



Vivekananda Way

ISSUE 24

PULLOUT FOR REFERENCE

Series 5: Issue 3: Understanding India - through Swami Vivekananda's eyes

Swami Vivekananda gave a wonderful talk at Jaffna on 24th January 1897. (Refer, Lectures from Colombo to Almora, Complete Works, Vol. 3). In this talk, he introduced Hindus in the subcontinent to their own religion in terms of its simplest and most fundamental building blocks and principles. This talk is rich in several important ideas on Hinduism and will be covered in this and the next issues of Vivekananda Way.

focus in this issue:

Vedantism - part 1

An outline of the talk is presented here:

I Defining Hinduism

Swami Vivekananda began by defining Hindus as Vaidikas or Vedantists - people whose religion is rooted in the Vedas and the Vedanta.

II Books of the Hindus

Swami Vivekananda then describes the books of the Hindus - from the revelations of timeless truths encoded in the Vedas and the Upanishads down to the mass of stories & myths with their numerous interpretations.

III The Core Principles of Hinduism

Swami Vivekananda goes on to describe the core principles of Hinduism, including the ideas of Srishti, Brahman, the law of Karma, the Infinite Soul, the meaning of various Deities, Mukti or freedom and the pathways to achieve it, the ideas of God, and the theory of Ishta.

IV The Practices of Hinduism

Based on the core principles, Hinduism has developed several practices, for example, the practice of each person following his/her own personal God/ Ishta; the practice of inclusion of everyone & exclusion of none; the practice of mercy - to the poor, animals, everybody; and building institutions which stand the test of time.

V The Task Ahead

Swami Vivekananda then concludes the extraordinary presentation of Hinduism with "action steps" for each of us. He proposes that 'Dana' or 'Service' is the great Tapasya of the modern age.

Sections **I** & **II** covered in this issue >>



An alternative word for Hindus: Vaidikas or Vedantists

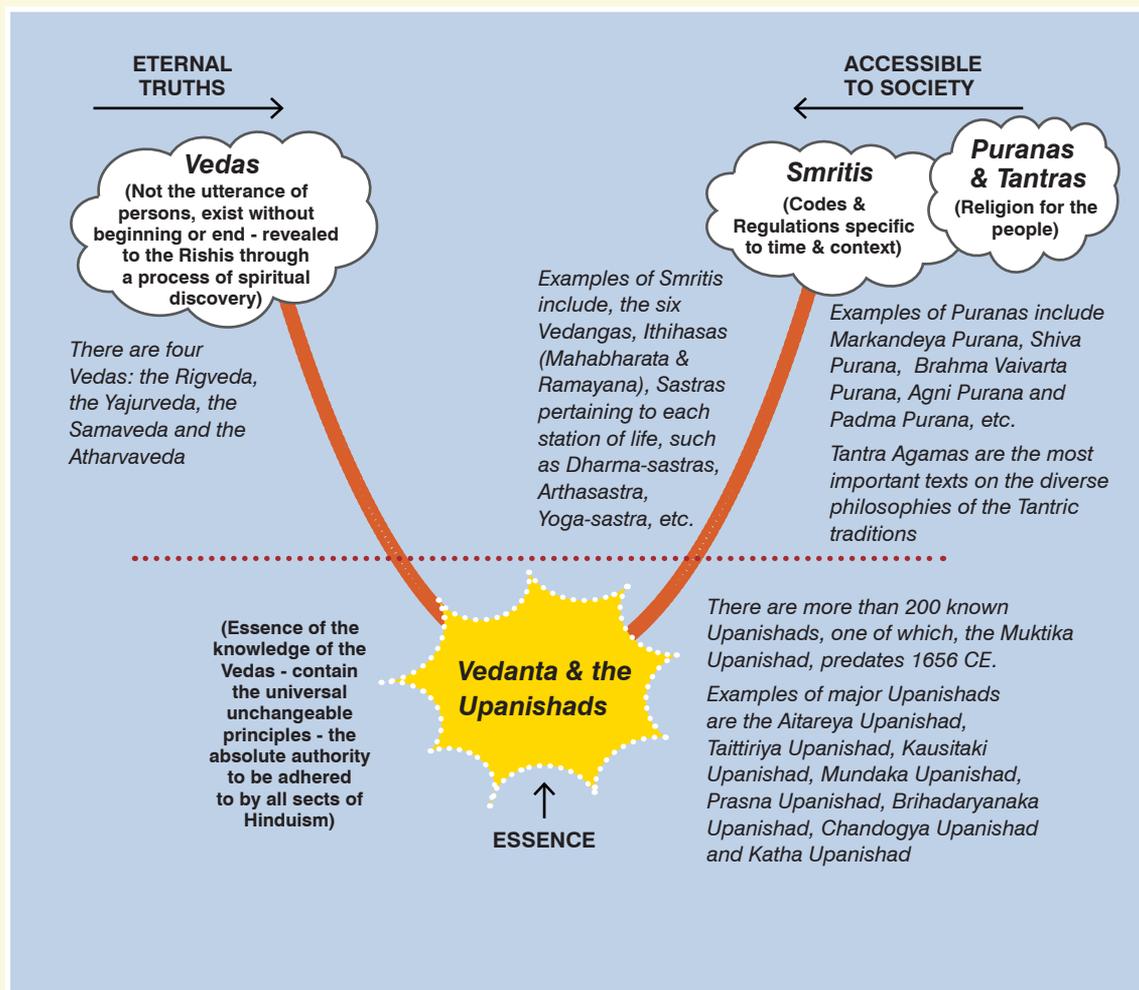


The word Hindu, by which it is the fashion nowadays to style ourselves, has lost all its meaning, for this word merely meant those who lived on the other side of the river Indus (in Sanskrit, Sindhu).

Thus this word has come down to us; and during the Mohammedan rule we took up the word ourselves. There may not be any harm in using the word of course; but, as I have said, it has lost its significance, for you may mark that all the people who live on this side of the Indus in modern times do not follow the same religion as they did in ancient times. The word, therefore, covers not only Hindus proper, but Mohammedans, Christians, Jains, and other people who live in India. I therefore, would not use the word Hindu.

What word should we use then? The other words which alone we can use are either the Vaidikas, followers of the Vedas, or better still, the Vedantists, followers of the Vedanta.

The books of the Hindus - a visualization



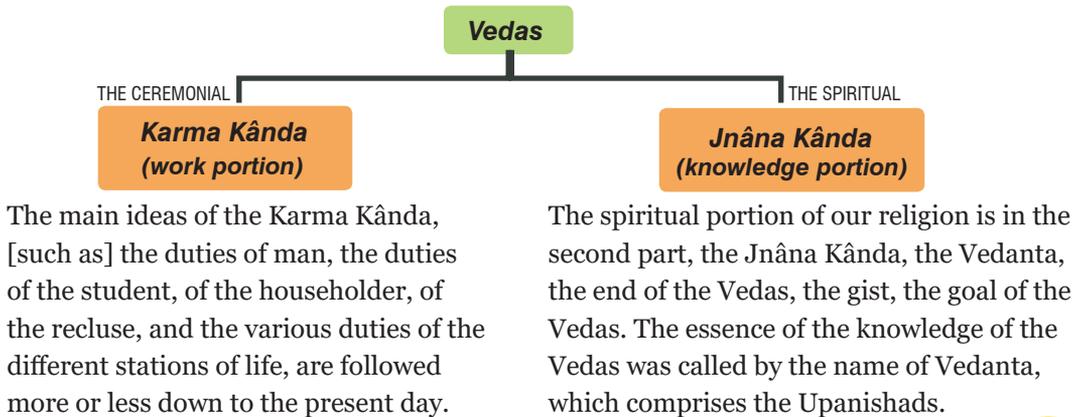
Vedas are revelatory truths, eternal, without beginning or end



This mass of writing called the Vedas is not the utterance of persons. Its date has never been fixed, can never be fixed, and, according to us, the Vedas are eternal. ...They were never written, never created, they have existed throughout time; just as creation is infinite and eternal, without beginning and without end, so is the knowledge of God without beginning and without end. And this knowledge is what is meant by the Vedas (Vid to know).

All the other religions of the world claim their authority as being delivered by a Personal God or a number of personal beings, angels, or special messengers of God, unto certain persons; while the claim of the Hindus is that the Vedas do not owe their authority to anybody, they are themselves the authority, being eternal — the knowledge of God.

Vedas are divided principally into two parts, the Karma Kânda and the Jnâna Kânda



All the sects of India that dare to come within the fold of Hinduism must acknowledge the Upanishads of the Vedas.



Vedas were revealed to the Rishis - who were spiritual discoverers



The mass of knowledge called the Vedanta was discovered by personages called Rishis, and the Rishi is defined as a Mantra-drashtâ, a seer of thought; not that the thought was his own.



Uddalaka Aruni



Yajnavalkya

Whenever you hear that a certain passage of the Vedas came from a certain Rishi never think that he wrote it or created it out of his mind; he was the seer of the thought which already existed; it existed in the universe eternally. This sage was the discoverer; the Rishis were spiritual discoverers.



Gargi



Maitreyi



Shvetaketu

and many more...

The ideas of the Upanishads have permeated through Indian society

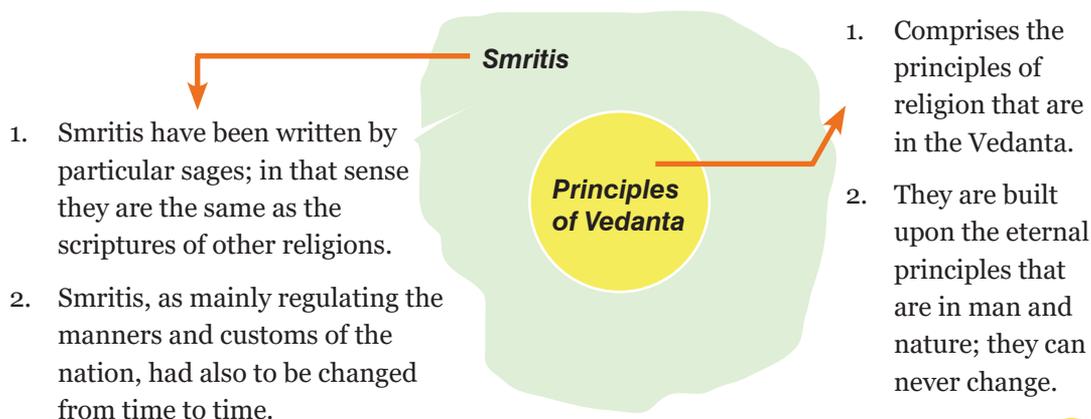


So deeply have these Upanishads sunk into our race that those of you who study the symbology of the crudest religion of the Hindus will be astonished to find sometimes figurative expressions of the Upanishads — the Upanishads become symbolised after a time into figures and so forth. ...Thus the various symbols now used by us, all come from the Vedanta, because in the Vedanta they are used as figures, and these ideas spread among the nation and permeated it throughout until they became part of their everyday life as symbols.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE VEDANTA IS ABSOLUTE

All the philosophers of India who are orthodox have to acknowledge the authority of the Vedanta; and all our present-day religions, however crude some of them may appear to be, however inexplicable some of their purposes may seem, one who understands them and studies them can trace them back to the ideas of the Upanishads.

Smritis are scriptures that convert the eternal principles of Vedanta into contemporary customs



In modern times the Smritis must change, but the principles of our religion must remain intact.



Puranas & Tantras illustrate the eternal principles to the people

Puranas were written in the language of the people of that time. Not meant for scholars, but for ordinary people. [Covered various topics, for example] history, cosmology (with various symbological illustration of philosophical principles).



Tantras are similar to Puranas in some respects. Some of them dealt with the sacrificial ideas of the Karma Kânda.

TO BE CONTINUED...

If you have any questions on this lecture, do post your queries on www.vivekanandaway.org.

You can also access previous issues of Vivekananda Way here.