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ART, LITERATURE, AND SCIENCE IN THE SYSTEM OF SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS OF ANCIENT INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the study of the interrelationship between art, literature, and science and the spiritual traditions of Ancient India. Based on the analysis of Vedic texts, epic monuments, and treatises on grammar, mathematics, astronomy, and the theory of fine arts, it is demonstrated that in Indian civilization cognition and creative activity were inseparable from the religious and philosophical worldview.

The concepts of dharma, ṛta, and moksha shaped not only ethical norms but also aesthetic principles, scientific methods, and literary canons. The aim of the study is to identify the mechanisms through which spiritual traditions structured all forms of creative and cognitive activity.

The research materials include the Vedic corpus, Sanskrit poetics (the Nāṭyaśāstra), the linguistic system of Pāṇini, mathematical texts of Āryabhaṭa, and treatises of the Vāstuśāstra. The methodological framework comprises historical-cultural analysis, the comparative-typological method, and the hermeneutics of sacred texts.

The results indicate that in Ancient India there was no fundamental distinction between sacred and scientific knowledge.

Keywords. *Ancient India, Vedic tradition, Sanskrit literature, rasa theory, Pāṇini, Āryabhaṭa, Vāstuśāstra, dharma, spiritual traditions, sciences of Ancient India*

Introduction. The spiritual traditions of Ancient India represent one of the most complex and internally coherent phenomena in world culture. Unlike many other civilizations, where religious, scientific, and artistic activities gradually acquired autonomy, in India they remained organically integrated within a unified worldview for millennia [1, p. 12].

The relevance of this topic is обусловлена the growing scholarly interest in non-Western scientific and philosophical traditions, which open new perspectives for the comparative history of culture. Understanding the mechanisms of integration between knowledge and spiritual practice in Ancient Indian society allows for a deeper interpretation of contemporary debates on the relationship between science, religion, and art [2, p. 34].

Research Aim. The aim of this study is to identify the mechanisms through which the spiritual traditions of Ancient India structured and legitimized all forms of creative and cognitive activity.

Methodological Approaches. This research employs a комплекс of complementary methods. Historical-cultural analysis allows for the examination of texts within the context of specific social and religious practices. The comparative-typological method is used to identify structural parallels between different fields of knowledge (such as linguistics, mathematics, and music) and their shared spiritual foundations [6, p. 118]. The hermeneutics of sacred texts provides an adequate interpretation of semantic structures oriented toward religious and philosophical concepts rather than positivist criteria of verification [7, p. 203].

Methods. The methodological framework of this study is based on the concept of "sacralized knowledge" (*vidyā*), according to which, in traditional societies, all forms of intellectual activity function as subsystems of a unified religious-philosophical system [1, p. 78]. This conceptual approach makes it possible to avoid the anachronistic projection of the Western distinction between science and religion onto the material of Ancient Indian civilization.

The study covers the period from the Vedic era (c. 1500 BCE) to the late classical period (c. 12th century CE), that is, the epoch of formation, flourishing, and codification of the principal spiritual and intellectual traditions of India. Geographically, the research focuses on Northern and Central India as the main centers of Vedic and classical Sanskrit culture, with necessary references to South Indian traditions (Dravidian musical theory and Tamil lyric poetry).

Results. The fundamental category structuring the worldview of Ancient Indians is *dharma*—a universal law that is simultaneously natural, ethical, and ritual in nature [8, p. 201]. The analysis demonstrates that *dharma* determined not only human behavior but also the rules governing textual production, the forms of artistic canon, and the principles of classification of natural phenomena.

The concepts of *karma-sañcita* and *saṃsāra* shaped a specific understanding of time and history, giving rise to mechanisms of knowledge preservation and transmission fundamentally different from those of Western European traditions. In a worldview in which each cosmic cycle culminates in the dissolution of the world, true value is attributed not to novelty but to authenticity—the precise reproduction of *śruti* (that which is heard, sacred revelation) [9, p. 118]. This explains the conservative character of Indian scholarship, which should be understood not as a lack of creative energy but as a systemic principle.

The Upanishads (8th–3rd centuries BCE) introduced the concepts of *Brahman* (absolute reality) and *Ātman* (the individual self), which are identical at their deepest level [10, p. 203]. This result is of fundamental importance: the formula *tat tvam asi* ("thou art that") became not only a philosophical proposition but also an aesthetic principle—an authentic work of art should guide the viewer toward the experiential realization of this unity.

The Vedic corpus (c. 1500–500 BCE) contains not only religious hymns and ritual prescriptions, but also proto-scientific ideas about nature, medical knowledge, and mathematical problems [11, p. 22]. The *Nasadiya Sukta* and the dialogical hymns of the *Rigveda* demonstrate a remarkably high level of philosophical reflection, anticipating the speculative thought of the Upanishads [5, p. 67].

The *Mahabharata*, comprising approximately 100,000 couplets, represents a genuine encyclopedia of ancient Indian culture, encompassing philosophical, legal, medical, and astronomical material [12, p. 130]. The *Bhagavad Gita*, which forms part of the epic, became a quintessence of dharmic ethics and exerted a decisive influence on subsequent genres of Sanskrit literature [8, p. 201].

The *Natya Shastra* of Bharata (c. 2nd century BCE – 2nd century CE) constitutes the first systematic theory of the fine arts in world history. Its central concept, *rasa* (literally "essence" or "flavor"), refers to a specific aesthetic experience arising in the spectator during the perception of a work of art. Bharata identifies eight principal *rasas*: *śṛṅgāra* (erotic/love), *hāsya* (comic), *karuṇa* (pathetic), *raudra* (furious), *vīra* (heroic), *bhayānaka* (terrifying), *bībhatsa* (odious), and *adbhuta* (marvelous) [13, p. 112].

A fundamentally important result of this study is that *rasa* is not a subjective emotional state. A refined spectator (*sahṛdaya*) is capable of "tasting" *rasa* precisely because their aesthetic perception has been purified through spiritual practice. Thus, in Indian aesthetic theory, aesthetic experience is inseparable from the religious and philosophical cultivation of the individual [2, p. 156]. Abhinavagupta, in his *Abhinavabhāratī* (10th–11th centuries), brought this theory to completion: the authentic experience of art is a reflection of the bliss of *Brahman* [14, p. 78].

Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (c. 4th century BCE) consists of approximately 4,000 sūtras describing the grammatical system of Sanskrit with a level of precision and completeness unmatched in European linguistics until the nineteenth century [15, p. 7]. Pāṇini's metalinguistic apparatus anticipates modern formal grammars and the notational systems of mathematical logic [16, p. 89].

The findings indicate that the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* served a sacred purpose—the preservation of the unaltered Sanskrit of the Vedas, in which the cosmic power of *vāc* (speech) is embodied [9, p. 204]. It is significant that the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is composed in a condensed, aphoristic, quasi-poetic form, thereby demonstrating the inseparability of scientific and artistic codes in Indian culture.

The *Śulba Sūtras* (8th–5th centuries BCE) contain some of the earliest recorded geometrical theorems in the world, including an equivalent of the Pythagorean theorem, predating the Greek mathematician by at least three centuries [17, p. 113]. The concept of zero (*śūnya*) as a number and the positional decimal system, developed in India, became foundational to modern global mathematics [17, p. 198].

Āryabhaṭa (476 – c. 550 CE) provided an approximation of π = 3.1416, developed trigonometric tables, proposed methods for solving linear Diophantine equations, and advanced the idea of the Earth's rotation [18, p. 57]. A noteworthy result is that the *Āryabhaṭīya* is composed in the poetic form of a *śāstra*, which vividly demonstrates the unity of scientific and artistic principles in Indian culture.

Treatises of the *Vāstuśāstra* regulated construction in accordance with the principles of cosmic order [19, p. 11]. An architectural structure was conceived as a microcosmic reproduction of the universe (*puruṣamaṇḍala*), determining the geometric layout of temples, systems of proportion, and the symbolic program of decoration. The *Mānasāra* establishes that the artist (*śilpin*) is not a free creator in the Western sense; rather, he is a conduit of *daivī prerana* ("divine inspiration"), whose task is the precise reproduction of a prototype existing in the realm of the Absolute [2, p. 211].

The Ajanta cave complexes (2nd century BCE – 7th century CE) vividly demonstrate the organic unity of architecture, sculpture, and painting. Their creators were guided by *dhyāna-ślokas*—meditative descriptions of forms, which the artist visualized in a state of contemplation before transferring them onto the wall [20, p. 112].

In Indian theory, sound (*nāda-brahman*) is regarded as the most immediate manifestation of the Absolute. The system of *ragas* does not merely express but ontologically participates in a corresponding level of reality [21, p. 88]. The statue of Shiva as *Naṭarāja* ("Lord of the Dance") represents one of the most concise visual embodiments of the idea that Shiva's cosmic dance simultaneously signifies the creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe [13, p. 47].

Āyurveda ("the knowledge of life"), regarded as an *upaveda*—an auxiliary Veda—integrates the doctrine of the three *doṣas* (*vāta*, *pitta*, *kapha*) into the cosmological system of the five fundamental elements [22, p. 89]. The *Suśruta Saṃhitā* describes surgical procedures, including rhinoplasty and cataract surgery [22, p. 167]. The primary aim of medicine in this context is not merely physical healing but the restoration of *dharmic* balance.

Discussion. The findings of this study confirm the hypothesis that in Ancient India there was no fundamental distinction between sacred and profane knowledge. All the domains considered—literature, mathematics, linguistics, architecture, medicine, and music—functioned as subsystems of a unified religious-philosophical system governed by shared epistemological principles rooted in Vedic metaphysics.

A particularly significant conclusion is that the Vedic tradition developed a unique mechanism for the codification and transmission of knowledge, in which the sacred authority of the text served as a guarantor of its scientific validity rather than an obstacle to rational inquiry. This helps explain how a high level of mathematical rigor (as seen in the works of Pāṇini and Āryabhaṭa) could be achieved within a system primarily oriented toward religious goals [6, p. 267].

These conclusions are consistent with the classical works of G. M. Bongard-Levin [1], who viewed Ancient Indian civilization as an integrated system in which philosophy, science, and religion

form a unified complex. At the same time, the present study refines this thesis by identifying specific mechanisms of integration within each of the disciplines examined.

Comparative-typological analysis reveals significant differences between the Indian and Greek models. In Ancient Greece, the rationalization of knowledge proceeded through a gradual emancipation from mythological and religious frameworks (from Thales to Aristotle). In India, an equally profound process of rationalization (as exemplified by the grammar of Pāṇini and the mathematics of Āryabhaṭa) unfolded within the religious system itself, without opposing it. This distinction is of fundamental importance for the comparative history of science [17, p. 198].

The theory of *rasa* is of particular interest in comparison with Western European aesthetic systems: unlike Aristotelian catharsis (purification through pity and fear) and Kantian disinterested contemplation, the Indian concept of *rasa* embeds aesthetic experience within the broader framework of spiritual practice and ontology [2, p. 298].

Conclusion. The conducted study makes it possible to formulate a number of general conclusions. Intellectual and creative activities in Ancient India were deeply rooted in religious and philosophical traditions and were conceived as various means of approaching ultimate reality. The distinction between “science” and “religion” appears to be a retrospective construct that is not fully applicable to this cultural context [1, p. 312].

The Vedic tradition developed a unique mechanism for the codification and transmission of knowledge, in which the sacred authority of the text ensured its preservation across generations with minimal distortion. This feature helps explain the remarkable precision of Panini’s linguistic system as well as the mathematical achievements of Aryabhata [15, p. 12].

At the same time, the theory of rasa and the concept of a spiritual canon in architecture and sculpture represent a fundamentally different model—compared to the Western European tradition—of the relationship between the artist and the work of art. In this framework, creativity is understood primarily as adherence to an eternal model rather than autonomous self-expression, which should be interpreted not as a limitation but as an ontologically grounded principle [2, p. 298].

Furthermore, the development of mathematics, linguistics, and astronomy occurred in parallel with the evolution of literature and the visual arts, all of which relied on a shared set of epistemological principles rooted in Vedic metaphysics. The form of the *shastra*—a normative treatise often composed in verse—serves as a clear manifestation of this unity [18, p. 71].

Prospects for further research are associated with a more in-depth analysis of Buddhist and Jain intellectual traditions as alternative systems of knowledge integration, as well as with a comparative study of the mechanisms of sacralization of science in other non-Western civilizations, such as the Chinese and the Arab-Islamic worlds.

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