

# The Position of *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtras* in the Vedic Corpus

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On behalf of the Sāstra-caḅṣuḅ-pariṣat

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We have mentioned the *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtras*; many devotees especially in the West may have never heard of this text so this would be an appropriate time to introduce it.

The *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtras* is part of the *Āpastamba Kalpa Sūtra* collection, along with *Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtras* and *Āpastamba Gṛhya Sūtras*. The *Kalpa Sūtras* form part of the *vedāṅgas* (limbs of the Vedas). The *Kena-upaniṣad* (4.8) asserts that complete knowledge requires three elements: Veda, **Vedāṅga**, and *Satya*. The following quote from my unpublished monograph provisionally titled *Is the Term “Vedic Astrology” a Misnomer?* gives some details about the *vedāṅgas*.

## Vedāṅga

Followers of the Veda describe the Veda as *Ṣaḁaṅga-veda*, the Veda of six limbs<sup>1</sup>, and understand that the study of the Veda simultaneously gave rise to the six subsidiary studies known as *Śikṣā*, *Chanda*, *Vyākaraṇa*, *Nirukta*, *Kalpa*, and *Jyotiṣa*.

As the Veda was learned by recitation and proper pronunciation, it was first necessary to learn the science of *Śikṣā*. A *Rg-vedic* usage of the verbal root *śikṣā* is “to give” (instruction). The guru was giving the Veda to his pupil by uttering it. Knowledge of *Śikṣā* was preliminary to the study of the Vedas, the mastery of which depended upon its proper pronunciation and recitation. *Chandas* (meter) is regarded as preliminary to Vedic chanting. The rules of poetical composition, versification, and meter had to be mastered in order to follow the many varieties of meter employed in the Vedas. Similarly, *Vyākaraṇa* (grammar) and *Nirukta* (etymology and lexicon) had also to be studied as aids to the comprehension of the meaning of the Vedic texts upon which so much stress was laid. The mere crammer of Vedic texts to whom the Veda merely conveyed a sound without sense was condemned as the bearer of a burden, like an ass carrying a load of sandalwood without relishing its smell.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The *vedāṅgas* are mentioned in the *Muṁḁaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.5

<sup>2</sup> R.K. Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education - Brahmanical and Buddhist* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), 57-58. See also 165-167.

***Kalpa Sūtras*** constitute that part of the *Vedāṅga* which instructs the student in all the elaborate rules for sacrifices and ceremonies. They explain in detail the varied rituals, sacrifices, judicial laws, and religious and cultural obligations. Each Veda has its own *Kalpa Sūtras*.

*Kalpa Sūtras* have four divisions: *Śrauta Sūtra*, *Gṛhya Sūtra*, *Dharma Sūtra*, and *Śulba Sūtra*.

- *Śrauta Sūtra*: the manuals used by priests engaged in the performance of the grander Vedic sacrifices, those requiring three fires and the services of many specialized priests.
- *Gṛhya Sūtra*: relates to the *saṁskāras* (sacraments) in the domestic life of householders performed at home. Beginning from the *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra* (conception of the child) the *Gṛhya Sūtra* includes all the ceremonies up to cremation (*antyeṣṭi-kriyā*); the five daily sacrifices (*mahayajña*); seasonal ceremonies; and those observed on special occasions, such as house building or cattle breeding.
- *Dharma Sūtra*: defines the customs, rules, duties, and the right course of conduct in social life.
- *Śulba Sūtra*: (which is only for the *Yajur Veda*) deals with the mathematical methodology to construct altars for the Vedic rituals. Depending on the purpose of the fire sacrifice the altar should be a certain shape: “He who desires heaven is to construct a fire-altar in the form of a falcon”; “A fire-altar in the form of a tortoise is to be constructed by one desiring to win the world of Brahman”; “Those who wish to destroy existing and future enemies should construct a fire-altar in the form of a rhombus.”<sup>3</sup>

Lastly, a study of *Jyotiṣa* “astral science” the *kāla-vidyā* “science of time” gave an insight into how the “Time Factor” moves things according to their destiny<sup>4</sup> as well as to the unchanging and regular laws of nature. This was also important for calendars and for choosing the right time to perform rituals.

*Śikṣā* and *Chanda* teach one how to pronounce the Veda. *Vyākaraṇa* and *Nirukta* teach one how to understand the meaning of the Veda. While *Kalpa*, and *Jyotiṣa* teach us how to apply the Veda in life. Each *āṅga* corresponds to a part of the body. *Vyākaraṇa* is the mouth of Vedas, *Jyotiṣa* the eye, *Nirukta* the ear, *Chanda* the foot, *Śikṣā* the nose, and *Kalpa* the hands.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> S.N. Sen and A.K. Bag, *The Śulbasūtras of Baudhāyana, Āpastamba, Kātyāyana and Mānava: With Text, English Translation and Commentary* (New Delhi: Indian National Science Academy, 1983), 86, 98, 111.

<sup>4</sup> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.54.14p

<sup>5</sup> Manomohan Ghosh, *Rik-Sakhiya Paniniya Siksa* (Calcutta (Kolkata): University of Calcutta Press, 1938), 43.

Reverting to *Āpastamba's Dharmasūtras*, they are associated with the *Taittirīya Śākhā* of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda*.

Now it may be asked, “What is a *Śākhā*?” Again from my unpublished monograph:

Before continuing we must say a little about Veda *śākhās* (branches). At the end of each *Dvāpara-yuga* a Vyasadeva appears who divides and condenses the one Veda into four different *saṃhitās* (collections of mantras) along with their related *brāhmaṇas*, *āranyakas*, and *upaniṣads* which become the well known *Rg*, *Yajur*, *Sāma*, and *Atharva Vedas*. Each Veda was then taught by Vyasadeva to individual students. Each of these four disciples had their own disciples and some minor alterations and adjustments were made by them while teaching the Veda. This was done mostly by rearrangement of the mantras to suit their needs. Such modified forms came to be known as *śākhās* (branches).<sup>6</sup> (The creation of *śākhās* also happens at the end of every *Dvāpara-yuga*.) While the individual Vedic mantras are eternal they are organized in different ways according to the time and circumstances. Thus the *Kurma Purāna* (52.19-20) tells us: “Previously the *Rg Veda* was divided into 21 *śākhās*, the *Yajur Veda* into 100 *śākhās*, the *Sāma Veda* into 1,000 *śākhās* and the *Atharva Veda* into 9 *śākhās*.” Since then we have lost most of these *śākhās*, and sadly only a few exist today. And eventually, as *Kali-yuga* progresses they will all be lost until the Vedas reappear again when the cycle repeats.

## Bibliography

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<sup>6</sup> See *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (12.6.36-80) and especially *Viṣṇu Purāna*, Canto 3, chapters 3-6 which describes in detail how the different Veda *Śākhās* came to be.