

## EVOLUTION OF HINDU SANSKRITI HISTORICAL RETROSPECT (CHAPTER I, PART II) ANCIENT INDIAN RISHIS



### SAPTA RISHIS:

“We offer our obeisance to the Rishis, born of old, the ancients, the path makers.”  
(Rig Veda, 10.14.15)

In traditional Hindu Astronomy, seven stars of Ursa Major are identified with the names of Sapta Rishis. The earliest list of the Seven Rishis is given by Jaiminiya Brahmana 2.218, 221: Agastya, Atri, Bharadvaj, Gautam, Jamadagni, Vaashista and Vishvamitra, followed by Brihadaranvaka Upanisad 2.2.6: with a slightly different list: Bharadvaja, Gautama, Jamadagni, Kashyapa, Vishwamitra Vashistha and Sandilya. And Gopatha Brahmana 1.2.8: have, Vashistha, Bhrigu, Gautama, Vishvamitra, Jamadagni, Bharadvaja, Gungu, Agastya, and Kashyapa.

The Sapta Rishis are the most enlightened beings and are considered to be greater than even Devas. Their knowledge has been passed on through generations and all Vedic and post-Vedic scriptures can be attributed to them and their family of sons and disciples. It is from these Rishis that Gotras are derived.

India is the land of the Rishis and Kashmir is known as *Resh Vaar*, the abode of Rishis. The culture of India is called as the Rishi culture or Vedic Culture, from time immemorial. The Vedas are the foundations of Sanatana Dharma and Indian culture. The Vedas are ancient books of knowledge and deal with all branches of knowledge mainly religion, philosophy, science, astronomy, astrology, sociology, music, politics and administration. The Vedas are compared to *Kalpa-Vriksha* (the desire tree), because they contain all things perceivable by man. Vedas lead us towards more meaningful, purposeful and useful life. Vedas are inseparable part of Hindu civilization. Max Mueller, remarked; “I maintain that to everybody who cares for himself, for his ancestors, for history, for his intellectual development---a study of Vedic literature is indispensable.”

“With the Vedas, the six appendices, with the Pada and Krama (texts), with Vedanta and Siddhanta, logic and grammar, Purana recitation, with (Tantric) Mantras and the six traditional sects ... with its masses of Puranic, Vedic (*Sruti*) and logic disciplines (*tarkasastra*), and, moreover, marked by Agnihottrins, with Brahmins devoted to meditation, asceticism, recitation and so on, and zealeaously engaged with ablutions, worship, and the like, ... the land of Kashmir is the best”. (Rajatarangini of Jonaraja, B 747)

The *Sapta Rishi or Laukika* era, is supposed to have started in 3076 BC or 25 years after the beginning of the *Kali* era. This calendar is popular in Kashmir even today and is being recorded year after year in yearly *Panchang*. *Sapta Rishi* year 5096 corresponds to 2020 Christian Calender. There used to be a sacred spot at Hari Parbat, the abode of Sharika Bhagvati, Srinagar, Kashmir, known as Spata Rishi, consisting of an old Chinar tree, surrounded by some sacred stones. It is believed, Spata Rishis used to meditate at that sacred spot.

The ancient Rishis of India were the ones whose contribution to Hinduism is tremendous. Hindus associated themselves with Gotras (lineage) with their names and even the stars were also named after them since they brightened us with their Knowledge and wisdom. The ancient Rishis of India bore multiple titles: Brahmarshi - A sage who has understood the meaning of Brahman. Maharishi - A great sage, Rajarshi – A royal saint, Devarishi – A Celestial sage.

**VEDIC RISHI:** Rishi is defined as “*rishati jnanena samsara-param*”

‘One who goes beyond the mundane world by means of knowledge.’

The word ‘Rishi’ has been derived from the root word *rish*, which means to flow, flow quickly. The word *rish* becomes ‘*rishi*’, which means a person, who has attained all that is worth attaining. A Rishi attains knowledge of the Self, using a mantra and also authors a mantra. A Rishi is the one through whom the sacred words or Mantras of the Vedas are revealed.

The Vedic Rishis were scientists, they were astronomers, who perfectly knew, the Geo-Magnetic field of the Earth. They understood how radio frequencies and other solar frequencies operate on our planet. They knew the Moon's gravitational force had huge influence on our Planet and hence almost every New Moon and Full Moon is considered Sacred by the Hindus. If one Full Moon is Buddha Purnima, the other New Moon is Kali Puja, almost a continuous cycle throughout the Year. They were using the Mandala design, while choosing hills and mountains on which they constructed the temples. One temple's energy is connected to another temple's magnetic force via massive systematic planning of triangular placements of temples across the geography of the country.

The scientific discoveries of the ancient Rishis have been recently rediscovered by the West; ‘Earth goes around the sun – Rig Veda 10. 22. 14. and Yajur Veda 3. 6.; Sun neither rises nor sets – Atraya Brahman 3’44 and Gopatha

Brahman 2.4.10; Sun and whole universe are round – Yajur Veda 20. 23; Moon is enlightened by the sun – Yajur Veda 18, 20; There are many suns – Rig Veda 9. 114. 3; Seven colours in the sun – Atharva Veda 7. 107. 1.

Electromagnetic field, conversion of mass and energy – Rig Veda 10. 72.’

According to Sri Aurobindo; ‘The Rishis of ancient India, called the ‘Scientists of Hinduism’, were the scribes of the Vedas. They developed the spiritual science of Hinduism, Sanatana Dharma, as their way of ensuring the constant renewal and progress of India’s spiritual tradition and culture. Sanatana Dharma permeates every aspect of Hindu culture, from religion to the arts to the sciences. Woven within its Vedic texts lie all of the essential concepts of quantum physics and other modern scientific discoveries.’ He further elucidates, ‘A Rishi sees or discovers an inner truth and puts it into self-effective language, the Mantra’... ‘A Rishi is the seer. He has seen the Mantra. The Rishi was not the individual composer of the hymns but the seer of an eternal truth and an impersonal knowledge. He does not merely see, he also hears. He possesses a supernatural faculty of hearing. To his inner audience, the divine word came vibrating out of the Infinite. So he is called Kavi satyashruta, the hearer of Truth’... ‘He is the possessor of great spiritual and occult knowledge, the complete inner knowledge. The Rishis, were seers as well as Sages, they were men of vision who saw things in their meditation in images, often symbolic images, which might precede an experience and put it in a concrete form. So it was possible for the Rishis, to see at once the inner experience and in image its symbolic happenings.’

“Saints and sages are a blessing to the world at large. They are the custodians of superior divine wisdom, spiritual powers and inexhaustible spiritual wealth... Their very existence inspires others and goads them to become like them and attain the same state of bliss achieved by them... Their glory is indescribable. Their wisdom is unfathomable. They are deep like the ocean, steady like the Himalayas, pure like the Himalayan snow, effulgent like the sun...To be in their company is the highest education. To love them is the highest happiness. To be near them is real education.” Swami Sivananda Saraswati

A Rishi in Rig Veda is an author of a Rik, a mantra.

The Rig Veda Samhita is a collection of 1,028 Suktas (hymns); divided into ten Mandalas (books). These 1,028 Suktas include eleven Valakhilya Suktas. The number of mantras in a Suktas varies from just one (1-99) to 58 (IX-97). The total number of mantras is 10,462. The average number of mantras per hymn is ten. These hymns are as envisioned by various Seers.

Although there had been hundreds of Rishis, few are considered to be greatest e.g., Angirasa, Kanva, Grtsamanda, Bharata, Agastya, Atri, Vyasa, Kapila, Bharadwaja, Narada, Bhrigu, Kashyapa Pulatsya, Vashista, Vishwamitra, Sushruta, Patanjali.

There are several notable female Rishikas who contributed to the composition of the Vedic scriptures. The Rig Veda mentions Romasha, Lopamudra, Apala, Kadru, Visvavara, Ghosha, Juhu, Vagambhrini, Paulomi, Indrani, Savitri, Devajami, and Yami. Sama Veda adds Nodha, Akrishtabhasha, Sikatanivavari and Gaupayana.

**The following chart indicates the number of Suktas, Mantras, ascribed to a Rishi:**

Mandala	Suktas	Mantras	Name of Rishis
<b><u>01</u></b>	<b><u>191</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>Maducchanda, Medhatithi, Gotama and others</u></b>
<b><u>02</u></b>	<b><u>43</u></b>	<b><u>429</u></b>	<b><u>Gritasamada and his family</u></b>
<b><u>03</u></b>	<b><u>62</u></b>	<b><u>617</u></b>	<b><u>Vishvamitra and his family</u></b>
<b><u>04</u></b>	<b><u>58</u></b>	<b><u>589</u></b>	<b><u>Vamadeva and his family</u></b>
<b><u>05</u></b>	<b><u>87</u></b>	<b><u>727</u></b>	<b><u>Atri and his family</u></b>
<b><u>06</u></b>	<b><u>75</u></b>	<b><u>765</u></b>	<b><u>Bhardvaja and his family</u></b>
<b><u>07</u></b>	<b><u>104</u></b>	<b><u>841</u></b>	<b><u>Vashistha and his family</u></b>
<b><u>08</u></b>	<b><u>103</u></b>	<b><u>1716</u></b>	<b><u>Kanva, Angira and their family</u></b>
<b><u>09</u></b>	<b><u>114</u></b>	<b><u>1108</u></b>	<b><u>Soma Devata but different Rishis</u></b>
<b><u>10</u></b>	<b><u>191</u></b>	<b><u>1754</u></b>	<b><u>Vimada, Indra, Shachi and many other</u></b>

The Vedas are generally considered to have two portions viz., *Karma-Kanda* (portion dealing with action or rituals) and *Jnana-Kanda* (portion dealing with knowledge). The Samhita and the Brahmanas represent mainly the *Karma-Kanda* or the ritual portion, while the Upanishads chiefly represent the *Jnana-Kanda* or the knowledge portion. The Upanishads, however, are included in the *Shruti*. They are at present, the most popular and extensively read Vedic texts. One hundred and eight Upanishads are enumerated in the Muktikopanishad. However, among these Upanishads, ten Upanishads, the names of which have been mentioned in the Muktikopanishad, are considered the most important Upanishads from the point of view of Vedantic Philosophy. Ten Principal Upanishads known as ‘Dashopanishad’ are: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Munda, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka. Besides, Shvetashvatara, Kaushitaki and Maitrayaniya Upanishads are often listed in old Upanishads.

According to Swami Vivekananda; “In ancient times there were, no doubt, many Rishis and Maharshis who came face to face with Truth. But if this recalling of our ancient greatness is to be of real benefit, we too must become Rishis like them. Ay, not only that, but it is my firm conviction that we shall be even greater Rishis than any that our history presents to us.”

## MAHARISHI VYASA

Krishna Dvaipayana, known as Maharishi Vyasa or Veda Vyasa, was a great Seer, a poet-philosopher and has become an institution representing the Hindu heritage. During ancient times, *Guru Shisha Parampara* was mode of learning in India. Guru would teach orally *Shishas* and this *Parampara* continued for generation after generation. It was estimated Rig Veda had originally one lakh Sanskrit Shlokas. With the passage of time Rishis got scattered all over country, with the result loss of Vedic literature. Vyasa moved around the country, collected all the Vedic passages and for the first time edited them into written volumes which constitute into four books, the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda and the Atharva-Veda. He divided each book into four sections; Mantras (chants or hymns), Brahmanas (rituals and rules of conduct), Aranyakas (methods of subjective worship) and the Upanishad (philosophical revelations). The Upanishads are found in the last section of each Veda. The philosophy reveled in the Upanishads are called Vedanta.

Besides, Veda Vyasa composed Mahabharata in two sets, first composition Jaya had 25000 Shlokas, Mahabharata 100,000 (with Upakhayanyas) Shlokas. The original epic was called Jaya then it was called Vijaya, then Bharata and finally Mahabharata. Jaya had about twenty five thousand verses while the final form had over one hundred thousand verses. Jaya was about spiritual victory, Vijaya was about material victory, Bharata was the story of a clan and Mahabharata included also the wisdom of the land called Bharat-Varsha. 18 chapters of Vyasa's Jaya constitute the Bhagawad Gita the sacred text of the Hindus.

The *Itihasa* or two epics are part of the Smriti tradition. The Smriti tradition had composers. The Ramayana was composed by Valmiki, regarded as the first poet or *Kavi* and Mahabharata was composed by Veda Vyasa.

Veda Vyasa also wrote the eighteen Puranas comprising of 400,000 Shlokas and established the system of teaching them through Upakhyanas or discourses. In this way, he established the three paths, viz., Karma, Upasana (devotion) and Jnana (knowledge). The *Brahma Sutras*, also known as the Vedanta Sutras have been written by Vyasa along with Badarayana. On the auspicious day Vyasa began to write his *Brahma Sutras* is known as Vyasa or Guru Purnima, according to the scriptures; 'Hindus should worship Vyasa and the Brahmanavidya Gurus, then only, begin the study of the *Brahma Sutras* and other ancient books on wisdom'. Vyasa has written two great *Bakhti Granths*; Adhyatma Ramayana and Bhagavatam, his last work.

**References:** 1.Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.20, Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
2. Upanishads by Dr.Shashi Tiwari (Compiled by Chaman Lal Gadoo)