three *paadas* of 8 syllables each; the meter itself is known as *gayatri* since it has 24 syllables; however, when people perform *japa*, they recite it only as a 23 syllabled meter (**वरे ण्यम्** instead of **वरे णियम्**), and so is called *nicrut gayatri chandas*.

Chandas helps us to ensure the form of the Mantra (by meter count). No alteration to this can be attempted since it would disturb the spiritual significance of the mantra itself!

Each mantra is dedicated to a *Devata*, has a specific *chandas* and has a *Rishi* who brought it to the world. That is the reason why we touch our head as we recite the name of the *Rishi* (symbolically placing his feet on our head), touch the nose when we recite the *chandas* (the guardian for the mantra is meter and so there is no life of the mantra without it; in the same way, there is no life without breath); touch our heart when reciting the name of the *devata* (to meditate upon the deity in our heart)

4. **निरुक्त** - *Nirukta* is generally known as vedic dictionary or *kosa* (**कोश**). *Amara Kosa* is one of the popular sanskrit dictionaries. Dictionary is also called *nighandu*. *Kosa* is actually the etymology where each word is split into syllables and gives the root from which the word is derived with meaning. The root of a word is called *dhaatu* (**धातु**). In Sanskrit all words have roots.

5. **ज्योतिष** -*Jyotisha* deals with vedic astrology / astronomy. It was mainly designed to help in arriving at the most favorable time for the performance of vedic rituals; this is to indicate the measure of success or lack of it when vedic rituals are performed under the influence of a particular *graha*, *nakshatra*, *tithi* etc. It involves precise mathematical calculations concerning the transit of planets etc., and so mathematics (**गणित**) is an integral part of it. *Jyotisha sastra* has three parts - *skandha trayaatmakam* (**स्कन्ध त्रयात्मकम्**). (the word *skandha* means main branch from the trunk of a tree) They are,

1. *siddhanta skandham* (**सिद्धान्त स्कन्धम्**): deals with trigonometry / arithmetic / algebra / geometry etc.

2. *hora skandham* (होरा स्कन्धम्): deals with the movement of planets and their effect on people etc.

3. *samhita skandham* (संहिता स्कन्धम्) deals with aspects like, the location of underground waters, designing and building houses, of omens, etc.

Jyotisha sastra covers principles of gravitation, rotation of earth etc. Famous astronomers like *Arya Bhatta*, *Varahamihira* and others have given beautiful discussions on these and other concepts.

The origin of creation is also calculated using astronomical principles; the *samkalpam* which we perform before doing any ritual is based on such calculations. (Details of these and similar concepts will be discussed in a future article).

6. कल्प - *Kalpa* deals with the aspects inducing a person into vedic action. The mastery in the other 5 *vedangas* mentioned so far is aimed to perform the actions mentioned in *kalpa* successfully. In a way, it is like a manual which will give details like a) how a ritual should be done; b) what are the functions of *brahmacharis*, *grihastas*, *sannyasis* etc. c) what ritual involves which mantra, devata, materials d) how many priests should perform a given ritual, e) what vessel of what shape, size to be used etc.

Kalpa sastra (sutra) has been compiled by many sages like, *Apasthamba*, *Bhodayana*, *Vaikhanasa*, and others. In each of the veda recensions, there are two kinds of *kalpa sutras* – the *srouta* (named after *sruti* which means veda) *sutra* and the *grihya sutra*. They outline the forty rituals (*garbhadana*, *pumsavana*, *seemantha*, etc. – details of which will be covered in a future issue) to be performed from the time of formation of the embryo in the womb to the time of cremation of the body ! They also outline the eight *Atma gunas* (virtues like, compassion, tolerance, cleanliness etc.) Among the two *sutras*, *srouta sutras* describe the major sacrifices and the *Grihya sutras* describe the domestic rites. When we do *abhivadanam* to elders, we state what *sutra* we follow – *Apasthamba*, *Bodhayana* etc. These refer to *Srouta sutras*. In ancient times, the *Srouta karmas* were given greater importance than *grihya karmas*. In addition, there are other texts called, *sulpa sutras*, *dharma sutras* etc. Among the four *vedas*, the *kalpa sutras* of *Atharva Veda* (which itself is very very less in practice), are not readily available.

As mentioned earlier, these six *sastras* are known as *vedangas* or the organs (limbs) of the *vedas*. Our *Rishis* have done a very great service to humanity through such analytical and sophisticated approach to enable the understanding of the *veda mantras*. It is

really sad that whatever little scholarship remains today in these subjects is fast deteriorating due to lack of adequate appreciation and encouragement. Let us all commit to change this trend for the better as a token of our gratitude to *veda mata*!

Ref: "The Vedas", Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991.

Feature article of next issue
The Upangas
(Subsidiary Organs of the Vedas)

