

UPSC Civil Services Examination

Ancient History

Types of Vedas - Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda & Atharvaveda

One of the best sources of Ancient Indian History is vedic literature. Vedas have formed the Indian scripture. The ideas and practices of Vedic religion are codified by the Vedas and they also form the basis of classical Hinduism. There are four types of Vedas - Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda.

The topic, 'Types of Vedas' is important for the [IAS Exam](#), keeping in mind the syllabus of history subject. Questions might be asked from any type of vedas in Prelims or Mains stage. Hence, this article will mention the relevant facts about four vedas for civil services examination. Aspirants can also download the notes PDF from the link provided in the page.

Four Vedas Name and Features

The four vedas and their features in brief are given in the table below:

Types of Vedas	
Name of the Veda	Key Features of the Veda
Rig Veda	It is the earliest form of Veda
Samaveda	Earliest reference of singing
Yajurveda	It is also called the book of prayers
Atharvaveda	The book of magic and charms

Vedas in Detail

Rigveda:

The oldest veda is the rigveda. It has 1028 hymns called 'Suktas' and is a collection of 10 books called 'Mandalas.' The features of Rigveda are given in the table below:

Features of Rigveda
It is the oldest form of Veda and oldest known Vedic Sanskrit text(1800 – 1100 BCE)
The meaning of the word 'Rigveda' is Praise Knowledge
It has 10600 verses
Though there are 10 books or mandalas but book number 1 and 10 are the youngest ones as they written later than books 2 to 9
Rigvedic books 2-9 deal with cosmology and deities

Rigvedic books 1 and 10 deal with philosophical questions and also talk about various virtues including charity in the society
Rigvedic books 2-7 are the oldest and shortest also called family books
Rigvedic books 1 & 10 are the youngest and longest
1028 hymns deal with deities including Agni, Indra and are attributed and dedicated to a sage rishi
The ninth rigvedic book/mandala is solely dedicated to Soma
The meters used to form hymns are Gayatri, Anushtubh, Trishtubh and Jagati (Trishtubh and Gayatri are most important)

To get [NCERT notes on Rigveda](#), check the linked article.

Samaveda:

Known as the veda of melodies and chants, Samaveda dates back to 1200-800 BCE. This veda is related to public worship. The key features of Samaveda is given in the table below:

Features of Samaveda
There are 1549 verses (except 75 verses, all have been taken from Rigveda)
There are two upanishads embedded in Samaveda - Chandogya Upanishad and Kena Upanishada
The Samaveda is considered as the root of the Indian classical music and dance
It is considered as the storehouse of the melodious chants
Though it has lesser verses than Rigveda, however its texts are larger
There are three recensions of the text of the Samaveda - Kauthuma, Raṇayaniya and Jaimaniya
Samaveda is categorised into two parts - Part-I includes melodies called Gana & Part-II includes three verses book called Archika.
Samaveda samhita is not meant to be read as a text, it is like a musical score sheet that must be heard

Yajurveda:

Stands to mean 'Worship Knowledge', Yajurveda dates back to 1100-800 BCE; corresponding with Samaveda. It compiles ritual-offering mantras/chants. These chants were offered by the priest alongside a person who used to perform a ritual (in most cases yajna fire.) The key features of Yajurveda are given below:

Features of Yajurveda
It has two types - Krishna (Black/Dark) & Shukla (White/Bright)
Krishna Yajurveda has un-arranged, unclear, motley collection of verses
Shukla Yajurveda has arranged and clear verses
Krishna Yajurveda has two recensions, while Shukla Yajurveda has four
The oldest layer of Yajurveda has 1875 verses mostly taken up from Rigveda

The middle layer of the veda has Satapatha Brahmana which is a commentary of Shukla Yajurveda

The youngest layer of Yajurveda consists various upanishads - Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the Isha Upanishad, the Taittiriya Upanishad, the Katha Upanishad, the Shvetashvatara Upanishad and the Maitri Upanishad

Vajasaneyi Samhita is the samhita in the Shukla Yajurveda

There are four surviving recensions of the Krishna Yajurveda – Taittiriya samhita, Maitrayani samhita, Kaṭha samhita and Kapisthala samhita

Aspirants can read about Upanishads, Brahmanas in the [vedic literature](#) page linked in the article.

Atharvaveda:

Stands to mean a tatpurusha compound of Atharvan, an ancient sage and knowledge (atharvan+knowledge), it dates back to 1000-800 BCE. The key features of Atharvaveda are given the table below:

Features of Atharvaveda
The daily procedures of life are very well enumerated in this veda
It has 730 hymns/suktas, 600 mantras and 20 books
Paippalada and the Saunakiya are two recensions of Atharvaveda
Called a veda of magical formulas, it includes three primary Upanishads - Mundaka Upanishad, the Mandukya Upanishad and the Prashna Upanishad
The 20 books are arranged by the length of hymns they contain
Unlike Samaveda where hymns are borrowed from Rigveda, hymns of Atharvaveda are unique except a few
This veda contains hymns many of which were charms and magic spells which are meant to be pronounced by the person who seeks some benefit, or more often by a sorcerer who would say it on his or her behalf

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