

HINDUISM

An Introduction

[History, Scriptures, Prayers and Philosophy]



Dr. Sukhbir Singh Kapoor
Mohinder Kaur Kapoor

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An Introduction

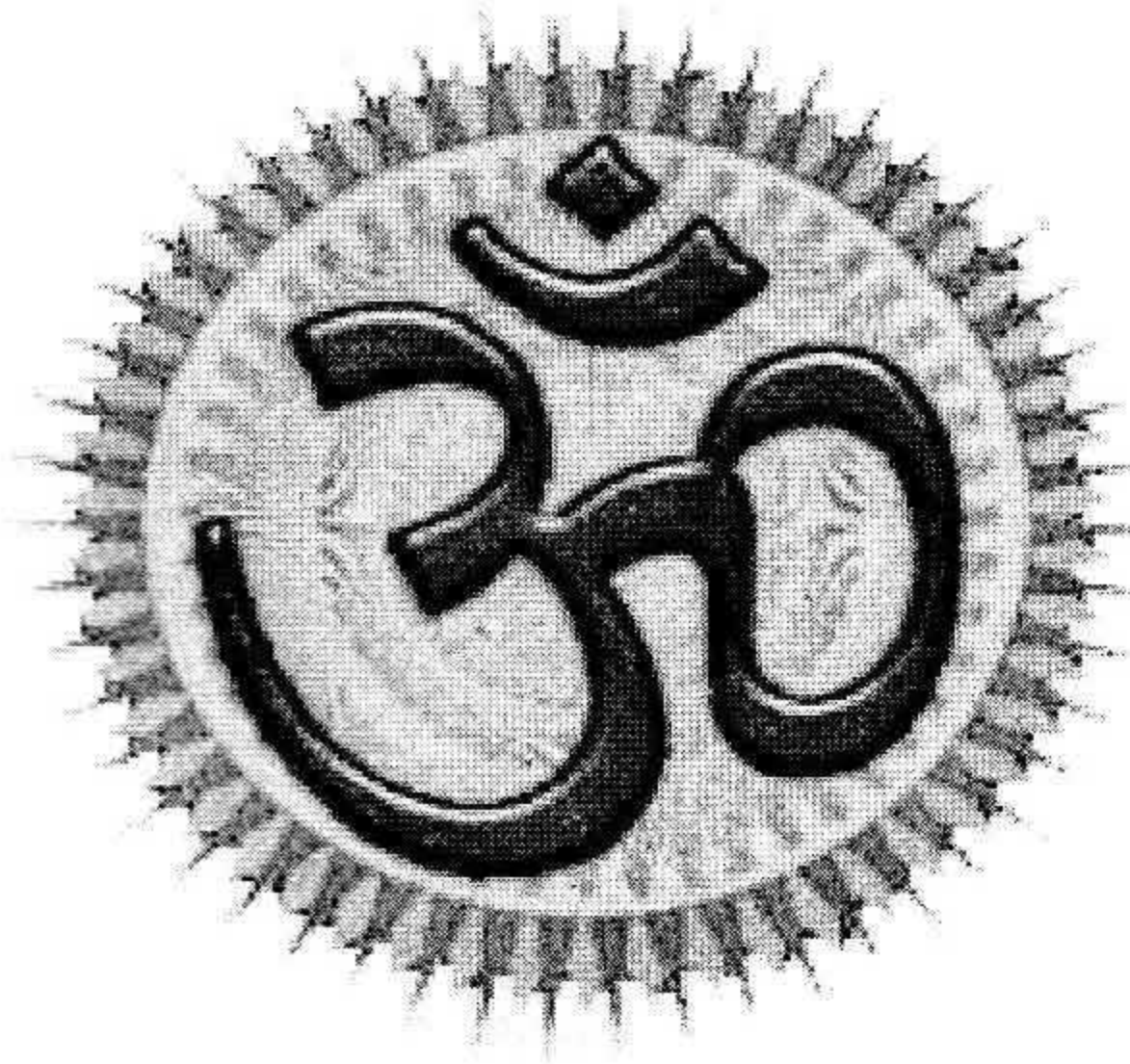
[History, Scriptures, Prayers and Philosophy]

by

Dr. Sukhbir Singh Kapoor

Vice Chancellor, World Sikh University London

Mrs. Mohinder Kaur Kapoor



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Introduction to Second Edition

I am very pleased to write introduction to the second edition of this book. I thank my readers for the encouragement they have given to me to write the second edition of this book. I have always written whatever my readers want from me. It is the blessings of *Waheguru* and the love of my readers that I write whatever is commanded.

I thank Poonam Kapoor for her help in writing and designing my books.

Dr. Sukhbir Singh Kapoor

London

23rd January 2010

by the same Author

All books are in English; Guru-bani text, where relevant, is both in Panjabi and English

Year of publication/book list

2008

1. The Crowning Glory of Guru Granth Sahib
2. The Last Rites – A Comparative Study of the last rites of different religions
3. The Making of the Sikh Rehatnamas
4. Anglo Sikh Wars
5. Sloaks of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Text of Ragamala

2007

A Dynamic Look into Sukhmani Sahib

2006

The Birds and Guru Granth Sahib

2005

1. The Sikh Ideology
2. Janam Sakhi Parampara
3. Hinduism – An Introductory study

2004

1. The Sikh Law Book - the Law personally handed by God to Guru Nanak
2. Guru Granth Sahib – An Insight into its Format and Design
3. Islam – An introduction
4. Sui Generis Martyrdom – Martyrdom of Mata Gujri and Sahibzadas
5. Sikhism – Guru Granth Sahib and The Sikh History

2003

1. Guru Granth Sahib – An Advance Study Volume 2 (2007 edition)
2. Dasam Granth – An Introductory Study
3. Comparative Studies of World Religions. (Second edition)
4. Asa di Var – an Epic the listening of which fulfils all worldly desires.

2002

1. Guru Granth Sahib – An Advance Study Volume 1 (2006 edition)
2. Sikh Religion and the Sikh People (Fifth revised edition 2007)
3. Sikhism – An Introduction (Second revised and enlarged edition)
4. Japji – A way of God realisation (Third edition)

2001

1. Sikhism – 1000 questions answered.
2. Guru Granth Sahib, An introductory Study (enlarged edition).
3. Sikh Philosophy, Facts and Fundamentals of Sikh Religion (2nd edition)
4. Japjee – The Sikh morning prayer (Illustrated deluxe edition)

2000

1. Bhagat Bani
2. Sikh Religion and the Sikh People (2nd edition) '*Adjudged best book of the year*'

1999

1. Sikhism – An Introduction
2. Saint Soldier (The Khalsa Brotherhood)
3. Comparative Studies of World Religions.
4. The Creation of Khalsa (Edited)
5. Japji-“A way of God realisation” (second edition) '*Adjudged one of the best available translations in English*'

1998/97

1. Guru Angad Dev, Life, History and Teachings
2. Nitnem (The daily Sikh Prayers) (Translation in both easy Panjabi and English)
3. Khushi de Hanju – (ਖੁਸ਼ੀ ਦੇ ਹੰਝੂ) Punjabi poetry

1996

1. The Sikh Marriage ceremony (Anand Marriage)
2. Baramah (The twelve months)

1995

1. Kirtan Sohila and Ardas
2. Gurbani – God's word
3. Jap Sahib, Swayas and Ardas -Master compositions of Guru Gobind Singh Ji (Translation followed by relevant Sakhis (life stories))

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my all Hindu friends [names in the alphabetic order]

*Amdekar Family
Bahanda Family
Bhargava Family
Chopra Family
Dansingani Family
Ghai Family
Gulati Family
Jain Family
Loomba Family
Maini Family
Sood Family
Varma Family*

They all have loved us like their own family members

Introduction

Hinduism represents the sum total of ancient, medieval and modern Indian cultures. It is one of the world's oldest religions.

Hinduism is also known as "Sanatana Dharma". In Sanskrit, 'Sanatana' means everlasting and 'Dharma', means Code of Spiritual Duties.

Many scholars argue that Hinduism is both a religion and a way of life and has given to the world the oldest and most profound philosophy of existence.

Hinduism has explored the truth behind our existence and has given several theories to define the Truth. It has given to the world at large a set of rules for a serene and peaceful living.

Sanatana Dharma does not have a starting point in history, does not have a founder, and has no defined Church. It is a religion of Nature and Spirituality. The sages who shaped the Hindu religion reiterated the teachings of Vedas which too are believed to have no origin. In ancient India, the Vedas formed the educational system and broadly comprised all the different spheres of life, such as spiritual, scientific and medical.

I have written many books on different aspects of Sikhism. Last year, I wrote a book on Islam, and now this book on Hinduism completes the triangle of my Spiritual thought.

Diving deeper into religious thoughts, one finds that religions were founded to preach love and not hatred; peace and not terrorism; friendship and not enmity. I quote a couplet of Mohammed Iqbal which fits-in in my research:

"Mahzab nahin sikhata apas mein ber rakhna, Hindi hain hum watan hain Hindustan hamara."

"Religions do not teach enmity, we all are Indians, and Hindustan is our beloved country."

I thank my all Hindu friends who have loved me like my own kith and kin, specially Dr. Madhavi Amdekar, who is a Maharashtrian Brahman, but is running Khalsa College London, as its Principal, as a true secular teacher.

My thanks are never complete unless and until I thank Poonam Kapoor for her guidance and support in all my works.

23rd January 2006

Dr. Sukhbir Singh Kapoor

Foreword

This book magnificently exemplifies a sense of connection between the Hindu religion and other religions. Written by Dr. S. S. Kapoor, Vice Chancellor of the World Sikh University, London, it gives a detailed insight into the basics of Hinduism.

The book covers a wide range of important issues related to Hinduism, including the history, scriptures, philosophy, prayers, and the lives of Lords Rama and Krishna; the depth of knowledge and research Dr. Kapoor has dedicated to this book is clearly evident throughout, making this book a must for those who wish to study Hinduism, either academically, or purely for interest.

Written by a Sikh, this book highlights the appreciation and respect of Dr. Kapoor for other religions, and thus demonstrates the concept of different religions coexisting in harmony and peace during the present troubled times.

January 2006

Dr. Madhavi Amdekar
Principal Khalsa College, London

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Module 1

HINDUISM – THE PRELUDE

Hinduism differs from other world religions in that it does not have a single founder [as Guru Nanak (Sikhism), Mohammed (Islam), Jesus (Christianity), Sidhartha (Buddhists), Mahavir (Jains), Moses (Judaism)]; a specific scripture [as Guru Granth Sahib (Sikhism), Qoran (Islam), Bible (Christianity), Three Baskets (Buddhism), Angas (Jainism) and Tohra (Judaism)]; a theological system, a single system of morality, or a central religious organization. In fact, it consists of thousands of different religious groups that have evolved in India since 2500 BC

Hinduism is world's third largest religion- approximately 900 million devotees, after Christianity and Islam. It claims about 14% of the world's population. It is the dominant religion in India, Nepal, and among the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

A list of the followers of the six important world religions is as follows:

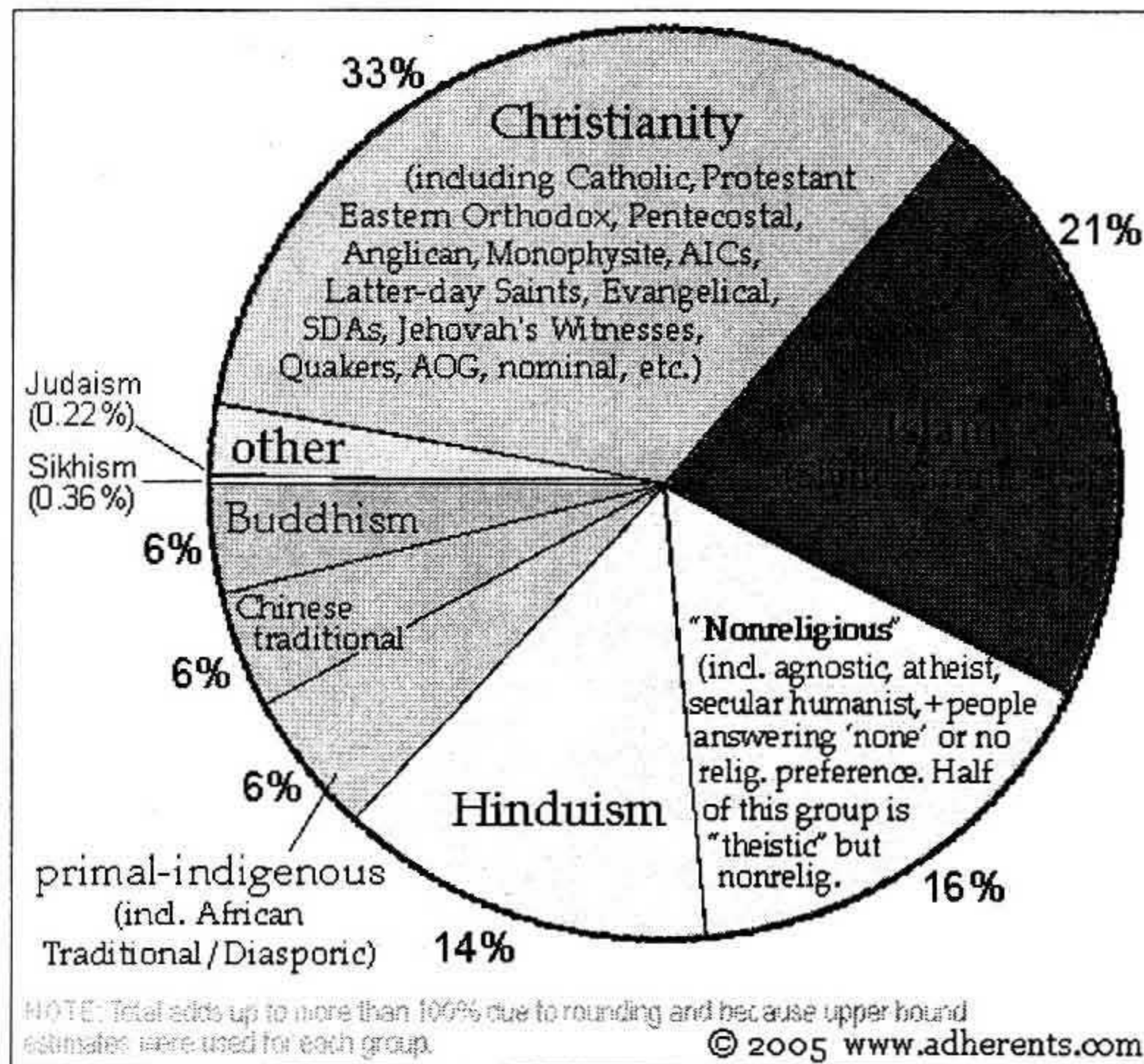
World population: 7000 million:

1. Christianity	2.1 billion (33%)
2. Islam	1.3 billion (21%)
3. Hinduism	900 million (14%)
4. Buddhists	376 million (6%)
5. Sikhs	23 million
6. Jews	14 million
7. Jains	4.2 million

Hinduism is generally regarded as the world's oldest religion approximately 5000 years old [some argue that Judaism is older than Hinduism].

Hindus recognize a single Deity, and view other gods and goddesses (about 330 million) as manifestations or aspects of the Supreme God.

According to many historians, the origin of Hinduism dates back to 5000 or more years. The word 'Hindu' is derived from the name of **River Indus**, which flows through northern India. In ancient times the river was called the 'Sindhu', but the Persians who migrated to India called the river 'Hindu', the land 'Hindustan' and its inhabitants 'Hindus'. Thus the religion followed by the Hindus came to be known as 'Hinduism'.



It is generally believed that the basic tenets of Hinduism were brought to India by Aryans who came from Central Asia and settled along the banks of the Indus river about 2000 BC. According to some scholars, the evolution of Hinduism may be divided into three periods: the ancient (2500 BC-1000 AD), the medieval (1000-1800 AD), and the modern (1800 AD to present).

Hinduism incorporates many systems of beliefs and ideas, which on one hand are akin to paganism and pantheism, and on the other very profound, abstract and metaphysical.

In Hinduism both religion and culture are interchangeable terms. Its essential aspects deal with:

- 'Bhakti' (devotion, meditation),
- 'Dharma' (what is right and wrong; duties as prescribed by scriptures), and
- 'Yoga' (discipline of mind and body).

Its main beliefs are¹:

- Idol worship (Belief in a personal God)
- Reincarnation (births based on the quality of karma)
- Karma (actions in life)
- Dharma (duties prescribed by scriptures)
- Moksha (liberation from transmigration)

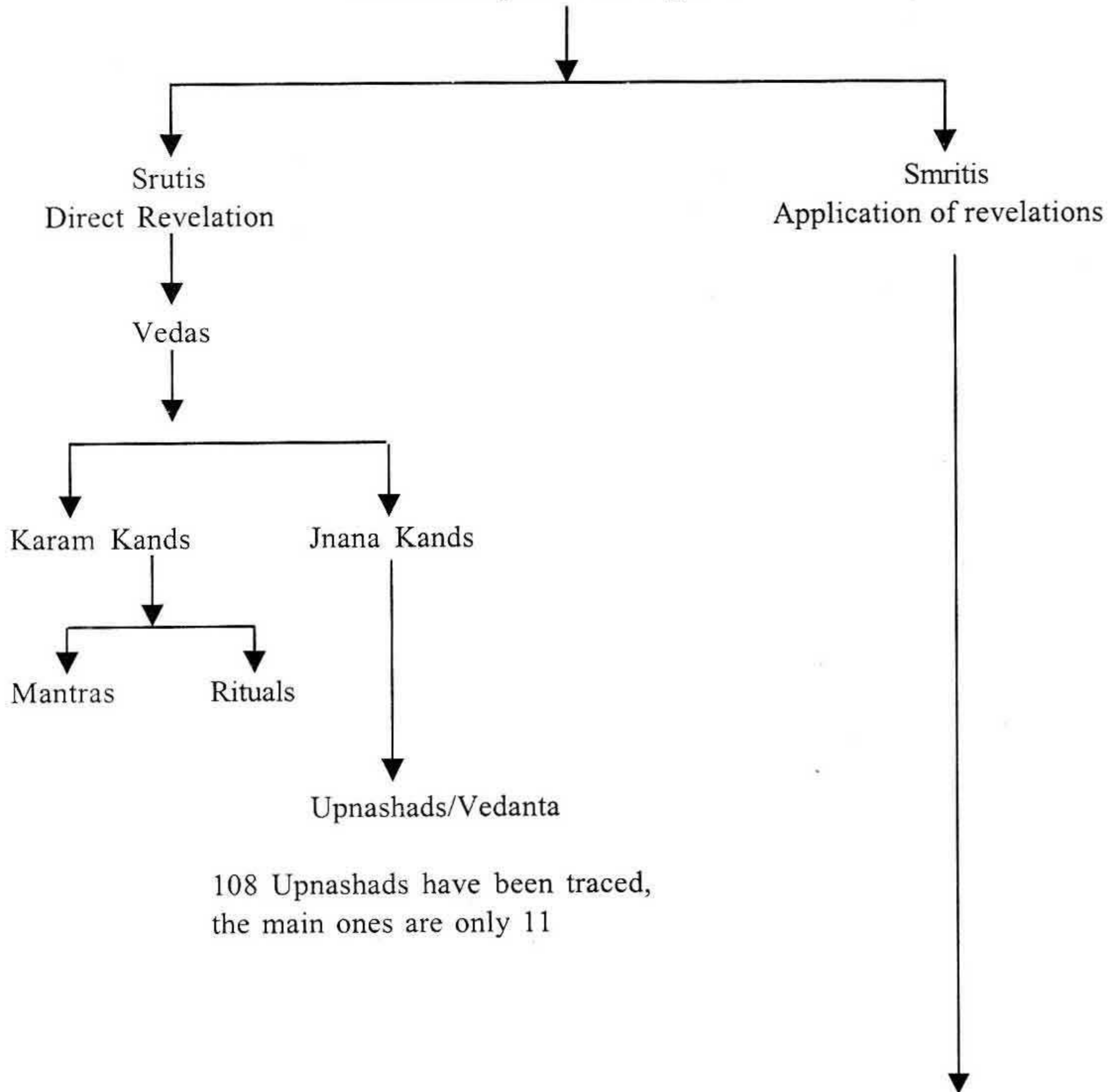
¹ Please also refer to Module 12

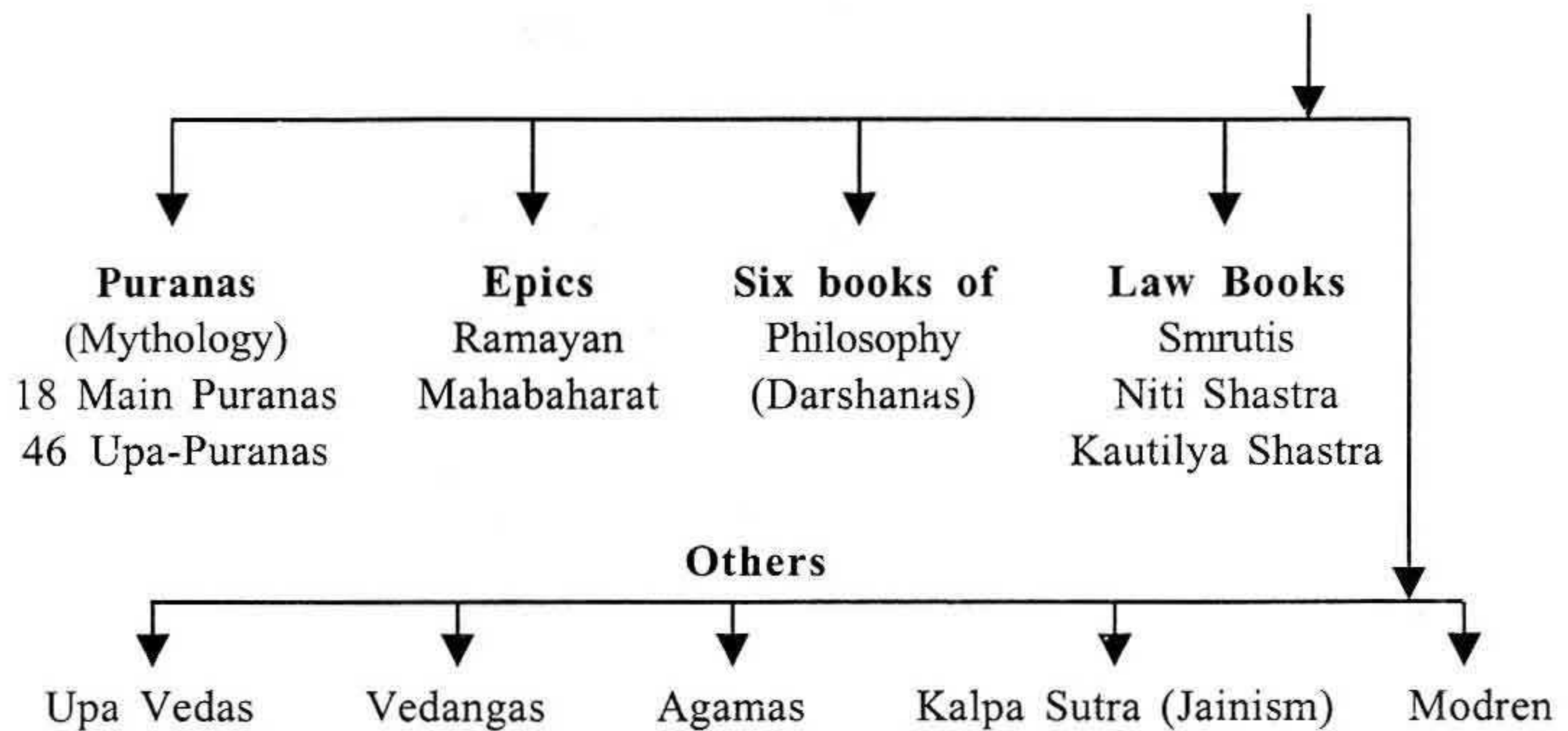
- Morality, including non-violence, truthfulness, friendship, compassion, fortitude, self-control, purity and generosity.
- Four stages of life: Human life is divided into four stages: Brahmchari (celibacy – from childhood to adolescence), Grishti (married life), Sanaysi (detachment from sexual and material life) and Vanprast (detachment from all relations, and finding a place in a forest or a cave). There are defined rites and rituals for each stage from birth until death.

Module 2

THE HINDU SCRIPTURES

Hindu Scriptures at a glance:





The Hindu religious literature, the most ancient writings in the world, is of two types:

- Primary scriptures (*Sruti*): They are of divine origin, whose truths were directly revealed to ancient *rishis* (sages) in their deep meditations. Sruti scriptures include the four Vedas *Rig, Yajur, Sāma and Atharva* Ved and constitute the highest religious authority in Hindu religion.
- Secondary scriptures (*Smriti*): The Smriti scriptures are of human origin and were written to explain the Sruti writings and make them understandable and meaningful to the general population. The Smriti scriptures include five distinct groups of writings :
 1. Itihasas (History or Epics – Ramayan and Mahabharat)
 2. Puranas (Mythology)
 3. Dharma Shastras (Law Codes)
 4. Agamas & Tantras (Sectarian Scriptures).
 5. Darshanas (Manuals of Philosophy)

2.1 Vedas

The Vedas are the ancient scriptures or revelation of the Hindus. They manifest the Divine Word in human speech. There are four Vedas, each consisting of four parts:

1. The mantra or hymn section (*samhita*).
2. The ritualistic teachings (*brahmana*)
3. The theological sections (*aranyaka*).
4. The philosophical sections (*upnashads*).

The hymn sections are the oldest. The others were added at a later date and each explains some aspect of the hymns or follows one line of interpreting them.

The Vedas were first written in heavens by god Brahma, and compiled on earth by the Aryans and finally codified and arranged by Rishi Vyas around 2500 BC.

The Books are written in Vedic Sanskrit, which is different from the modern Sanskrit and the form of the text is in poetry.

Classification of Vedas

Rig Veda

The Rig Veda is the oldest of the Vedas. All other Vedas are based upon it, and consist to a large degree of various hymns from it. It contains a thousand hymns, each hymn averaging around ten verses. The subject matter of the hymns is the praise of the Almighty.

It is the oldest book in Sanskrit. Modern western scholars tend to date it around 1500 B.C. This book was revealed to Agni Rishi

It is a book of doctrines. It contains the oldest form of all the Sanskrit mantras. It is built around a science of sound which comprehends the meaning and power of each letter. Most aspects of Vedic science like the practise of yoga, meditation, and medicine can be found in the Rig Veda.

Sam Veda

The Sama Veda represents the force of spiritual knowledge and the power of devotion. This book was revealed to Vayu Rishi

It consists hymns of the Rig Veda put to musical measure. Hence the text of the Sama Veda is an alternative version of the Rig Veda. Its secret is in its musical annotation and rendering.

If Rig Veda is the word, the Sama Veda is the song or the meaning; and
If Rig Veda is the knowledge, the Sama Veda is its realization.

Yajur Veda

The Yajur Veda is the Veda of rituals. On an inner level it sets forth a yogic practice for purifying the mind and awakening the inner consciousness. This book was revealed to Aditaya Rishi.

Its deities are the same as the Rig Veda. The purpose of the rituals is to put together and recreate within ourselves the Cosmic Man. The rituals are to recreate the universe within our own psyche and thereby unite the individual with the Universal. Its series of sacrifices culminate in the Atma-yajna or the self-sacrifice wherein the ego is offered up to the Divine. While the lesser sacrifices win the lesser worlds, the Self-sacrifice wins all the worlds and gains the greatest gift of immortality.

Athar Veda

The Atharva Veda is the last of the Vedas. It has not always been accepted as

a Veda. It contains many hymns from the Rig Veda but also has some popular magic spells which are outside of the strictly ritual-knowledge orientation of the other Vedas.

It is a collection of hymns but of diverse character, some very exalted, like the Rig Veda, others of more common nature. It gives us a better idea of the life of common people in Vedic times. This book was revealed to Angira Rishi.

The deities of the Atharva Veda are also the same as the Rig Veda although Rudra-Shiva assumes a more visible role. The language is a little simpler and less variable in its forms

2.2 Upnashads and Vedanta

These are Sanskrit scriptures which contain commentaries on Vedas. The word Upnashad is made of three syllables: Upa means near, Ni means down, and Sad means to sit. This means to find knowledge by sitting near the feet of the teacher. These scriptures record the conversations between students and their teachers.

There are eleven major Upnashads: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Aitareya, Taattiriya, Mundka, Mandukya, Brihadaranyaka, Chhandogya , Shevtashvatara.

Upnashads are also called Vedanta, the conclusion of Vedas. The text of Upnashads can be summarized as follows:

- The reality of Brahman and its identity with the individual soul
- The falsity of the world
- The attainment of immortality through the realization of Brahman.

The Upnashads were composed by sages and Rishis in the seventh century BC.

2.3 Puranas

Puranas are stories which convey the truths of Vedas and Dharam Shastras to children, simple villagers and the illiterate masses. These formed the basis of the religious education of the ordinary people.

These books have been conveyed to successive generations by word of mouth, and deal with questions of ethics, morality, belief and purity etc. A sample of texts of a few popular stories are:

- Power of chastity (Story of Savitri)
- Power of purity (Savitry)
- Power of goodness (story of Sukanya)
- Power of meditation (story of Dhruv)
- Power of belief (story of Prehlad)
- Power of faithfulness (story of Ahilya)
- Power of simran (Story of Ganika)
- Power of service to parents (Story of Shravan)
- Power of adhering to Truth (Story of Raja Harischandra)

- Power of simplicity (Story of Sudama)
- Power of incarnation (stories of 10 avatars of Vishnu) and many more

There are eighteen main Puranas and many minor Puranas. The main Puranas comprise six Puranas for each of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv.

The classification and name of Puranas are as follows:

Puranas: Brahma

Brahma, Brahmanda, Brahma-Vaivasvata, Markandeya, Bhavishya and Vamana

Puranas: Vishnu

Vishnu, Narad, Shrimad Bhagvata, Garuda, Padma and Varaha

Puranas: Shiv

Shiv, Matsya, Kurma, Linga, Skanda and Agni

A Further Look:

1. BRAHMA PURANA

Contains two parts- Purva Bhaag and Uttar Bhaag. Purva Bhaag contains tales of creation, description of Rama and Krishna. Uttar Bhaag contains a detailed description of Purshottam Tirtha, prominent among all the holy places.

2. PADMA PURANA

Contains five parts. In the first part, sage Pulastya explains the essence of religion to Bheeshma. The second part contains a description of the earth. Third part contains tales of creation as well as geographical description of Bharat (India). Fourth part describes the life of Rama. In the fifth part, essential knowledge of religion has been discussed in a dialogue style between Shiva and Parvati.

3. VISHNU PURANA

It also contains five parts. First part narrates the creation of the universe, Pralay and churning of the sea. Second part contains geographical description of earth divided into seven islands. Third part describes about the origin of Buddhism. Fourth part contains a description about the populating of the earth from the beginning. Fifth part is entirely devoted to the life and plays of Krishna.

4. SKANDA PURANA

It is the largest Purana. It is mainly devoted to Kartikeya (Skanda), the son of

Shiv and Parvati. Besides, it contains a lot of tales related to Shiv and many holy places of pilgrimage devoted prominently to Shiv.

5. SHIV MAHAPURANA

It is also a huge compilation of tales devoted primarily to the life and plays of Shiv. It is divided into seven Samhitas, which together contain more than twenty-four thousand stanzas.

6. VAMANA PURANA

This Purana is entirely devoted to Vaman avtaar (incarnation) of Vishnu narrated in a dialogue style between the sage Pulastya and Narad.

7. MAARKANDEYA PURANA

Markandeya Purana begins with a question put forth by sage Jaimini. In reply to this question, sage Markandeya narrates what constitutes the subject matter of this Purana.

8. VARAHA PURANA

It contains the tale of rescue of the earth by 'Varaha' avtaar (Boar incarnation) of Vishnu.

9. BRAHMA VAIVAT PURANA

This Purana contains four parts. First part contains the tale of creation. Second part contains tales related to goddesses. Third part contains tales related to Ganesh. In the fourth part, tales related to the life and plays of Krishna have been given.

10. AGNI PURANA

This Purana is devoted to Agni. It is presented in preaching style by Agni to sage Vashishta. It contains the description of various incarnations of God, Lord Rama and Krishna as well as of the earth and stars.

11. BHAVISHYA PURANA

This Purana contains five Parvas (parts). The first part contains description of creation. Second, third and fourth parts contain detailed description of Shiv, Vishnu and Surya respectively. In the fifth part, description of heaven has been given.

12. KURMA PURANA

God Himself has narrated this Purana in Kurma (tortoise) incarnation to Narad. Narad narrated it to Sutaji who in his term narrated it to an assembly of great sages.

13. MATSYA PURANA

Tales of Fish incarnation and books of Manu and seeds of all life during Pralay by Matsya avtaar is the main theme of this Purana.

14. GARUDA PURANA

In Garuda Purana, Vishnu preaches his vehicle, Garuda about the religion and life. Besides, trivial tales related to religion and moral, this Purana also contains description of diamond like jewels and the ways to identify best kind of jewels.

15. BRAHMAAND PURANA

Presently it is available in different pieces and no connection seems to exist between them. Once, it had contained Aadhyatma Ramayana.

16. SHRIMAD BHAGWAT PURANA

Because of its beautiful presentation style, Shrimad Bhagwat Purana has a high rank in Sanskrit literature. It contains tales related to various incarnations of Vishnu and mainly deals with the life and plays of Krishna.

17. LINGA PURANA

Preaching about the glory of Shiva and Linga Puja is the main objective of this Purana. In two parts, this Purana contains tales related to the creation of the universe, origin of Linga, and of all the Vedas, Brahma, Vishnu etc. from this Linga.

18. NARAD PURANA

It is a Vaishnav Purana presented in a style of dialogue between Narad and Sanat kumar. This Purana contains detailed description of major places of pilgrimage.

THE EPICS – ITHIAS

The two important scriptures classified under this heading are Ramayan and Mahabharat.

2.4 Ramayan

Ramayana is the most popular and timeless Indian epic. The term “*Ramayana*”, literally means “the march (*ayana*) of Rama” in search of human values.

This story of Rama by the great sage Valmiki is referred to as the “*Adi Kavya*” (Original Epic). About the Valmiki *Ramayana*, Swami Vivekananda has said: “No language can be purer, none chaster, none more beautiful, and at the same time simpler, than the language in which the great poet has depicted the life of Rama.”

The Structure of the Book : Seven “Kandas” (Sections).

The epic poem is composed in slokas (couplets), in Sanskrit, employing a complex meter called “anustup”. These verses are grouped into individual chapters or cantos

called “sargas”, wherein a specific event or intent is told. The “sargas” are again grouped into books called “kandas” or sections.

The seven “kandas” of *Ramayana* are:

1. “*Bal Kanda*”, the boyhood section;
2. “*Ayodhya Kanda*”, Rama’s life in Ayodhya, until his banishment;
3. “*Aranya Kanda*”, Rama’s life in the forest and Sita’s abduction by Ravana;
4. “*Kishkindha Kanda*”, Rama’s stay at Kishkindha, the capital of his monkey ally, Sugriva;
5. “*Sundara Kanda*”, Rama’s passage to Sri Lanka;
6. “*Yuddha Kanda*” or “*Lanka Kanda*”, Rama’s battle with Ravana, the recovery of Sita, and return to Ayodhya; and
7. “*Uttara Kanda*”, the section narrating Rama’s life in Ayodhya as king, the birth of his two sons, Sita’s test of innocence and return to her mother, and Rama’s demise or “jala samadhi”.

Time of Composition

It is believed that *Ramayana* was written between the 4th and the 2nd centuries BC with augmentations up to about 300 A.D. Linguistically and philosophically, a period just after the Vedic age, would most suit the content of the epic.

2.5 Mahabharat

The **Mahabharat** sometimes just called Bharata, is the great religious, philosophical and mythological epic of India. It is a keystone text of Hinduism. It is the second longest literary work in the world (after the Tibetan tale of Gesar). The title may be translated as “Great India” (Bharata means the son/progeny of Bharata, the king believed to have founded the kingdom of Bharatavarsha, in present day India; “Bharat” has equal status as the official name of India in all Indian governments today, and is still commonly used). The work is part of the Hindu itihās (history), literally ‘that which happened,’ along with the Puranas and *Ramayana*. The full version contains more than 100,000 verses, making it around four times longer than the Bible and seven times longer than the Iliad and Odyssey.

It is a great Sanskrit Epic which tells the story of two ancient Indian dynasties – The Pandavs and the Kauravas and also of Lord Krishna.

The Bhagavad Gita is located in the *Bhisma-Parva* chapters 23-40 of the Mahabharat. A core sacred text of Hindu religion and philosophy, the Bhagavad Gita, often referred to as the Gita, is a summation of Hindu thought, of the Vedic , Yogic , Vedantic and Tantric philosophies.

The Text of Mahabharat

The main characters of Mahabharat can be grouped as follows:

1. The Family of Pandavs – the important names are:

Kunti (Mother, and) sons-

Yudhishter (Dharma, father Dharamraj), Bhim (father god Vaayu), Arjuna (father god Indra);

Karan (father god Sun) born to Kunti before her marriage to Pandav

Madri (Mother) , sons - Nakula and Sahadev twins (father god Ashvini)

Draupadi (wife of five Pandav brothers). In fact Arjuna had won Draupadi in a Swayamvara. Upon the Pandav brothers return to home, they told their mother that they have brought a wonderful gift (Draupadi) for her. Kunti without understanding the implication advised them to share the gift equally amongst them. Thus Draupadi became a common wife of all brothers.

2. The Family of Kauravs – Father, Dhritrashta (he was blind), and mother, Gandhari (throughout her married life she blind folded her eyes). They had 100 sons. The important names are: Duryodhan, the eldest son and Dushasan, the second in line. Another important name in this clan is maternal uncle ‘Shakuhni’ (he was the master mind behind all evil plays and war of enmity between the cousins).
3. Duryodhan, Dushasan, Sahkuni and Karan were known as the wicked quartet. Karan became friendly with Kauravs for Duryodhan gave him title of King of Anga Kingdom, to elevate his status, to make him qualify to fight with Arjan.
4. The Teachers of Pandavs and Kauravs:
 - i. Kirpacharya – the spiritual mentor of the clans (Kul-guru)
 - ii. Dronacharya – the guru who taught them the art of archery and warfare.
 - iii. Bisham Pitama – the great warrior and a much respected elder.
5. Lord Krishna and his brother Balram. They were sons of King Vasudev and Devki and were brought up in Gokul by Nanda and Yashoda. Kunti the mother of Pandavs was sister of Vasudev

The Great Battle:

The background scenario:

1. Dhritrashta’s blindness and his weakness towards his sons, the evil designs of uncle Shakuni, Karna’s hostility with Pandavs and increasing popularity and prosperity of Pandavs made Kaurav brothers over jealous, and wicked. They planned to usurp the whole kingdom and send Pandavs to exile.
2. Duryodhan’s visit to Pandavs grand court hall called ‘Mayasabha’ (hall of illusion); his failure to distinguish between real and mirage and Draupadi’s sarcastic remarks that the son of a blind would himself be a blind, made him a staunch enemy of Pandavs.
3. Duryodhan challenged Pandavs to a game of dice. They cheated and Yudhishthira lost game after game staking his wealth, kingdom, his brothers, their wife Draupadi and himself.

4. Duryodhan then tried to humiliate Draupadi in the open court by asking Dushasan to drag her by her hair to the court and to undress her in front of all present. This proved to be unsuccessful as Lord Krishna came to her rescue by releasing unending drapery which kept her body covered.
5. Duryodhan then defeated Pandavs yet in a second game of dice and Pandavs and Draupadhi were ordered to live in exile for twelve years, after which they had to live ingnito for another year, untraced by Kauravs, otherwise the term of exile would have to be repeated.
6. During the above period the kingdom was to be ruled by Duryodhan.
7. The Pandavs made a virtue of their misfortune, practising meditation and austerities, securing invincible divine weapons.
8. When Pandavs returned from exile, Kauravs refused to return their kingdom 'Indraraprastha' to them.
9. Pandavs then decided to go on war to establish their claim to their kingdom.

Lord Krishna and the Great battle

1. Both Pandavs and Kauravs then listed armies of various kingdoms on their sides.
2. Both of them then went to Krishna for his help in the battle. Krishna told them that they have a choice either to take his army or only Himself. He further said that he would not wield any weapon in the battle.
3. Arjuna chose Krishna whereas Duryodhan chose his army.

The Teachers and the Great battle

1. All teachers were to side with the Kauravs according to the war rules then prevailed.
2. Both Kirpacharya and Daronacharaya then sided with the Kauravs

The Preparation of the Great battle

1. Sage Vyasa conferred the gift of divine vision on Sanjay, a counselor of Dhirisrastra to describe the incidents of war to the blind king.
2. The battle was fought in the planes of Kurukshetra, a town of erstwhile Punjab.
3. Before the start of the battle, the Pandav brothers walked towards the Kaurav army, bowed down to their teachers and asked for their blessings.

The Statistics of the Great Battle

1. The battle took place in and around 2500 BC.
2. Approximately four million soldiers were killed in this battle.
3. All sons of Dhiritrashtra were killed.

4. All guru teachers were killed.
5. Pandavs won the battle and reigned for 36 years.
6. The army on the two sides comprised 11 battalions for the Kauravs and 7 battalions for the Pandavs. A battalion consisted of the following:
 - i. 109,350 infantry – foot soldiers
 - ii. 65,610 infantry -horse soldiers
 - iii. 21,870 infantry – elephant soldiers
 - iv. 21,870 infantry – chariots

After the Great Battle

1. After a rule of 36 years all Padavs and Draupadi left for Himalayan en-route to heavens
2. On the way four younger brothers and Draupadi died, only Yudhishtira survived.
3. When he reached at the gate of heaven, he was stopped as he had his dog with him.
4. He was asked to leave his dog outside if he wanted to enter heaven.
5. Yudhishtira replied that if his faithful dog was refused entry he too would not go in.
6. At the end both were allowed to enter heavens.

2.6 Shrimad Bhagvad Gita

Shrimad literally means ‘beautiful, glorious’. Bhagavad means ‘divine one’ and Gita is ‘song’. Shrimad Bhagavad Gita therefore means ‘beautiful song of the Divine one’.

Popularly known as Gita, it is believed to be part of the smritis. The poem consists of 18 chapters divided into three sections of six chapters each, and contains about 700 verses. It is believed to have been composed around 300 AD by an unknown Brahmin. However, its authorship, or its revision, is sometimes ascribed to Shankaracharya. Although now considered part of the Mahabharata, it was composed later, and therefore added to the epic later.

The poem is in the form of a dialogue between two major characters in the Mahabharata: Arjuna and Krishna. Just before the Great battle at Kurukshetra, Arjuna asked Krishna, his charioteer, to take his chariot forward to enable him to size up the opposition. When he looked at them, he saw that their army consisted of his cousins, uncles, guru-teachers, elders and others whom he revered. Arjuna was suddenly struck with remorse at the thought of attempting to gain the kingdom by killing his kinsmen. He told Krishna that he could not fight them. Krishna replied that a warrior’s duty was to fight and not question the wisdom of war. Everyone born was destined to die, but it was God or destiny that destroyed. The slayer was only an instrument

in the hands of God or destiny. Krishna's advice and guidance to Arjuna constitute the text of the Gita.

The first section deals with Karma Yoga or the philosophy of action. Nishkama karma, or an action performed without thought for any compensation and without fear of the consequences, is the central teaching of this section. It explains that one must perform one's karma, which is decided at birth depending on which caste (see Varna) one is born into. A Brahmin's duty is upholding righteousness, a Kshatriya's is protection, a Vaishya's, agriculture and trade, and a Shudra's, service.

The second section considers Gyana Yoga or the philosophy of knowledge. It teaches that although good work is important, most of one's time should be devoted to attaining knowledge of the Supreme. It says that knowledge dispels delusion, destroys sin, and purifies the one who attains it.

The third section, Bhakti Yoga, explains the philosophy of devotion. This portion of Gita teaches that every form of worship, even if apparently crude is a stepping stone towards a higher form and therefore should be respected. Different forms of worship are compared to different roads that lead to the same destination.

The philosophy behind the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, therefore, is: not mere knowledge, nor mere action, but action with perfect knowledge, without any desire for its fruit and consecrated to God.

The Gita has been translated into almost all the languages in the world, and is the second most-widely translated book after the Bible. This work is revered by all and while testifying in a court of law, it is on the Gita that a Hindu must place his or her right hand and swear to tell the truth.

The Stage:

There are four artistes in the spiritual play of Gita, the Kaurav king Dhritarashtra (the listener), Sanjay (the narrator) , Arjuna and Lord Krishna (the conversationalists)

The Composition and the Text:

The composition can be broadly divided into three sections and 18 chapters containing 701 verses. Each section is divided into six chapters. The text of the chapters is as follows:

- First six chapters (section 1) – the path of action
- Next six chapters (section 2) – the path of devotion, and
- Last six chapter (section 3) – the path of wisdom.

The Recapitulation of Chapters:

Chapter 1: The Dejection of Arjuna

Hymns 1-11 Description of the principal warriors on both sides with their fighting abilities

Hymns 12-19 The blowing of conchs by the warriors

- Hymns 20-27 Arjuna observes the warriors drawn up for battle
 Hymns 28-47 Overwhelmed by emotions, Arjuna gives expression of his grief, disappointment and reluctance to fight.

Theme

As the two opposing armies stand for the greatest war on earth, Arjuna looks, with tears, at his relatives, guru-teachers and friends in both armies. Clouded by grief, Arjuna feels dejected and gives up his determination to fight.

Chapter 2: Sankhyayoga [The Path of knowledge]

- Hymns 1-10 Arjuna and Lord Krishna discussing Arjuna's dejection.
 Hymns 11-30 The Yoga of knowledge described
 Hymns 31-38 The Ksatriya's duty to engage himself in fight
 Hymns 39-53 Karmyoga (the yoga of selfless action) described
 Hymns 54-72 Characteristics of the man of stable mind and his glories described

Theme:

Addressing Arjuna Krishna explains the main difference between the temporary material body and the eternal spiritual soul. He explains the nature of selfless service, the process of transmigration, and qualities of a self-realised man.

Chapter 3: Karmyoga [The Path of selfless action]

- Hymns 1-8 The importance of the performance of duty
 Hymns 9-16 The necessity of performing sacrifices
 Hymns 17-24 The necessity for the action
 Hymns 25-43 Methods to overcome desires

Theme

Everyone has to perform karmas at every step of life in this world; and Karmas performed within the defined laws of God and without selfish motives lead to liberation from the laws of transmigration.

Chapter 4: The Path of Wisdom

- Hymns 1-18 The glory of God with attributes: Karmyoga
 Hymns 19-23 The conduct of Yogis and Sages, its glory described
 Hymns 24-32 Different form of sacrifices described with their fruits.
 Hymns 33-42 The glory of knowledge described

Theme

The spiritual knowledge of the soul, of God and their relationship, is both purifying and liberating. Such knowledge is the fruit of selfless devotional action (Karma-yoga).

Chapter 5: The Path of the Renunciation of Karma

- Hymns 1-6 Sankhyayoga and the Yoga of disinterested action described
- Hymns 7-12 Characteristics and glories of Niskama Karmayogi
- Hymns 13-26 Jnanayoga, the path of knowledge
- Hymns 27-29 Dhyanyoga – meditation and devotion

Theme

One who performs actions, inwardly renouncing their fruits, attains peace, spiritual vision and bliss. One should perform Karma without any desire of results.

Chapter 6: The Path of Self Control

- Hymns 1-4 Karmayoga, characteristics of one who attains Yoga
- Hymns 5-10 Characteristics of God-realised soul
- Hymns 11-32 Description of Dhyanyoga
- Hymns 33-36 The question of mind control
- Hymns 37-47 The fate of one who falls from Self Control

Theme

The practise of Smadhi, full consciousness of the Divine, is a meditative practice which can control the mind and senses and helps in focusing concentration on the Pramatma.

Chapter 7: The Path of Jnana [Knowledge of Nirgun and Manifest Divinity]

- Hymns 1-7 Knowledge of Manifest Divinity
- Hymns 8-12 Presence of God in all objects
- Hymns 13-19 Condemnation of men of demonical (possessed by devil) nature and praise of devotees. The three Gunas: Rajas (Passion), Sattav (Purity) and Tamas (Darkness)
- Hymns 20-23 Motive of Worship
- Hymns 24-30 Condemnation of men who are ignorant of the greatness of God, and praise of those who know Him.

Theme

Krishna is the supreme Truth, the preserving and sustaining force of everything, both material and spiritual. The wise souls surrender to him and impure souls divert their minds to other objects of worship.

Chapter 8: The Yoga of the indestructible Brahma

- Hymns 1-7 Answers to Arjuna's questions – Who is Brahman?, What is self?, What are fruitive activities?, What is material manifestation? What are demigods?
- Hymns 8-22 The subject of Bhakti Yoga.

Hymns 23-28 The bright and dark paths of life.

Theme

One should remember Krishna in devotion throughout one's life. Remembering him at the time of death, one can attain supreme abode, beyond the material world.

Chapter 9: The Confidential Knowledge

Hymns 1-6 The subject of Jnana.

Hymns 7-10 The origin of the world.

Hymns 11-15 Condemnation of men of the evil nature; methods of meditation.

Hymns 16-19 Description of God.

Hymns 20-25 The fruits of worship.

Hymns 26-28 The glory of true devotion.

Theme

Krishna is the supreme Godhead and the supreme object of worship. The soul is eternally related to Him through transcendental devotion (Bhakti).

Chapter 10: The Opulence of the Divine

Hymns 1-7 Description of God's glories

Hymns 8-11 Bhaktiyoga

Hymns 12-18 Arjuna's praises of God

Hymns 19-42 The Lord describes glories and power of yoga

Theme

All wonders, suspense, power, beauty, grandeur and sublimity, either in the material world or in the spiritual realm are all manifestation of Krishna's divine energies and opulence.

Chapter 11: The Universal Form

Hymns 1-4 Arjuna prays to the Lord for a vision of His universal form.

Hymns 5-8 Krishna describes his universal form.

Hymns 9-14 The universal form described by Sanjay to Dhrisrastra.

Hymns 15-31 Arjuna see Krishna's universal form and offers praises to him.

Hymns 32-34 Krishna describes his glory and asks Arjuna to fight.

Hymns 35-46 Arjuna is overtaken by fright and prays for a sight of Krishna's four-armed form.

Hymns 47-50 Krishna reveals his four-armed form to Arjuna.

Hymns 51-55 The necessity of devotion to have a vision of Krishna.

Theme

Lord Krishna reveals Arjuna the divine vision of his spectacular unlimited form and explains that his humanlike form is the original form of Godhead. One can perceive this form only by pure devotional service.

Chapter 12: The Devotional Service

Hymns 1-12 The true worship and means of God realization.

Hymns 13-20 Characteristics of God-realised soul.

Theme

Bhakti Yoga, the pure devotional service, is the highest and straight means for attaining pure love for Krishna. Those who follow this supreme path develop divine qualities.

Chapter 13: The Spirit and Matter

Hymns 1-18 The Field and the knower of the field.

Hymns 19-34 The Matter and the Spirit.

Theme

One who understands the difference between the body, the soul and the Divine attains mukti.

Chapter 14: The Three Gunas

Hymns 1-4 The evolution of the world from Matter and Spirit

Hymns 5-18 The Gunas: Rajas, Sattav and Tamas

Hymns 19-27 The characteristics of the soul who has transcended the three Gunas

Theme

All souls are under the control of three Gunas: Goodness and purity (sattav), passion and ambition (Rajas) and ignorance and darkness (Tamas)

Chapter 15: The Supreme Person

Hymns 1-6 The universe is like a tree; various means of God realization.

Hymns 7-11 The Jivatma, the individual soul

Hymns 12-15 God and His glories

Hymns 16-20 The perishable living bodies, the imperishable soul and the Supreme Person

Theme

The ultimate purpose of knowledge is to detach oneself from the entanglement of the material world and to understand the Supreme personality of the Divine. One who understands this reality, the Supreme merges into him.

Chapter 16: The Divine and the Demonical properties

Hymns 1-5 The demonical qualities

Hymns 6-20 The characteristics of man possessed of demonical qualities

Hymns 21-24 Instructions to renounce wicked qualities

Theme

Those who possess demoniac qualities, and fail to follow the instructions of the scriptures, attain inferior birth and are inflicted with further bondage.

Chapter 17: The Division of Faith

Hymns 1-6 Faith, fate, and penances

Hymns 7-22 Food, sacrifices, penances and charities

Hymns 23-28 The meaning of 'OmTatSat'

Theme

There are three types of faith, evolving from three modes of Gunas. The acts performed by those whose faith is in passion and ignorance yield only impermanent and material results; whereas acts performed in purity and goodness in sanction with scriptures, purify heart and lead to pure faith.

Chapter 18: The Perfection of Renunciation

Hymns 1-12 The relinquishment.

Hymns 13-18 Causes of Karma.

Hymns 19-40 Classification of knowledge, actions, doers, reasons, three gunas.

Hymns 41-48 Castes and duties attached to them

Hymns 49-55 The path of knowledge

Hymns 56-66 The path of Karmyoga

Hymns 67-78 The glory of Gita

Theme

Krishna explains the meaning of renunciation and the effects of the Gunas on human consciousness and activity. The highest path of religion is absolute and unconditional surrender to God which frees one from all sins, and brings him/her to complete enlightenment, and enables one to return to Krishna's eternal abode.

The Summary of the Fundamental Issues

1. The soul is immortal. It is beyond six-fold changes: birth, growth, modification, death, decay and disintegration.
2. Do not repent about the past, do not worry about the future, make the present full of worthiness.
3. God has created everyone to be a trustee of His gifts. The greed to own more always results in sorrow.

4. Everyone must perform his duties which are assigned to them. The performance of duties is the true religion.
5. Everyone must do karmas without any desire of its fruits.
6. Leave all results and rewards to the Almighty.
7. Death is the start of another life. Remove selfishness and pride from the mind and then everything will look bright and beautiful.
8. The body is made of five elements: fire, water, air, earth and space. It perishes when soul leaves it. Only soul is imperishable.
9. The real refuge is in the feet of God. Those who trust in God have no fear, no worry and no grief.
10. The real salvation lies in offering all actions to God.

2.7 Hindu Philosophy: The Six Vedic Schools of Thought

Samkhya by Kapil rishi

Subject matter: Knowledge of equilibrium

Based on Atharveda

Samkhya is widely regarded to be the oldest of the orthodox philosophical systems in Hinduism. Its philosophy regards the universe as consisting of two eternal realities: purusha and prakrti. The purushas (souls) are many, conscious and devoid of all qualities. They are the silent spectators of prakrti (matter or nature), which is composed of three gunas (dispositions): satva, rajas and tamas (steadiness, activity and dullness respectively). When the equilibrium of the gunas is disturbed, the world order evolves. This disturbance is due to the proximity of Purusha and prakrti.

Nyaya by Gautum Rishi

Subject matter: The Almighty God, Logic

Based on Rig Veda

The Nyaya school of philosophical speculation is based on a text called the Nyaya Sutra. It was written by Gautama. According to this book God is the Cause of all causes. Another most important contribution made by this school is its methodology. This is based on a system of logic that has subsequently been adopted by most of the other Indian schools. According to the Nyaya school, there are exactly four sources of knowledge (pramanas): perception, inference, comparison and testimony. Knowledge obtained through each of these can of course still be either valid or invalid, and the Nyaya author again went to great pains to identify, in each case, what it took to make knowledge valid, in the process coming up with a number of explanatory schemes.

Vaisheshika by Kanada Rishi

Subject matter: Metaphysical theories

Based on Athar Veda

The Vaisheshika system, which was founded by the sage Kanada, postulates an atomic pluralism. In terms of this school of thought, all objects in the physical universe are reducible to a certain number of atoms.

Although the Vaishesika system developed independently from the Nyaya, the two eventually merged because of their closely related metaphysical theories.

Yoga by Patanjali Rishi

Subject matter: Raj Yoga

Based on Athar Veda

The Yoga system is generally considered to have arisen from the Samkhya philosophy. Its primary text is the Bhagavad Gita, which explores the four primary systems; the sage Patanjali wrote an extremely influential text on Raja Yoga (or meditational) entitled the Yoga Sutra. The most significant difference from Samkhya is that the Yoga school not only incorporates the concept of Ishvara (a personal God) into its metaphysical worldview, which the Samkhya does not, but also upholds Ishvara as the ideal upon which to meditate.

Mimamsa by Jaimini Rishi

Subject matter: Karmas (Actions)

Based on Yajur Veda

The main objective of the Purva (“earlier”) Mimamsa school was to establish the authority of the Vedas. The Mimamsa accepted the logical and philosophical teachings of the other schools, but felt that these paid insufficient attention to right action (*Karma*). According to the Mimamsa, the very striving for liberation stemmed from a selfish desire to be free. Only by acting in accordance with the prescriptions of the Vedas could one attain salvation (rather than liberation). At a later stage, however, the Mimamsa school changed its views in this regard and began to teach the doctrines of God and mukti (freedom). Its adherents then advocated the release or escape from the soul from its constraints through what was known as jnana (enlightened activity). All Hindu ritual, ceremony and religious law are influenced by it.

Vedanta by Vyas

Subject matter: God and the soul

Based on Sam Veda

Vedanta, concentrates on the philosophical teachings of the Upanishads rather

than on the ritualistic injunctions of the Brahmanas. The subject argues that the self (soul, atma) was identical to indescible Brahm (Parmatma).

While the traditional Vedic 'karma kanda' (ritualistic components of religion) continued to be practised, more jnaana (knowledge) centered understandings began to emerge, mystical streams of Vedic religion that focused on meditation, self-discipline and spiritual connectivity rather than more practical aspects of religion like rituals and rites. The more abstruse Vedanta (meaning literally the end of the Vedas) is the essence of the Vedas, encapsulated in the Upanishads which are commentaries on the four original books (Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva). Vedantic thought drew on Vedic cosmology, hymns and philosophy.

2.8 The Hindu Law Books (Smritis)

These books instruct humans as to how they should conduct themselves at different periods of life (ashrams) and what duties are enjoined on them due to their birth in a particular caste or varna.

The word Smritis means that which is remembered and passed on from generation to generation.

There are 18 Smritis. They explain and develop Dharma and lay down laws which regulate Hindu national, social, family and individual obligations.

The important lawgivers include Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parashara. The others are Daksha, Samvarta, Vyasa, Harita, Satatapa, Vasishtha, Yam, Apastamba, Gautama, Devala, Sankha-Likhita, Usana, Atri and Saunaka.

The Smritis are named after them. We have Manu Smriti, Yajnavalkya Smriti, and Parasara Smriti etc. Manu is the greatest law-giver of the race. He is the oldest law-giver as well. The Yajnavalkya Smriti is next in importance to it. Manu Smriti and Yajnavalkya Smriti are universally accepted at the present time as authoritative works all over India.

It is believed that the laws of Manu are intended for the Satya Yuga; those of Yajnavalkya are for the Treta Yuga; those of Sankha and Likhita are for the Dvapara Yuga; and those of Parasara are for the Kali Yuga.

The laws for regulating Hindu society from time to time are codified in Smritis. The Smritis have laid down definite rules and laws to guide the individuals and communities in their daily conduct and to regulate their manners and customs. The Smritis have given detailed instructions, according to the conditions of the time, to all classes of men regarding their duties in life.

2.9 The Other Religious Books

Upvedas

Upvedas is the name given to four books of worldly knowledge. They are as follows:

- i. Ayurveda by Dhanvantari deals with the science of medicine.
- ii. Dhanurveda by Viswamitra deals with archery.
- iii. Gandharvaveda by Narad deals with art and music.
- iv. Arth Shastra by Kautilya deals with economics

Vedangas

These are explanatory limbs of the Vedas. Their names and texts are as follows:

- i. Siksha –It was written by Sage Panini. It is the science of phonetics and also deal with pronunciation and accent.
- ii. Vyakarana – It contains the grammar to understand the Vedas. Its author is also sage Panini.
- iii. Nirukta – It contains the science of the etymology of the words of Vedic mantras. It is the science of linguistics dealing with the formation and meaning of words.
- iv. Chandas Shastra – It teaches prosody, the art of versification and deals with the use of metres in prose and poetry.
- v. Kalpa Shastra – It deals with the science of rituals and ceremonies in religious rites.
- vi. Jyotisha – It is the science of astronomy and astrology

The text of these books is the knowledge of God. That is why they are often referred to as the *Jnana (knowledge)-kanda* of Vedas.

These books mainly refer to the following questions:

- i. Where and how does God exist?
- ii. How are man/woman and universe relate to Him?
- iii. How and why should one try to realise God?
- iv. What exactly happens when one realises Him?

A study of these book reveals that the books discuss some of the greatest truth ever known to humankind. They contain the theme of the philosophy of the Vedas and the profound spiritual truths contained in them which have blazed through the ages, guiding human beings in their search for spiritual enlightenment.

Module 3

THE HINDU CONCEPT OF GOD

Hinduism is commonly perceived as a polytheistic religion. The Hindu belief in God varies from person to person. While some Hindus believe in the existence of a trinity of God- Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv, and their further incarnations. Some believe in thousands of gods, and still others in thirty three crore i.e. 330 million gods. However, the Hindu scriptures clearly state that there is one God.

The major difference between the Hindu and the Sikh perception of God is the common Hindu belief in the philosophy of Pantheism. Pantheism considers everything, living and non-living, to be Divine and Sacred. The common Hindu, therefore, considers everything as God. He considers fire, water, trees, sun, as god and worship them. Amongst animals they worship cows, monkeys and snakes and revere even a few human beings as manifestations of God. They make images of these gods and worship them.

It is against this practice that the Sikh Guru warned their devotees. They said, "Worship only one formless God and no one else."

Sikhism exhorts man to consider himself and his surroundings as examples of Divine Creation rather than as Divine Himself. Sikhs therefore believe that though everything is created by God but everything is not God Himself.

The Hindu scriptures, contrary to prevalent practices, clearly state that there is only one God and that the entire universe is nothing other than an appearance of this Supreme Spirit.

Like Sikhism, Hindus do believe that God positively exists, He can be realized, He can be talked with, and He resides in heavens as well as amongst us. He is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. He cannot be described as He can manifest in any form.

Like all other religions, Hinduism states that God is merciful, benevolent, and giver of all the bounties. But unlike other religions it believes in Avtarhood, i.e. God's incarnation in the world. There is a long list of incarnations of Vishnu

In general, Hinduism considers God not just as the Supreme All-powerful One, who commands the humanity to tread the way He says, but also a personal God whom the individual can worship out of love and not necessarily out of fear. It is a general belief that people worship God either out of ignorance or fear or greed; whereas He must be worshiped with inner belief, faith and devotion.

According to true Hindu belief, God, as is, is beyond any attributes of form, colour or shapes, though majority of Hindus make numerous images to worship Him.

In the formless state, God is referred to as *Nirguna Brahman* (attributeless god). However God takes forms as perceived by humans and this perceived form is called *Saguna Brahman* [god with attributes]. These forms could range from a mere stone to a horrible looking animal, but each form has its own significance. **The forms provide a basis for the Hindu worshipper to easily pursue the otherwise incomprehensible Supreme.** For example from a dutiful Ram to a destruction clad Kali, from a all skill-symbol goddess Saraswati to a Power to kill Durga; from an eternal couple Radha and Krishna to devoted couple Ram and Sita; from an all powerful symbol Hanuman to a all destroyer Shiv and so on.

3.1 Concept of God according to Hindu Scriptures:

BHAGAVAD GITA

“Those whose intelligence has been overtaken by material desires surrender unto demigods and follow rules and regulations of worship according to their own convictions.”
[Bhagavad Gita 7:20]

The Gita states that people who are materialistic worship demigods i.e. ‘gods’ besides the True God.

UPANISHADS:

The following verses from the Upanishads refer to the Concept of God:

- i. “Ekam evadvitiam”
“He is One only without a second.”
[Chandogya Upanishad 6:2:1]
- ii. “Na casya kascij janita na cadhipah.”
“Of Him there are neither parents nor offsprings.”
[Svetasvatara Upanishad 6:9]
- iii. “Na tasya pratima asti”
“There is no likeness of Him.”
[Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:19]
- iv. “Na samdrse tisthati rupam asya, na caksusa pasyati kas canainam.”
“His form is not to be seen; no one sees Him (in one form only) with the eye. [Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:20]
- v. There is only one God, who resides deep inside all objects and beings. He is everywhere and the inner self of all [Svetasvatara Upnashad 6:11]

THE VEDAS

1. Yajurveda

The following verses from the Yajurveda echo a similar concept of God:

- i. “na tasya pratima asti
“There is no image of Him.”
[Yajurveda 32:3]
- ii. “shudhama poapvidham”
“He is without a specific body, and is symbol of purity.”
[Yajurveda 40:8]
- iii. “Andhatama pravishanti ye asambhuti mupaste”
“They enter darkness, those who worship the natural elements” (Air, Water, Fire, etc.) and not the Divine.”
- iv. “They sink deeper in darkness, those who worship sambhuti* .”
[Yajurveda 40:9]
*Sambhuti means created things, for example table, chair, idol, etc.
- v. The Yajurveda contains the following prayer:
“Lead us to the good path and remove the sin that makes us stray and wander in the wrong direction .”
[Yajurveda 40:16]

3.2 Popular Hindu Deities and other Objects of Worship

The most popular forms in which Hindus like to worship God are numerous incarnations of Vishnu. In the Hindu trinity: Brahma (creator), Vishnu (sustainer) and Shiv (destroyer), it is Vishnu who has incarnated as and when situation on earth had demanded. In the Dasam Granth, a Sikh holy scripture, there is a mention of 24 incarnations of Vishnu, though Hindus normally mention only Ten. The most significant incarnations are as follows:

1. Fish god
2. Tortoise god
3. Narsingh god
4. Dwarf god
5. Rama
6. Krishna
7. Kalanki

From the above the most revered Avatars are Rama and Krishna.

The important Hindu deities and their consorts, where relevant, are as follows:

1. Brahma (creator) – consort Saraswati (goddess of skills and arts)
2. Vinshnu (preserver) – consort Lakshmi (goddess of wealth)
3. Shiv (destroyer) – consort Parvati, (goddess of power; she is called by different names e.g., Durga, Kali, Usha, Uma, Kamakshi, Rajeshwari etc.). Kamakshi has four hands. The important objects in her hands are as follows:
 - i. A noose – signifying worldly attachments from which we should free ourselves.
 - ii. A hook – signifying that we should walk on the path of righteousness.
 - iii. A sugarcane – symbol of sweetness of mind
 - iv. Arrows – signifies fight with five perceptions which we must conquer.

As Durga, she rides a tiger, has eight hands, in five of which she carries various weapons to annihilate injustice and persecution. The five weapons which she holds are as follows:

- v. A mace
- vi. A sword
- vii. A Chakara
- viii. A bow and arrows
- ix. A trishul

In addition to five weapons she carries a conch in the sixth hand, a peacock feather in the seventh hand, and eighth hand is used for blessing.

The skulls she wears tells us that we are mortals and her dark form is symbolic of uncertain future.

As Kali she tells that Time (Kal) is immutable and all powerful.

4. Rama (symbol of Duty and Devotion) – consort Sita (icon of duty to husband)
5. Krishna (symbol of perfection of known (sixteen) qualities) – consort Radha (beloved) , Rukmani (wife)
6. Hanuman (Army general of Rama) – a symbol of strength
7. Ganesh (son of Shiv and Parvati) – a symbol of good omen (Hindus start their new work, ceremonies etc. by praying to Him). He is the deity to be worshipped at the start of any work, as he is considered the removal of all obstacles and hardships.
 - i. His body represents Cosmos,
 - ii. His trunk the Pranavas or OM, the symbol of the Divine.
 - iii. His elephant head denotes superior intelligence,
 - iv. Snake around his waist represents cosmic energy,
 - v. Rosary beads signify pursuit to prayer
 - vi. Broken trunk is symbolic of knowledge as it is with this tusk that he is believed to have acted as the scribe of Mahabahrta as dictated by sage Vyas.

- vii. Noose to remind worldly attachments,
 - viii. Hook to remind the path of righteousness, and
 - ix. Modaka to remind us of the sweetness of one's innerself.
-
- 8. Shivling (a stone- symbol of male virility in the form of *lingas* and mother goddess, a symbol of fertility)– worshipped as the source of all creation.
 - 9. Sheshnag (a serpent)
 - 10. Tulsi, a holy plant
 - 11. Kartikeya – He is also a son of Shiv. He is the deity of war.

Module 4

PATHS TO REALISE THE DIVINE

To realise the Supreme bliss and to reach His kingdom, there are three main paths:

- Bhakti Yoga [through meditation]
- Karma Yoga [through noble actions]
- Jnana Yoga [through spiritual enlightenment]

Bhakti Yoga

In this path the devotee chooses a form of the Sargun Brahman in any one of His manifestations and realises Him through love and meditation. Intense faith and unfaltering belief in the personal deity (Isht Devta) is the main characteristic of this path.

Stages of meditation:

1. The form of personal deity is chosen by means of an image.
2. The image is installed at a sacred place and pooja is performed daily.
3. The image is kept facing eastwards, towards the rising sun.
4. Before Pooja, various objects of pooja are kept ready (please refer to page 40)
5. The worshipper adorns the centre of their foreheads with Kumkum (red powder) and also wear sandalwood paste or holy ashes (vibhuti). Married women usually wear a red mark in the centre of their set hair on the head.
6. The worshippers then light the diva or lamps before the images. This signifies the dispelling of ignorance and the illumination of the mind with divine knowledge.
7. Water is then sprinkled and sipped, suggesting purification of one's physical self.
8. The next step is the offering of flowers, which represents the soul of the devotee being offered to the Divine.
9. Fruit and food is then offered to the deity to thank Him for all the bounties.
10. Coconut, betel leaves and other offerings call upon God to bless the house with happiness and success.

11. Incense is waved, symbolising the fragrance of the love of God; and camphor is burnt, signifying the destruction of ego.
12. Hymns are chanted and Aarti is performed, symbolising the complete surrender to the will of God.
13. The ringing of bells signifies requests made to the Almighty.
14. Circumambulations is now performed circling the image three times to show the union of the devotee with God.
15. The number three is important in Hinduism. It represents:
 - i. Three worlds: Akash, Earth and Patal
 - ii. Trinity of Godhead: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv
 - iii. Three aims of Hindu thought: Satyam (Truth), Shivam (Auspiciousness) and Sundram (Beauty), and
 - iv. Three Gunas: Rajas, Sattav and Tamas
16. Fasting is also a part of Hindu worship. Hindus choose their own fasting days to please the Divine. Birth anniversaries of Krishna and Rama, eleventh day of the full and new moon, Maha Shivratri are some universal fasting days. Karva Chauth is also popular in the North.
17. Pooja ends with a prayer thanking God for the bounties and presenting Him with a new shopping list of demands.

Karma Yoga

The second path of God realisation is through Karma yoga or union with the Divine through action.

Karma are actions or service performed without aiming for its rewards. These are actions without attachment to the fruits of such actions.

The ideals of Karma Yoga are:

- Self discipline
- Self restraint
- Absolute absorption in the action
- Compassion and love
- Dedication
- Dignity of work
- Selfless service
- Nobility in actions
- Truthful living
- Complete submission

Jnana Yoga

The third path of God realisation is the path of knowledge. It is the achievement of self enlightenment through knowledge.

The main stages of this path are:

- The study of scriptures.
- Enrolment with a teacher-guru for his spiritual guidance.
- The application of indictments so studied from the scriptures and taught by the teacher-guru.

The three obstacles identified in this path of enlightenment are:

- Avidhaya – ignorance [incomplete knowledge]
- Maya – the repeated attack of Kam, krodh, lob, moh and ahankar
- Upadis – numerous sheaths which enclose the soul [knowledge has to penetrate into the mind passing through various coverings of body]

To realise God through Jnana path the individual soul has to discard three lower levels of the state of mind:

- The waking state
- The dreaming state
- The Deep sleep state

and reach the Turia (superconscious) state. This is reached through spiritual enlightenment. At this point Jnana Yogi becomes liberated (Jiwan Mukht).

Module 5

THE HINDU PRAYER

The focal point of a Hindu prayer is an idol, called *Isht Devta*. Though there is no reference to worship of idols in the Vedas. The Puranas and the Agamas [Scriptures which lay down doctrines for the worship of deities.] give descriptions of idol-worship both in the houses and in the temples.

The members of the pre-Aryan tribes had a mode of worship which resembled the current form of worship that Hindus practise today in the temples and in their homes. They make offerings of food and flowers, milk, oils and red ochre (kum-kum) to idols. There are also practices of offering of animals to goddess Kali.

Aryans on the other hand had no idols and worshipped nature. Agni (Fire) was the next and was important in the sacrifices and was considered as a messenger, carrying the messages to the heavens, as the flames of the sacrificial fires ascended upwards.

Other gods like Varuna (god of nature and moral order), Vayu (wind), and Usha (dawn), Prithvi (earth) and many more were also important.

Indra was their main god. Warrior Indra was admired for his bravery rather than for his benevolence. About half of the hymns of Rig Veda are praises for Indra.

Later, Aryans adopted and incorporated the worship of idols and added chanting of Vedic mantras during worship. Ironically, thousands of years later, it is a mixture of both the pre-Aryan and Aryan form of prayers and rituals, mostly unchanged, that is prevalent in modern Hinduism.

The Hindu prayer is called 'Sandhaya' and is performed three times a day, morning, noon and evening.

The important points in the Hindu worship are as follows:

1. Devotees take bath and put clean clothes.
2. Collect objects needed in worship e.g., dishes, food, flowers, incense and wicks.
3. Devotees will either stand or sit cross-legged on the ground.
4. The mat used for sitting must not be made of cotton.
5. The devotees will face their idols or face east [reverence of the rising sun]
6. The idols are placed on a properly made throne or on an elevated place.
7. The feet of the idols are washed with clean water as a mark of respect and

humble submission to the Divine.

8. The idols are then bathed, dressed in new clothes and decorated with colourful garlands as a sign of service to God.
9. Perfumes, fresh flowers and specially prepared food are offered to the deity.
10. Devotees then invite the Spirit of God to enter the idol before them.
11. Once the above mentioned rituals are completed, the devotees offer prayers as follows:
 - i. Singing God's praises.
 - ii. Recounting God's description.
 - iii. Reciting God's names.
 - iv. Recalling God's power and glory.
The prayers are sung with or without musical instruments, chanting and clapping (sometimes dancing).
 - v. Devotees then make requests for themselves and their families.
12. Prayers may last for as long as the worshipper can afford time.
13. At the end one must offer parting presents to God, these may be a flower, a petal, a drop of water or a grain of rice.

Krishna said in Gita:

“One may offer Me even a leaf, a flower, a fruit or a drop of water. When it is offered with sincere devotion and with a pure heart. I am glad to accept, partake and use it.” 9:26

14. The worshipper then request God to rest or to depart.
15. The Hindu prayers are of two types:
 - Singing the glories of God
 - Requesting God for personal favours
16. Meditation (when prayers are offered from mind rather than tongue) is considered to be the highest form of prayer
17. Control of both body and mind are essential for concentration.
18. There is no set prayers that all Hindus are expected to recite.
19. Devotees of different deities and people of different traditions choose their own set of prayers from scriptures.
20. The most popular morning prayer, however, is Gaytri Mantra [refer to page 42 for its text and meaning].
21. Many Hindus believe that women should not read scriptures and go to Hindu temple during their menstrual period.

Module 6

GAYATRI MANTRA

OM Bhur-Bhuvah-Svah.

Tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasva dhimahi.

Dhiyo yo nah pracodayat.

'Gayatri Mantra' is the most important Vedic prayer to illuminate the intellectual powers of a person.

The prayer is addressed to the Sun god, addressed as Savitha as the life-giver on earth.

Goddess Gayatri or Annapurna is believed to be the Mother-god that animates all Life. Considered to be the essence of Vedas.

Gayatri Mantra fosters and hones the knowledge-yielding faculty of a person. The four 'mahavakyas' or sentences of Gayatri Mantra, make a sacred mantra that demonstrates the unity that underlies multiplicity and manifoldness in creation.

Theme

Oh God! You are the giver of life,

Remover of pain and sorrow,

The bestower of happiness,

Oh Creator of the Universe, may we receive Your supreme sin-destroying light, may You guide our intellect in the right direction.

Meaning of individual words:

The individual words and characters of the Mantra have a meaning of their own than can be defined as follows:

Om :

The primeval sound that represents God,

Bhur :

The physical world that embodies the vital spiritual energy or 'Pran',

Bhuvah :

The mental world and destroyer of all sufferings,

Swaha :

The celestial and spiritual world that embodies happiness,

Tat :

God, referring to transcendental Paramatma (Ultimate Spirit),

Savithur :

The bright Sun, the Creator and the Preserver of World,

Varenyam :

Best or most adorable,

Bhargo :

Destroyer of all sins,

Devasya :

Divine deity or Supreme Master,

Dheemahi :

We meditate upon and take in,

Dhiyo :

The Intellect,

Yo :

The Light,

Nah :

Our

Prachodayath :

Inspire or Enlighten.

Literal translation:

We meditate on the glory of the Creator; Who has created the Universe;
Who is worthy of Worship; Who is the embodiment of Knowledge and Light;
Who is the remover of all sins and ignorance; May He enlighten our Intellect.
The Essence of the Mantra

The Gayatri Mantra consists of three parts:

1. Praise,
2. Meditation, and
3. Prayer

While chanting the mantra, all devotees first:

- Praise God or the Divine Power,
- Meditate upon it in all reverence and then finally,
- Pray or make an appeal to the God awaken and strengthen the intellectual powers of a person.
- The Mantra is said to be the embodiment of all deities and is certainly not associated with any particular religion or sect, time, place or person.
- While Om, Bhuh, Bhuvah, Swaha, Thath, Savithur, Varenyam, Bhargo and Devasya are said to be its nine colours or praise of the Divine, Dheemahi is related to meditation and Dhiyo, Yo, Nah and Prachodayaath are said to be the parts of the prayer aspects of the mantra.
- Gayatri is the mother of the Vedas or Divine Knowledge. The other two forms of Gayatri are Savitri and Saraswathi and these three are said to be present in everyone.
- Gayatri controls the senses of a person, Savitri controls the Prana [the life force of a person] and Saraswathi controls the Speech. Thus, the three together represent the purity in thought, word, and deed.
- In the same order, Gayatri is said to enhance one's intelligence and intuition by recitation of the mantra, Savitri is said to protect the life forces and Saraswati is said to guard one's speech.
- The deity Gayatri is said to be 'Panchamukhi' (having five faces). These five faces are actually the five senses guarded by her or alternatively, five 'pranas' of life forces protected by her as Savitri. The concept of Savitri being the deity to control life forces stems from the legend that Savitri was the devoted wife who was so pure and loved her husband so much that she succeeded in bringing her husband back to life by forcing Yama, the god of Death, to return his 'Prana' or life force. It is said that Gayatri Mantra acts as a third eye of a person that opens up a whole new world of spiritual realization and attaining Brahma.
- It is said to have power to protect one from any possible harm. Even the science-minded Westerners have found that the correct recitation of Gayatri Mantra in the right accent as described in the Vedas produce certain vibrations that make the surrounding atmosphere visibly illumined. This is called 'Brahmaprakasha' or effulgence of the Divine.
- As prescribed by Vedas, Gayatri mantra must be chanted at least three times a day: during morning while taking bath, at noon before eating lunch and in

the evening at the time of sunset to cancel out all the sins that one may have done all through the day unknowingly.

- Other devotees believe that it is best to recite Gayatri period during the 'Satwik' or 'pure and serene' period during the day from 4 am to 8 am and 4 pm to 8 pm. The Gayatri Mantra should be recited while meditating upon the fact that everything is within oneself and thus, we should keep and develop confidence in the Self.

Module 7

THE LAW OF KARMA AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

The law of Karma is the law of cause and effect, one reaps whatever one sows. According to Brihadaranyaka Upnashad [part 3, chapter 10, verse 13]:

All Individuals create for themselves their next life as a result of their desires, hopes, aspirations, failures, disappointments, achievements and actions performed during this life of theirs. Just as a caterpillar, before it leaves one leaf, makes sure that his front feet have been firmly fixed on the next leaf of the branch of a tree, a soul creates its next life before it departs from the present one.

This vast universe is a wheel of Karma. Upon it revolve all creatures that are subject to birth, death, and rebirth. Round and round it turns, and never stops. As long as the individual self thinks he/she is separate from God, they revolve upon the wheel in bondage to the laws of birth, death, and rebirth. But when through the grace of God they realize their identity with Him, they stop revolving and achieve immortality i.e., mukti.

According to the doctrine of karma, for every morally determinate thought, word, or action, there will be corresponding karmic compensation, if not in this life, then in some future life.

The karmic law requires that every human wish find ultimate fulfillment. Non spiritual desires are thus the chain that binds man to the re-incarnational wheel.

Vedanta says that desires, being innumerable, are often left unfulfilled at the time of the death of a man and to desire is also a sort of action. He/she, therefore, takes other birth or births to see his/her desires fulfilled. And, the materialization of these unfulfilled desires may be called destiny. That is why, scriptures have mentioned that it is because of our own desires, hopes and aspirations that we take other birth or births after death.

According to Hindu scriptures a jiva (life-force) is granted a human life only after going through 8,400,000 previous incarnations of lower forms of life, 2,000,000 as a plant, 900,000 as aquatic, 100,000 as insects, 100,000 as a bird, 300,000 as a cow and 400,000 as a monkey.

The Classification of Karma

The Karmas are classified as:

- Samchit (collected), the unfinished mass of actions of past births, both good and bad, yet to be worked out and which appear in this birth in the form of desires, in other words *samskaras*;
- Prarabdha (detained), the result of karma already worked out in a previous life which appears in the present life in the form of fate; Prarabdha karma is of three categories, *ichha*, *anichha* and *parechha* [personally desired, without desire, and due to others' desire]. For the one who has realized the Self, there is no *ichha*-*prarabdha* but the two others, *anichha* and *parechha*, remain.
- Kriyamana karma, or present willful actions, or free will; and
- Agami (present and future), the karma we are continually making in our present actions and will be making in our future actions.

Death and After

When a man dies, his earthly body and its various elements stop working. The elements are grouped as:

- 5 Jnana Indriyas: Nose, ears, eyes, mouth and skin.
- 5 Karma Indriyas: Feet, hands, mouth, urinary organ and anus.
- 5 Elements: Water, fire, earth, air and space.
- 5 Senses: Smell, hearing, seeing, taste and touch
- 5 Wishes: Lust, wrath, greed, attachment, and ego.
- 10 Body systems: Skeletal, muscle, digestive, respiratory, circulatory, lymphatic, endocrine, reproductive and excretory.

The changing Karma-body (receptacle of deeds), and the actions of the soul, determine the formation of the next life.

After the death of people who have done bad deeds, another solid body, designed to be tortured, is born out of the five elements. When (the living souls) here have suffered with that body the tortures given by Yama, (the bodies) dissolve, each part distributed into its own basic element.

The Transit Lounge

It is believed that after severing its connection with the human body, the soul dwells for some **twelve days** in a transitional ghostly form (*preta*) [the ceremony of *Kirya* is performed on the 13th day]. Thereafter, freed from this limbo through ritual offerings (*sraddha*) by the son of the deceased, it travels upward to the "realm of the father" (*pitr-loka*), there to remain for an indeterminate period until further pujas are performed on earth by the love ones.

The Path of the Dead

According to the Hindu scriptures those who after death pass into the path of light (people with good karmas) are not reborn, whereas those who after death go to the path of darkness (people with bad karmas) are reborn after they have consumed the fruits of karma in their subtle bodies.

Heaven and Hell

The Ruler of Hell is god Yama. He is assisted by Chitragupta. Hell is a particular locality which is walled off from the surrounding regions of space by the messengers of Yama. Sinners get a thick body called "Yatana-Deha" when they are punished. The punishment in hell is not remembered by the soul when it is reborn. The punishment in hell is reformatory and educative. The permanent educative effect remains in conscience. The innate fear which some souls feel at the sight of temptation of sin is due to the finer development of conscience in the furnace of hell-fire.

Into blind darkness enter they who worship ignorance. Those worlds covered with blind darkness are called hells.

The Hindu belief -

Hindus believe in 2-7 heavens and 21 divisions of hell. Some scholars count 28 hells, and each hell is divided into 164 chambers and each chamber is under the charge of five horrible looking guards..

A few important hells are:

- i. Tamisra - There is darkness over there. Robbers and adulterous are tortured over there.
- ii. Andhatamisra -. These are cells of deep darkness, egoistic are punished her
- iii. Raurva. - Those who hurt creatures are punished here.
- iv. Kumbhipaka - Here cruel men are boiled in oil.
- v. Kalsutra - The sinful Brahmins are punished in this hell.
- vi. Asipatravana - It is the hell for non-believers.
- vii. Sukramukha - It is the hell for cruel kings.
- viii. Krimibhojana - The selfish and inhospitable people are transformed into worms, where they eat one another.

The classification of heavens is as follows:

- i. Swarg – heaven of Indra, situated on mount Meru.
- ii. Baikunth – heaven of Vishnu. It is built of gold and precious stones.
- iii. Brahma lok – heaven of Brahma
- iv. Shiv Puri - - heaven of Shiv. It is situated on *mount Kailash*

Length of Time before Rebirth

People wish to know the exact period that elapses from the time of leaving the body and being born again. In fact, there is no definite period of time in this matter.

In main two factors decide this issue viz., the nature of the individual Karma and the last impression before death. The time of rebirth may vary from hundreds of years to a few months even. Those that work out some of their Karmas in other planes in subtler regions, take a considerable time before entering a fresh body.

The interval is very long, for a year of the earth period passes off as a single day on the celestial plane.

A very sensual individual with strong craving or one with intense attachment sometimes is reborn quickly. Also in cases where life is cut short by a violent death or a sudden accident.

Module 8

THE VOYAGE OF LIFE

The life is an excursion which has:

- Definite goals,
- Defined stages of progression, and
- Specified directions to follow.

The Goals

According to the Hindu belief, everyone is born to fulfill certain goals. The Hindu scriptures codify these goals as follows:

- Dharma (Duties) – This is the path to reach God by means of a disciplined life. Honesty, compassion, truth, purity, love and justice are the virtues which should be practised in life.
- Artha (Material prosperity) – This means of obtaining necessities and comforts of life by honest means.
- Kama (Enjoyment) – Hinduism teaches that everyone has a right to enjoy the charms of this beautiful world, but it stresses that all actions must be self-controlled. People must not enjoy at the cost of harming others.
- Moksha (Salvation) – The ultimate goal of life is to be free from the continuous cycle of birth and death. This goal can be achieved by following the path of Dharma and leading a virtuous, pious and disciplined life.

8.1 The Stages (Ashrams)

Hinduism has identified four stages through which a life passes. These stages are called Ashrams, which are as follows:

- Brahmcharya (student life) – This is the stage of learning. This is also a life of celibacy to discipline mind, and keep body physically strong.
- Grihastha (family life) – This is the life of a householder. The goals of Artha and Kama are to be achieved in this stage. This Ashram is based on the feeling of mutual love and sharing.
- Vanaprastha (retirement, age 50, the stage of the forest dweller) – In this stage a person should lead a detached life. This stage is entered into when

one's hair has become grey, one's skin wrinkled, and grandchildren born to carry on the family tree. Husbands and wives may leave their affairs and possessions with their children and retire together to the forest as hermits. This does not involve the complete renunciation of the world, for husbands and wives can still have sex (once a month), and a sacred fire still should be kept burning and minimal rituals performed. This stage is thus not entirely free of *dharma*.

- Sanyasa (Preparation for salvation, age 75) – In this stage the mind must be free from desires and all bonds of relationships. This is the stage of the **wandering ascetic**, the *sannyâsi* (or *sâdhu*). If a man desires, he may continue on to this stage, but his wife will need to return home; traditionally she cannot stay alone as a forest dweller or wander the highways as an ascetic. The *sannyâsi*, who has renounced the world completely, is regarded as dead by his family (the funeral is held), and is finally beyond all *dharma* and caste. When a *sannyâsi* enters a Hindu temple, he is not a worshiper but one of the objects of worship. Not even the gods are *sannyâsin* (they are householders), and so this is where in Hinduism, as in Jainism and Buddhism, it is possible for human beings to be spiritually superior to the gods.

8.2 The Sanskaras

These are the acts of purifying, refining and developing the body, the mind and the intellect. These acts are performed by religious ceremonies and rituals. The sixteen important Sanskaras are as follows:

- Jatakarma – performed at birth. The newborn child is welcomed into the world by putting a small amount of honey in the mouth of the child and whispering the word 'AUM' in the ear of the child.
- Namkaran – performed about eleven days after birth. Names must be meaningful, associated with date of birth and start with Sanskrit words or alphabet.
- Nishkarmana – This is the introduction of the child to the mother Nature. It is performed about four months after birth. The child is taken out and exposed to the rays of the god sun.
- Annaprashana – The ceremony of offering first solid food to the child, when teething commences.
- Mundan – This ceremony is performed during one to three years of age. The child's head is shaved, which signifies the removal of old bad karmas from the life of the child.
- Karnavedha – This is performed during three to five years of age, when the lower lobes of ears are pierced. It is popular amongst girls. It signifies prevention from diseases.
- Upanayana - This is popularly known as the sacred thread ceremony. It is performed when the child reaches the school going age. The ceremony introducing

the child to the Teacher (Guru). The thread has three strands, which mean:

- i. Rishi rin – obligation to promote knowledge
 - ii. Pitri rin – obligation to look after parents.
 - iii. Dev rin – obligation towards the society and the country
- Vedarambha – This ceremony is the next step to Upanaya. This is before the first formal Vedic lesson at the Gurukul (school). It starts with the Gayatri Mantra.
 - Samavartana – This is the graduation ceremony performed at the completion of studies.
 - Vivaha – This is the start of the Grishastha Ashram.
 - Garvhadhana – This is performed after the wedding ceremony for the fulfillment of one's parental obligations. It involves prayer for the conceiving of a child.
 - Punasavana – Performed during the second or third month of pregnancy.
 - Simantonnayana – This ceremony is performed in the sixth to eight months of pregnancy. This is a prayer for the healthy mental growth of the unborn child. The American name of this ceremony is shower bath.
 - Vanaprastha – This is the detachment from the worldly life, starts at the age of 50.
 - Sanyasa – This starts at the age of 75. This is the declaration of the renunciation of all worldly bonds. A true sanyasi wanders from places to places.
 - Antyeshti (Death rites) – This ceremony is performed at death. The sequence of ceremony is as follows:
 - i. Before cremation the body is washed and wrapped in white cloth.
 - ii. At the cremation the eldest son or the husband lights the funeral pyre.
 - iii. Prayers for peace are recited and offerings made to the fire.
 - iv. After three days, the ashes are collected and dispersed according to the family traditions.
 - v. A thirteen days mourning (kirea) is observed in the family. It is believed that the soul reaches its resting place in the skies on this day.
 - vi. The final resting place of the soul is determined in the eleventh month after death (Punjabis do Varina in this month).

Module 9

THE HINDU CASTE SYSTEM

It is interesting to note There is no mention of caste system in the ancient Vedic Religion which dates back to around 5000 B.C. There was no idol worship or the concept of multiple gods and sub gods in the Vedic Religion. On the contrary, since the universe was born out of the Great Fire (Agni) in the aftermath of the 'Big Bang', the ancient seers of Vedic times considered it proper to propitiate and worship Agni which constitutes the principal element of what is called 'Panchabhootham' that includes other key natural elements like air, water, ether and earth.

The caste system was a subsequent addition by Sage Manu in his Smritis or laws of the Hindu Religion.

The caste system as conceived by Sage Manu was, no doubt, accepted by all without exception or question for a long time when the population of India was very small, the economy was rudimentary and the government was based on different shades of monarchy. The concept of democracy as we understand it today was unknown. Under these circumstances, the caste system served well as a form of division of labour in which each individual had a role to play according to his mental and physical endowments on a hereditary basis to ensure uninterrupted continuity in the provision of the needed services and goods.

The caste system has become increasingly obnoxious by the fact that the four original castes have mushroomed into 4,000 castes today, and has led to inter and intra caste wars between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

According to Manu the Hindu Society was divided into four broad classes which came to be known as castes (old name varnas). Varans also refer to colours associated with the castes.

When Aryans invaded India, they came across the local inhabitants whom they called their Dasas (servants). They absorbed them by giving them the status of servants.

In time the whole working pyramid came to be grouped into four divisions:

- The Brahmins – they were given the task of teaching and religious leadership. They represent white colour and wear janeo made of cotton, normally at the age of 8.

- The Kshatriyas – they were given the task of warriors and rulers. They represent red colour and wear janeo made of jute, normally at the age of 11
- The Vaishis – they were allotted the task of commercial occupation. They represent yellow colour and wear janeo at the age of 12.
- The Sudras – they were given the task of manual labour and farming. They represent black colour and are not allowed to wear a janeo.

Bhagvad Gita has a number of verses associated with the caste system:

Chapter 4, Verse 13 reads:

I have created the four varnas and this division is based upon their different kinds of qualities and capacities to perform certain activities.

(Ch. 18 - verse 41)

The duties involving Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra are grouped according to people's abilities and skills.

(Ch. 18 - verse 42)

The skills for a Brahmin involve serenity, self-harmony, austerity and purity, loving-forgiveness and righteousness; vision, wisdom and faith.

(Ch. 18 - verse 43)

The qualities needed according to Kshatriya are: a heroic mind, splendor or inner fire, constancy, resourcefulness, courage in battle, generosity and noble leadership.

(Ch. 18 - verse 44)

Trade, agriculture and rearing of cattle may be tackled by Vaishya; and the background (tenure) of a Shudra is also suited to providing support .

Module 10

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN HINDU SCRIPTURES

The status of women in the old Hindu society has been highlighted by different people in different way. Where some equated their status with animals other equated their status with queens. Both schools have supported their arguments with quotations from scriptures.

The Positive picture:

The status of women in the ancient Hindu society was an enviable one. Their were women seers and philosophers like Maitreyi, Gargi, Vishavara, Ghosha and Apala. In princely families, the custom of Swayamvara, selection of groom by the bride was an accepted norm. Inter-caste marriages were accepted. Shakuntla, the daughter of a Brahmin sage, chose Dushyanta, a Kshatriya prince; Santanu, a Kshatriya king married Satyawati, a fisher-woman.

The children were known by the mother's family name rather than the father's family name, e.g., the Pandav brothers were called Kunti putar (the name of their mother).

Some scholars argue the in the ancient India, women occupied a superior position, to men. "Shakti" a feminine term means "power" and "strength". All male power comes from the feminine. Literary evidence suggests that kings and towns were destroyed because the rulers troubled a single woman.

For example, Valmiki Ramayana teaches us that Ravana and his entire kingdom were wiped out because he abducted Sita. Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata teaches us that all the Kauravas were killed because they humiliated Draupadi in public. Elango Adigal's Sillapathigaram teaches us Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas was burnt because Pandyan Nedunchezhiyan mistakenly did harm to Kannaki.

In Vedic times women and men were equal in many aspects. Women participated in the public sacrifices along side men. Some Vedic hymns, are attributed to women such as Apala, the daughter of Atri, Ghosa, the daughter of Kaksivant or Indrani, the wife of Indra.

In early Vedic times women also received the sacred thread and could study the

Vedas. The Haritasmṛti mentions a class of women called Brahmavadinis who remained unmarried and spent their lives in study and ritual. Panini's distinction between Acharya (a preceptor) and Acaryani (a lady teacher or a preceptor's wife), and Upadhyaya (a preceptor) and Upadhyayani (a lady teacher or a preceptor's wife) indicates that women at that time could not only be students but also teachers of sacred Vedas.

There were several noteworthy women scholars of the past such as Kathi, Kalapi, and Bahvici. The Upanishads refer to several women philosophers, who disputed with their male colleagues such as Vacaknavi, who challenged Yajnavalkya. In the Vedic period, we also come across female scholars like Ghosha, Lopamudra, Romasha and Indrani. In the Upanishad period, names of women philosophers like Sulabha, Maitreyi, Gargi are encountered.

The Rig Veda also refers to women engaged in warfare. One queen Bispala is mentioned

In religious matters, Hindus have elevated women to the level of divinity. It is a religion that has attributed the words for the strength and power to feminine. The Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) are all-powerless without their female counterparts.

Devi is the greatest goddess. This echoes Devi-Mahatmyam prayer:

- By you this universe is borne,
- By you this world is created
- By you it is protected
- By you it is consumed at the end
- O Devi! You are the Supreme Knowledge, as well as intellect and contemplation...

A few illustrations, from the scriptures, are produced hereunder to illustrate the importance of women:

Where women are honoured there gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured no sacred rite yields rewards," declares Manu Smṛiti (III.56).

"Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands and brothers-in-law, who desire their own welfare." (Manu Smṛiti III, 55)

"Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers." (Manu Smṛiti III, 57).

"The houses, on which female relations, not being duly honoured, pronounce a curse, perish completely as if destroyed by magic." (Manu Smṛiti III, 58)

"Hence men, who seek their own welfare, should always honour women on holidays and festivals with gifts of ornaments, clothes, and dainty food." (Manu Smṛiti III, 59)

In an old Shakti hymn it is said – '**Striyah devah, Striyah pranah**' meaning that the Women were Devas, and women are life itself.

"If a husband dies, a wife may marry another husband.

"If a husband deserts his wife, she may marry another." (Manu, chapter IX, verse 77).

“A woman’s body,” says Manu, “must not be struck hard, even with a flower, because it is sacred.”

In the Vedas, she is invited into the family ‘as a river enters the sea’ and ‘to rule there along with her husband’, as a queen, over the other members of the family. (*Atharva Veda xiv. i. 43-44*).

Perhaps, it was only after the Muslim invasion of India that the women were confined to the homes and lost most of their freedom enjoyed during the Hindu rule.

The Negative picture

The other school of scholars state that Vedas contained highly objectionable and condemnable passages concerning women. Taking cue from the ‘Vedas’ authors of subsequent religious scriptures referred to women in more contemptuous form. The following customs degraded the position of women in the social set up:

- ‘**Sati custom**’ (the custom of burning the widow with the body of her husband),
- ‘**Dasi custom**’ (keeping the slave girls), and
- ‘**Niyog custom**’ (ancient Aryan custom of childless widow or women having sexual intercourse with a man other than husband to beget child), were among cruel customs responsible for the plight of the women.

Families prayed to have male child than a female child. No one wanted a daughter. The birth of the son was celebrated, but the birth of the daughter plunged family into remorse. Unfortunately, this attitude still persists.

‘Rig Veda’ itself says that a women should beget sons. The newly married wife is blessed so that she could have 10 sons. So much so, that for begetting a son, ‘Vedas’ prescribe a special ritual called ‘**Punsawan sanskar**’ (a ceremony performed during third month of pregnancy). During the ceremony it is prayed:

Atharva Ved 6/11/3

Almighty God, you have created this womb. Women may be born somewhere else but sons should be born from this womb”.

Rig Ved 8:33:17

“Lord Indra himself has said that women have very little intelligence. They cannot be taught” –

Rig Ved 10:95:15

“There cannot be any friendship with a woman. Her heart is more cruel than a heyna” –

‘Yajur Ved (Taitriya Sanhita) 6:5:8:2

“Women code says that the women are without energy. They should not get a share in property. Even to the wicked they speak in feeble manner”.

Shatpath Puran 14:1:31

Preachings of the 'Yajur Veda' equates women with shudras(untouchables) and cattle and says that falsehood, sin and gloom remained integrated in them and they must be controlled with a stick.

Despicable

To insult and humiliate women further, the religious books speak of women having sexual intercourse with animals or expressing desire for intercourse with them. In 'Yajur Veda' such references are found at a number of places.

Yajur Veda 23:19

"All wives of the host reciting three mantras go round the horse. While praying, they say: 'O horse, you are, protector of the community on the basis of good qualities, you are, protector or treasure of happiness. O horse, you become my husband.'"

Yajur Veda 23/20

After the animal is purified by the priest, the principal wife sleeps near the horse. There are also references of polygamy where people had more than one wife. 'Yajur Veda' in the context of 'Ashva Medha' (Horse Sacrificing ceremony), says that many wives of Harish Chandra participated in the 'Yagyna' (religious sacrifice).

In 'Shatpath Puran (Shatpath Brahmin)', preachings (13:4:1:9), of the Veda, it is written that four wives do service in 'Ashva Megha'.

In another Puran (Tatiraity Brahamin, 3;8:4), it is written that wives are like property.

Not only one man had many wives (married and slave girls), but there were cases of many men having a joint wife. It is confirmed from the following hymn in 'Atharva Veda': "O men, sow a seed in this fertile women" - Atharva Veda 14:1

Both these customs clearly show that a women were treated like a moving property. The only difference between the two customs was that whereas according to former one man had a number of movable properties, in the latter, women was treated as a joint movable property.

Vedas also sanction 'Sati Pratha'. The widow was burnt at the funeral pyre of her husband so that she may remain his slave, birth after birth and may never be released from the bonds of slavery.

The Atharva Veda says:

"O dead man following the religion and wishing to go to the husband's world, his women comes to you." In the other world also may you give her children and wealth in the same manner. In the Vedas, widow is treated inhumanly. For example it is mentioned that on death of her husband, the wife was handed over to some other man, or to her husband's younger brother.

Swami Vivekananda states that even at that time women used to have sexual intercourse with a person other than her husband to beget a child. The hymn says:

“O woman, get up and adopt the worldly life again. It is futile to lie with this dead man. Get up and become the wife of the man who is holding your hand and who loves you. - Rig Veda 10:18:8

Apparently this shows that woman is considered to be a property. Whenever and whosoever desired, could become her master. If the woman was not remarried, then her head was shaved. This is evident from Atharva Veda (14:2:60).

The condition of widows was miserable. She was considered to be inauspiciousness and was not allowed to participate in household ceremonies like marriages and pregnancies related events of other family members. She had to spend her life alone. In Rig Veda there are references to slave girls being given in charity as gifts. After killing the men folk of other tribes, particularly of the native inhabitants, their women were rounded up and used as slave girls. It was a custom to present slave girls to one other as gifts. The kings used to present chariots full of slave girls to their kith and kin and to priests (Rig Veda 6:27:8). King Trasdasyu had given 50 slave girls as a gift. (Rig Veda 8:38, 5:47:6).

A slave girl was called Vadhu (wife), with whom sexual intercourse could be performed without any kind of marriage ceremony. These girls belonged to the men who snatched them from enemies, or who had received them in dowry, or as gifts. Only the men to whom they belonged could have sexual intercourse with them. But some slave girls were kept as joint property of the tribe or the village. Any man could have sexual relations with them. The Vedas also talk about ‘Niyog’, the custom of childless, widow or woman having sexual intercourse with a person other than her husband to beget a child.

In the name of ‘Beejdan’ (seed donation), they used to have sexual intercourse with issueless women. This was a cruel religious custom and the chastity of the women was not safe. The so called caretakers of the religion were allowed to have sexual intercourse with other man’s wife. From ‘Niyog pratha’ it can be concluded that women were looked upon as mere child producing machines.

In ‘The Position of women in Hindu Civilization’ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar writes:

“Though woman is not married to man, she was considered to be a property of the entire family. But she was not getting share out of the property of her husband, only son could be successor to the property.”

In the Vedas there are instances where daughter was impregnated by her father and the sister by her brother. The following example of sexual intercourse is found between father and daughter in the Rig Veda:

“When father had sexual intercourse with his daughter, then with the help of earth he released his semen into her.”

Hereunder are produced a few more hymns to illustrate the most insulting position of women mentioned in the scriptures:

- The friendship of women does not last long. Their nature is like that of the hyena.” [Rig Veda 10-95-10] [Periyar]
- (When creating them) Manu allotted to women (a love of their) bed, (of their) seat and (of) ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct.” [Manu.9.17]
- For women no (sacramental) rite (is performed) with sacred texts, thus the law is settled; women (are) destitute of strength and destitute of (the knowledge of).....” [Manu.IX.18]
- Day and night women must be kept in dependance by the males (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one’s control. Manu.9.2]
- Chaitanya was one of the major ‘saints’ during the medieval period. He spread Vaishnavism in Eastern India, but aroused the wrath of the Orthodox Aryan-Vaishnavas because he allowed conversion from lower castes. Even this liberal man had highly negative opinions of women.
- “Chaitanya thought it to be a sin to talk, think or even dream of women and that even the sight of a wooden statue of a woman can distract the mind and be responsible for immorality. He advised people to avoid being alone even with their own mother , sister or daughter.” [Nand 124-127]

Module 11

THE HINDU THEORY OF CREATION

Bindu Visphot

Bindu Visphot was nothing but an explosion that created many *Brahmandas* (solar systems).

Scholars have evolved many theories of universe creation but the theory of *Bindu Visphot* (Big Bang) has been universally accepted. This theory is very close to Indian Philosophy and also to the Sikh theory of creation. The beginning, of *Brahmanda* or *Mahadanda* or a *Sunya* had been the atomic blast which scattered in countless stars, planets, and galaxies all over.

The term Big Bang, as a name for the initial cataclysmic event, was coined in 1946 by George Gamoq.

The Big Bang theory provides the best explanation of three basic cosmological observations, According to this theory, the universe began as the result of all explosion called "the Big Bang, 10 - 20 billion years ago.

There is, however, not much difference between Hindu theory of *Bindu Visphot* and the Big Bang theory of the West. Hindus associate their scientific evolution of universe with the metaphysical and spiritual values and not just the metaphysical values of the West.

The energy splits in the three divine forces; *Brahma* the Creator, *Vishnu* the Preserver and *Mahesh* the Destroyer. These are attributes, though, for popular consumption they are given forms.

The fragmentation of the *Bindu* scattered in such direction which appears like present *Swastik*. Thus *Swastik* is used as symbol for welfare and development. It stands out conspicuously in rituals. The concept of *nam* and *rupa* (name and form) denotes material and energetic elements.

Immediately after the explosion, the universe consisted chiefly of strong radiations represented by the term *OM* in the Indian mythology, and IK ONGKAR in the Sikh theology . These radiations formed a rapidly expanding region called the primordial fireball: As we see *Bindu Visphot* produced vibrations, radiations and wave lengths of sound symbolic of *OM* or < in the Indian tradition.

In Hinduism, *OM* is said to be the essence of all *mantras*, the highest of all *mantras*, the Divine Word or *Shabda Brahm* itself. *OM* has also been described as

the essence of the *Vedas*. It has been said by the *rishis* that one need not know or study the *Vedas*; one has only to know how to chant *OM*. It is the sound of the infinite. It gives power to all *mantras*. Hence all *mantras* begin and end with *OM* and without it are said to be deprived of power.

OM consists of three sounds. The vowel *a*, the vowel *u* and nasalized *m* sound. It is said that the three portions of *OM* (*AUM*) relate to the states of waking, dream and deep sleep and also to the three *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, and these are ruled by the gods *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Mahesh*.

In the *Vedas* *OM* is the sound of the Sun, the sound of light. It is the sound of assent, affirmation and ascent. It has an upward movement and uplifts the soul.

The close relationship between sound and matter is a proven fact. It is said of Tansen, the great musician that by the mere act of singing *Megh Malhar* he could induce clouds to precipitate.

Today it does not sound all that mysterious. nor impossible.

As *OM* is related to the start of universe, therefore, in all Hindu rituals it is taken as a start of any thing good and is seen as a good omen.

Evolutionary Philosophy of Aurobindo Ghosh

Sri Aurobindo's basic tenet is that mankind as an entity is not the last rung in the evolutionary scale — mankind will evolve beyond its current capacities ushering in a new, evolved human species guided by and filled with the knowledge, truth, substance and energy of spiritual consciousness.

In his voluminous writings he described, amongst other things, his understanding of the nature, process, and purpose of creation and life as we know it on earth; the process of transformation of the individual from his current limited status to her ultimate evolutionary possibility; and the likely course of the future of humanity; i.e., humanity's ultimate purpose and destiny in the cosmos.

Sri Aurobindo, throughout the later period of his life and until his death dedicated himself to the spiritual transformation of the human race. It was his sincere wish to take humankind out of duality, division, ignorance, suffering, and falsehood, and bring all human beings to a new positive existence that he qualified as "Light, Knowledge, Wisdom, Power, Truth, Peace, Beauty, Delight, Infinity, and Oneness of Being." He and his followers believed that he had discovered a new spiritual power and extension of the "Divine consciousness," which he called the "Supramental" or "Truth Consciousness" — the study of which he called *Integral Yoga*.

He believed this new force and power had only recently descended into the earth's atmosphere, and the "Supramental" could effectuate a new evolutionary status for humanity. If he, along with a handful of followers, through the mastery of *Integral Yoga*, could bring this power down into the earthly realm and into the individual consciousnesses of this group of followers they could be the promoters of a new dawn

for the human race; and thus this community could serve as pioneers for the establishment of a “Divine life” on earth.

The puzzle of life:

To solve the puzzle of life and to study the functioning of living bodies, a study of biological functioning of the body is essential. This study involves the basic knowledge of the following:

I. Five elements of life, five sensory organs, five mortar organs and ten apertures:

Five elements of life	Godly virtues of the five elements	Five sensory organs	Five senses of sense Organs	Five mortar organs	Five functions of motor organs	Ten door or apertures
Water	To make air cleaner by its impartial touch	Nose	Smell	Feet	To walk	Two nostrils
Air	To clean filth from water	Ears	Hearing	Hands	To hold	Two ears
Fire	Burning of impurity	Eyes	Seeing	Mouth	To eat	Two eyes
Earth	Forbearance	Mouth	Taste	Urinary organ	To throw out dirty water	One mouth
Space/akash	Detachment	Skin	Touch	Anus	To throw out food refuse	Two outlets of secretion
						One Tenth door (daswadwar)

2. The essential features of character building of a human life

Five vices	Five virtues	Five major sins
Passion	Truth	To steal
Anger	Contentment	To kill
Greed	Faith	To think evil
Attachment	Fortitude (courage in pain)	To back-bite
<i>Ego</i>	<i>Compassion</i>	<i>To harm someone</i>

Three diseases	Three gunas	Three states of mind
Mental	Satik (Sato) – doing noble deeds (brightness), comfort happiness	Awakening
Physical	Rajas (Rajo) – materialistic efforts – Optimism, pain grief	Dreaming
<i>Psychological</i>	<i>Tamas (Tamo) – doing bad karmas (darkness), ruin, downfall</i>	<i>Sound sleep</i>

Module 12

THE HINDU BELIEF AND PRACTICES

The Hindu belief and practices are the sum total of all modules discussed above. These can be summed as follows:

- **Hindu castes:** According to Hindu teaching, there are four basic castes, or social classes. Each caste has its own rules and obligation for living. The elite caste is the Brahman, or priest caste. Second are the Kshatriyas, or warriors and rulers. Third are the Vaisyas, or merchants and farmers. Finally, the fourth caste is the Shudras, or labourers. Outside the caste system are the untouchables. The untouchables are the outcasts of Hindu society. Though outlawed in India in the 1940s, the untouchables are still a very real part of Indian society. Castes are determined by birth and not by selection.
- **Trinity of God:** The trinity includes - “Brahman” which is composed of: Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Shiva (the Destroyer).
- **Belief in gods and goddesses:** Many sections of Hindus believe in 330 million gods and goddesses.
- **The theory of Karma:** The law that good begets good, and bad begets bad is the basic theory of karma. Every action, thought, or decision one makes has consequences – good or bad – that will return to each person in the present life, or in the life yet to come.
- **Reincarnation:** This is a journey on the “circle of life,” where each person experiences a series of physical births, deaths, and rebirths. With good karma, a person can be reborn into a higher caste, or even to godhood. Bad karma can relegate one to a lower caste, or even to life as an animal.
- **Nirvana:** This is the goal of the Hindu. Nirvana is the release of the soul from the seemingly endless cycle of rebirths.
- **Polytheism and Pantheism:** Hinduism is both polytheistic, and pantheistic. There are three gods that compose the Godhead – Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Hindus also worship the wives of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. In fact, there are millions of Hindu gods and goddesses – by some counts, as many as 330 million.
- **Enlightenment:** Enlightenment is attained by becoming tuned to the Brahman within. Only then can one reach Nirvana. The release from the wheel of life

that allows access to Nirvana is known as “moksha.”

- **Moksha:** Hindus recognize three possible paths to moksha, or salvation.
 - i. The first is the way of works or *karma yoga*. This is a very popular way of salvation and lays emphasis on the idea that liberation may be obtained by fulfilling one’s family and social duties thereby overcoming the weight of bad karma one has accrued.
 - ii. The second way of salvation is the way of knowledge, or *jnana yoga*. The basic premise of the way of knowledge is that the cause of our bondage to the cycle of rebirths in this world is ignorance. According to the predominant view among those committed to this way, our ignorance consists of the mistaken belief that we are individual selves, and not one with the ultimate divine reality – Brahman. It is this same ignorance that gives rise to our bad actions, which result in bad karma. Salvation is achieved through attaining a state of consciousness in which we realize our identity with Brahman. This is achieved through deep meditation, often as a part of the discipline of yoga.
 - iii. The third way of salvation is the way of devotion, or *bhakti yoga*. This is the way most favoured by the common people of India. It satisfies the longing for a more emotional and personal approach to religion. It involves the self-surrender to one of the many personal gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Such devotion is expressed through acts of worship, temple rituals, and pilgrimages.
- **Changing world:** According to Hinduism, the world around us is not real and is impermanent and ever changing. The world in which we live is a world of ignorance and falsehood or untruth, called Asat, in contrast to Sat or the world of Truth that exists beyond it, where neither the mind, nor any of the senses can ever reach even remotely.
- **Desires:** The chains that one ties to this wheel of Samsara or Bhava-Chakra or round of births and deaths, are the unfulfilled desires. So long desires remain unsatisfied one must come back to this world in order to possess and enjoy them. But, when all desires for the mundane objects cease, then the chains are broken and one becomes free. You need not take any more births. You attain Moksha or the final emancipation.
- **Jiwan Mukta:** People wander in this Samsara as they think that they are different from God. If you unite yourself with Him through meditation and Yoga, you will obtain immortality and eternal bliss. Cut the bonds of Karma through Knowledge of the Eternal and enjoy the Supreme Peace of the Atman. You will be freed from the round of births and deaths. Freed from sin, freed from passion, you will become a Jivan Mukta or liberated sage.
- **The Goals of life:** Hindus organize their lives around certain activities or “*purusharthas*.” These are called the “*four aims of Hinduism*,” or “*the*

doctrine of the four fold end of life." They are:

- i. The three goals of the "*pravritti*," :
 - a. ***dharma***: righteousness in their religious life.
 - b. ***artha***: success in their economic life; material prosperity.
 - c. ***kama***: gratification of the senses; pleasure; sensual, sexual, and mental enjoyment.
 - ii. The main goal for the "*nivritti*," those who renounce the world. is: *moksa*: Liberation from "*samsara*." This is considered the supreme goal of mankind.
 - iii. Meditation is often practised, with Yoga being the most common. Other activities include daily devotions, public rituals, and *puja*, a ceremonial dinner for God.
- **Fasts**: Hindus believe that fasting earns a great deal of religious merit. The Hindu fasts differ considerably amongst various Hindu sects. A few important type of fasts are as follows:
 - iv. Fasts, where one eats one proper meal during the day, and for the rest of the day they eat only vegetables, fruit, sugar and milk.
 - v. Fasts, where one eats only fruit, potatoes, and milk products only during the day and a full meal in the evening.
 - vi. Fasts, where one eats only fruit, vegetables, sugar and milk during a period of 24 hours.
 - vii. Fasts, where one eats nothing during a period of 24 hours.
 - viii. Fasts are observed in honour of one or other of the deities.
 - ix. Fasts are observed on various week days, e.g., Mondays, Tuesday, Fridays etc. In additions fasts are also observed on anniversaries e.g., Janam Ashtmi, Shivratri, Ramnaumi. A few fasts have social significance e.g., Karva Chauth, Full Moon, New Moon etc.
 - **Pilgrimage**: Most of the Hindus believe that to enter heavens a Hindu must visit four important Dhams: Badrinath in the North, Rameshvaram in the South, Dwarka in the West and Jagannath in the East. In addition there are 68 other pilgrimage places for purification and burning of sins. It is believed that one who dies at Varanashi goes directly to heavens and one who dies in Maghar goes to hell.
 - **Code of Conduct**:
 - i. **Common Code to avoid**: Sensuousness, Anger, Greed, Lust, Pride, Arrogance, Aggressiveness, Violence
 - ii. **Common Code to cultivate qualities of** : Forgiveness, Cleanliness, Truthfulness, Charity, Kindness, Friendliness, Non-violence, Control of mind and Sexual restraint.
 - iii. **First stage of life (Brahmchari, age 8-20 years)**: In this stage one must

- be working hard to acquire spiritual knowledge, absolute obedience of the teacher, complete abstinence from all kind of sexual involvement and other sensual pleasures, abstinence from drinking alcohol, smoking and other intoxicants and cultivating qualities of humility and contentment.
- iv. Second stage of life (Grishthi, age 20 -50): In this stage one must be working honestly to set a happy home, honest living, love to wife and children, looking after the necessities and comforts of all family members, giving children proper education and arranging their marriages at the appropriate age.
 - v. Third and fourth stages of life (Sanyasi and Vanprast, age over 50): In these stages one must have observance of complete detachment from all worldly possessions, severance of all sexual relations, absolute fearlessness and friendliness towards all living beings, shedding of all ego and pride, perfect contentment with whatever one may get – whether pain or pleasure, absolute end of all wishes and desires, and practise of deep meditation and prayers.
 - vi. Brahmins being at the top strata of caste must have an absolute control of their mind and temptations; they ought to be pure from heart; ready to suffer for a good cause, have peaceful disposition; absorbed in acquiring and teaching spiritual knowledge and unfaltering belief in God.
 - vii. Kshatriyas, belonging to the warrior and ruling class ought to be brave, strong and skillful. They must also be just and honest and must rule with compassion and love. They must also have faith in God.
 - viii. Vaisyas, ought to be honest to their professions of agriculture, cattle breeding, commerce and business. They must always be honest in dealing with others. Their transactions must be conducted on the principles of trust, fairness and integrity.
 - ix. Shudras must render faithful service to the community at large. They must perform physical labour and offer personal service with obedience and humility.
- The Three Gunas: The scriptures state that the life is gripped with three Gunas:
 - i. **Tamas Guna:** Those who are governed by Tamas guna, they are selfish, deeply involved in physical pleasures and are always tempted by material gains. They are unable to restrain from immoral, irreligious, wicked and criminal deeds.
 - ii. **Rajas Guna:** Those who are governed by Rajas Guna, they are ambitious and optimistic and do anything to reach their destination. They do not differentiate between good and bad and virtue and evil. They want their ambitions fulfilled by any means.
 - iii. **Sattav Guna:** Those who are governed by Sattav Guna, they follow the path of service, sacrifice, friendliness and kindness. They control their ambitions [According to the Scriptures all people fall into these categories of Gunas,

and they (scriptures) do not blame people for this fall, and suggest that they are mere tools in the hands of these Gunas. The advice is that they all must come out from these Gunas, whether good or bad, and follow the path of complete renunciation.]

- **Rules and Commandments:** The rules which govern the life of a Hindu are divided into two parts –
 - a. Niyam (Things to be done) are-
 - i. Keep yourself clean, both outside (body) and inside (thoughts).
 - ii. Practise self control, tolerance, patience and calmness.
 - iii. Be contented.
 - iv. Educate both mind and the self, and
 - v. Believe in and practise to submit to God.
 - b. Yamas (Abstentions)
 - i. Do not lie.
 - ii. Do not steal.
 - iii. Do not destroy and injure anything.
 - iv. Do not be envious, and
 - v. Do not overeat and over drink.

Module 13

THE LIFE STORY OF RAMA

In Treta there lived a king Dasaratha, who ruled the province of Ayodhya. He was issueless. He performed a yajna and was given a fruit to be given to his wives to bear him sons. King Dasaratha divided it equally between Kausalya, the eldest wife, and Kaikeyi, his favourite queen. They in turn divided their halves and gave them to the third wife Sumitra. In time they gave birth to four princes, Kausalya to the eldest Rama, Kaikeyi to the second son Bharat, and Sumitra to younger younger twins Laxman and Shatrugna. All four princes grew up under the care of sages and turned out into fine warriors.

Once, during their travels with sage Vishwamitra, they came to Mithila, where king Janaka had pronounced a swayamvar (groom hunt ceremony) for his daughter Sita. Sita was Laxmi incarnate into this world. The condition at the swayamvar, was that whoever could lift the heavy bow, which was presented to him by Shiva, could win the hand of Sita in marriage. Rama was the only prince who could lift the bow. Hence Rama was wed to Sita in Mithila and they returned to Ayodhya a happy family.

When King Dasharatha' grew old he decided to coronate Rama as his successor. carried away by the advice of her maid Manthara, she claimed that her son Bharata should Succeed as the next king, and that Rama should go to forest for fourteen years. Dasharatha was shocked to hear this. All his pleadings with Kaikeyi to change her mind proved in vain.

A long time ago, the King had promised her that he would fulfil two wishes of hers. Now, as a fulfillment, she demanded that the king install Bharata as the Crown Prince and that Rama should go to forest for fourteen years.

Rama came to know about this, consoled his father and said he would go to the forest to fulfil his pledge. Rama immediately discarded his royal robes and ornaments and wearing sack-clothes, prepared to leave for the woods. Kausalya was grief-stricken. Rama pacified her and obtained her permission to leave. He then broke this news to Sita.

Both wife Sita and younger brother Laxman insisted that they go with Rama in the exile. Rama, accepted their offer after a great hesitation.

The trio then left for Chitrakoota Mountain. It was a picturesque area. Many sages had built their ashrams (hermitages) there. They warmly welcomed Rama, Sita

and Lakshmana. Rama and Lakshmana built a hermitage for themselves. From Chitrakoota, the three went to Dandakaranya forest.

The sages of Dandakaranya received them with regard and affection. They told Rama that evil rakshasas and wild animals had been harassing them and sought his help to relieve them of these troubles and protect them. Rama, by nature, was compassionate; he promised them he would free them from the menace of rakshasas.

Rama, Sita and Lakshmana then went to a spot called Panchavati and built a hut over there for their permanent stay. On way to Panchavati, they came across a huge banyan tree. Atop it sat a large-sized eagle. They thought it might also be a rakshasas in disguise. But it said: "Raghurama, I am a friend of your father Dasharatha. My name is Jatayu. When you and Lakshmana go out, I will be here with Sita and keep guard. I will try to be of some help to you.

One day a demoness, Shurpanakha, sister of Lanka's king Ravan, came to that area in search of food. She scented some human beings staying there and came to Rama's hermitage and peeped in.

She was instantly struck by the graceful personality of Lakshmana and wished to marry him. She assumed the appearance of a beautiful damsel and asked Lakshmana to marry her. She tried to make advances to Lakshmana. In rage Lakshmana cut off her ears, nose and breasts and thus drove her away.

Shurpanakha, apart from the physical pain, felt humiliated and ran away growling loudly. She went to a demon Khara, a brother of Rama, who ruled over Janasthana, where Rama's hermitage was located. He immediately ordered his army to attack Rama and Lakshmana. But Rama's powerful arrows annihilated the enemy force.

Shurpanakha then went to Lanka and wailed before Ravana. She narrated her humiliation and the defeat of Khara and his army. She also told him about Sita's beauty.

Ravana thought of many ways and finally decided to seek the assistance of Mareecha, who was his relative. His final plan was to see that Rama and Lakshmana would be lured away from the hermitage; he could then go there and kidnap Sita.

Mareecha assumed the guise of a golden deer and moved about in the presence of Sita. Sighting it, Sita told Rama to catch him for her.

Lakshmana smelt the foul play and warned Rama and Sita about it, he said that It was not a real deer and was a trick of rakshasas. But to fulfill Sita's wish first Rama and then Lakshmana went after the deer. Rama killed the deer (Mareecha) with his arrow.

Meanwhile, taking advantage of Lakshmana and Rama's absence, Ravan disguised himself as a 'Sannyasi' (monk) arrived at Rama's hut. Sita treated him with reverence, crossed the Lakshmana rekha (a security line drawn by Lakshmana, advising Sita not to cross it) to give some provisions to Ravan.

Ravan carried her forcibly to his chariot and marched back to Lanka.

Jatayu, who was sleeping atop a tree, was awakened by Sita's cries. He immediately

jumped forward and attacked Ravana's chariot, killed the driver and damaged it considerably.

Enraged, Ravana lashed at Jatayu and cut off his wings. Sita was saddened to see Jatayu fall to the ground mortally wounded. Carrying Sita, Ravana flew away in the skies towards Lanka.

When Rama and Lakshmana returned to their hut they found Jatayu, injured and in agony. It seemed as if the bird was struggling to keep alive only to inform Sri Rama about the abduction of Sita.

Rama and Lakshmana, full of grief, conducted the last rites of Jatayu in accordance with the tradition.

Ravana brought Sita to Lanka. He showed her his palace and riches. He showed her his rakshasas army. He told her: "Look here, Rama cannot come here. Forget him. There is no one more heroic and rich than I am. Become my queen and lead a happy life." He kept her in the Ashokavana garden and engaged demonizes to guard her.

Rama and Lakshmana proceeded in search of Sita. Wandering all around, they arrived at Rishyamooka hill. Sighting them from atop the hill, Sugriva, a king of the monkeys, sent his minister Anjaneya (Hanuman) to meet them and bring them to him.

His elder brother Vali, who also kept Sugriva's wife for himself, had deported Sugriva from his land. Sugriva narrated his woes to Rama and sought his help. In turn, Rama told him about his own sorrow. Both pledged to help each other. They declare their friendship in front of the Fire god Agni.

They chalked out a plan to kill Vali. Reaching his kingdom, Sugreeva began shouting and taunted his brother Vali, while Rama hid himself behind the palmyra. Vali emerged from his regal chambers, ignoring his wife's admonitions. Sugreeva and Vali leapt high into the lowering heavens, whirring tails and grinding teeth. Their clash was a sanguine spectacle of torn flesh, flotsam floating midair in the fluid wave of the wind. Finally, Vali overtook his miserable brother, clutching Sugreeva's throat in his mighty hands.

As when lightning pierces the silence and still of the night sky, so too did Rama's arrows struck at Vali's heart. Vali pulled the arrow from the wounded wall of his chest and saw the sign of his vanquisher Rama. Vali asked him, that why the preserver of Dharma, had to commit as an egregious act?

Rama thus kept his promise and killed Vali and installed Sugriva on the throne.

Sugriva sent his soldiers to all corners of the country to search for Sita. Rama called Anjaneya (Hanuman) and told him: "Dear son of Vayu wind, I feel that you will succeed in your mission. You are the only one able to reach Lanka. Go forth and meet Sita. Tell her about our welfare. As a sign of recognition, give her this ring." He blessed and sent him away.

The armies of 'vanaras' (monkeys and bears) reached the seashore. They thought to themselves, How to cross the vast sea? One has only to fly. Who is capable of it. They all agreed that only Hanuman possessed the prowess to undertake the task.

Thus, Anjaneya embarked on his voyage of a distance of 100 yojanas with the speed of wind and reached Lanka he went to Ravana's palace, searched around and found Sita at Ashokavana.

Hanuman came down from the treetop and stood before Sita singing the praise of Rama. Sita, surprised, feared that this too might be a ruse of Ravana. But Hanuman assured her and revealed his real self.

Hanuman came back and narrated the story to Rama and asked him to immediately attach Lanka.

Rama, accompanied by the army the monkeys, proceeded towards Lanka. A bridge was built across the sea.

The armies of Rama and Ravana fought a fierce battle. Ravana's son Indrajit, younger brother Kumbhakarna, commander Prahasta, were all great warriors and fought determinedly. However, Ravana's army was at last defeated and all warriors killed, included Ravan.

Rama then installed Vibhishana, a younger brother of Ravana, as the king of Lanka.

Rama's forest exiled had also ended by then. He and others reached Ayodhya flying in 'Pushpaka-vimana'. Bharata and the citizens accorded a grand welcome to Rama. Everybody was filled with happiness. All were talking about Sita. Already, preparations for Rama's coronation were complete. He was ceremonially crowned the king.

In the midst of this jubilation, a washerman taunted the piety of Sita. He said that it was impossible for Sita to remain pious in the prison of Ravan. He wanted Sita to either confess her unfaithfulness or to prove her piety. A fire test was declared. Sita was to pass through a burning fire.

Can such a kind-hearted soul as Rama speak so cruelly? Sita could not believe her ears. "This is a great test for me. All right. If my husband rejects me, why should I live? I will sacrifice this body- to Agni" -she decided and asked Lakshmana to prepare a fire. Lakshmana prepared the fire.

Sita walked into the flames. All were shocked and the women present wailed. But the fire subsided and god Agni stepped out carrying Sita. He told Rama that She was absolutely pure.

Yet on another occasion Rama dressed himself like an ordinary person and began wandering within Ayodhya to understand what impression the citizens had of Him. By chance one night Rama heard a man talking to his wife who had gone to another man's house. In the course of rebuking his wife, the man spoke detrimentally about the character of Sita devi, saying that he (the husband) was not like Rama who allowed his wife to come back after staying at another's house. Rama immediately returned home, and fearing such rumours, he decided to send her away. He chose the 'ashrama' of Valmiki Muni, who lived in Ram Tirath (a place near the present day Golden Temple, Amritsar). Sita, who was pregnant at the time, later gave birth to twin

sons named Lava and Kusa, in the Ashram of Valmiki.

Punjab is also the home of Kaushalia, the mother of Rama. Her birthplace is at Ghuram, which is situated on the ancient highway that connected the Shivalik to the Aravali range. Ghuram is a village in Patiala District.

Luv later founded the city, Lavpur, now called Lahore and Kush founded the town of Kasur, about 40 miles east of Lahore. Both these places are in Pakistan today.

Valmiki was a dacoit called Ratna who haunted the forests and preyed upon the unwary travellers. One day a sage called Narad passed through the forest, Valmiki immediately attacked him. Narad asked him why he did his foul deeds to which Valmiki replied that it was to take care of his family, which consisted of his aged parents, wife and children. The sage then wanted to know if they would be willing to share in the punishment that waited for Ratna in the hereafter. Ratna was sure they would but the sage advised him to go and ask them. Ratna tied the sage to a tree and ran home to ask his family if they would share in his punishments in the hereafter, but his family replied in the negative, saying that it was his duty to take care of them, they were not responsible for the path he chose to do so. Disappointed Ratna returned to the forest and confessed to the sage. The sage told him to repent for his sins and to stop his evil ways and to chant the name of God Rama. Rama was hard for him to say so the sage told him to chant Mara instead which means dead. Chanting Mara Mara Mara a few times he realised he was chanting Rama instead.

Rama continued to perform many sacrifices during his ruling Ayodhya. At one such sacrifice, some fifteen years later, two boys came into the arena of the sacrifice while Rama was sitting at his throne. Valmiki had taught the boys the whole poem of the Ramayana and had put the story to a very beautiful and melodious 'swara', tune. Valmiki, accompanying the two boys, asked Rama's permission so the boys could recite his poem. Rama gave permission, and the boys commenced in perfect unison.

Night after night the recital continued until it came to Sita's abandonment to Valmiki's 'ashrama'. Rama was then convinced they were his very own sons born to Sita. He sent word to Valmiki that he should come with Sita and vouch for her purity and faithfulness. If Sita was willing to come before the assembly and give proof of her innocence, she could resume her rightful place at her Lord's side.

Everyone agreed and the next day Sita came. Everyone was touched at the sight of her, her head and eyes downcast, tears running down her beautiful face, her long hair chastely adorning her back.

Sita stood in silence, her eyes transfixed on the ground without blinking. With folded hands she said, "If Rama has always been foremost in my heart, then may my Mother Earth (Bhumi) herself deliver me. If I have been only true to him, wholly, mind, body and soul, then may my Mother Earth deliver me. If I have loved none but him, then let my Mother Earth deliver me."

As she spoke, the earth rumbled, shook and cracked open where Sita stood. Bhumi devi (Mother Earth personified) then appeared, seated on a throne surrounded

by 'nagas' (snakes), and she invited Sita to take her seat along side her.

Sita, entrusting her children to Valmiki, ascended the throne supported by 'nagas' adorned with fiery eyes and jewels on their heads. There, seated besides her mother, Bhumi and Sita disappeared from sight. The earth closed up leaving not even so much as a furrow on the surface as though nothing had happened.

Remembering Rama, true to his vow of 'ekapatni', never accepted another woman other than Sita. Next to him on his throne he kept a golden deity of Sita performing sacrifices for thirteen thousand years.

At the end of this period, Agastya Muni and many demigods and sages approached Rama and reminded him that his duties on earth had now been fulfilled and he should now return to Vaikuntha. Rama performed 'acaman', sipping water and reciting 'mantras', once, twice, thrice, then he resumed his form of Visnu, for it is from that seat of Visnu that his earthly duties became manifest.

Module 14

THE LIFE STORY OF KRISHNA

Krishna is the most popular Hindu deity. He belonged to the royal family of Mathura, and was the eighth son born to Devaki, and her husband Vasudeva, a high ranking noble of the court. He was born in a prison cell in Mathura. The place of his birth is now known as Krishnajanmabhoomi, where a temple is raised in his memory. He was Kshatriya by birth, but was raised as a cowherd in Gokal.

As his life was in danger from his uncle Kansa the king, he was smuggled out from the prison to be raised by his foster parents Yashoda and Nanda in the forest at Vrindavana. His brother Balrama and sister Subhadra also survived the wrath of uncle Kansa, who had vowed to kill all children of Devaki, as he was told by his astronomers that one of her children (some believe that the prophecy was of the eight child) will be the cause of his death.

Krishna reached adulthood at Vrindavana. Here he was admired by the village belles known as Gopis. His most beloved Gopi was Radha. The original stories of his youth here include that of his life with, and his protection of, the local people of Mathura.

Krishna as a young man revolted against the unjust rule of Kansa, overthrew his kingdom, and became ruler of Mathura. In this period he came closer to Arjuna and the other Pandava princes of the Kuru kingdom on the other side of the Yamuna. Later, he migrated to Dwaraka (in modern Gujarat). He married Rukmini, daughter of King Bhishmaka of Vidarbha, though Radha remained his true love all his life.

In the story of Mahabharata, he is said to have asked the warring sides to choose between his army and himself. The Kauravas picked his army and Pandavs chose him. He agreed to be the chariot driver for Arjuna in the great battle, and vowed not to handle weapons. The Bhagavad Gita is the advice given to Arjuna by Krishna before the start of the battle.

Krishna ruled Dwaraka with his wife Rukmini, Satyabhama was his another important wife. In the end, the Yadava clan killed themselves in infighting, and Krishna was killed by accident by a hunter. His death marked the end of Dwapar yuga. One calculation puts the year of his death at 3102 BC

The name Krishna is sometimes said to mean dark blue (the colour of a raincloud), rather than black. This may be connected to the common modern practice of representing

many Hindu deities with blue skin.

The name has also been said to mean *all-attractive*, though this may be from a related Sanskrit word.

According to the Vishnu Sahasranama, Krishna is the 57th name of Vishnu, and also means the “Existence of Knowledge and Bliss”.

Other Names of Krishna

He is known by numerous other names or titles. The most commonly used of these include:

- Gopala - cowherd; protector of cows.
- Govinda - protector of cows.
- Hari - the fawn (or yellow or gold) coloured one.
- Hrshikesha - master of the senses.
- Jaganatha - lord of universe.
- Keshava – long haired; in some accounts, the killer of Kesi.
- Madhava - bringer of springtime.
- Vaasudeva, Krishna Vaasudeva - son of Vasudeva.

Some believe that Krishna died at the age of 125 on February 18, 3102 BC at 14:27:30 hours on the banks of river Hiran in Prabhas Patan. As the report goes, he was 125 years, 7 months and 6 days old when he left the earth for his divine abode Goloka. The finding are based on clues in the Vedic literatures. Certain dates were fed into special software which was used to prepare a *kundli* (astrological horoscope charts). The Vishnu Puran and Bhagavad Gita mentions that Krishna “left” Dwarka 36 years after the Battle of the Mahabharat. The Matsya Purana mentions that Krishna was 89 years old when the battle was fought. It further mentions that the Kal Yuga began on the day Krishna left this mortal world.

According to yet another believe a hunter hit Krishna with a poisoned arrow and he died. The hunter mistook a shining divine sign in Krishna’s foot to be a deer’s eye and hit him. His body was eaten up by the wild animals. Many eras after, the King of Puri found the remains of his skeleton and recognised him by a special ring which was still stuck to the bone of his finger. His remains were ceremoniously brought to the place where stands the present day temple of Jagannath.

The story further states that the King called Vishkarma, the divine architect, to erect a giant wooden statue in the memory of Krishna. Vishkarma agreed to build the statue on the condition that no one was allowed to look at it until it was completed. When the statue was almost three fourth complete the queen entered the room with one of her maids to look at the work. In rage, Vishkarma left the statue incomplete. Even today, the statue of Jagannath stands as it was left incomplete, according to the legend. The statue has no arms and legs.

Krishna appears under many names, in a multiplicity of stories, among different

cultures, and in different traditions. Sometimes these contradict each other, though there is a common core story that is central to most people's knowledge of Krishna.

While in most Dharma traditions and Puranas (accounts), he is described as one of the major incarnations of Vishnu, in Gaudiya Vaishnavism, he is considered to be the only true God, or the source of all incarnations.

Among his important or celebrated stories are:

- Govinda Krishna, the god of the cow-herders. He is contrasted in this to his brother Balarama representing the cultivators, who is sometimes called Halayudha, the master of the plough.
- Krishna the lover, the all-attractive, the flute player is frequently shown playing the flute, attracting and bewildering the gopis (the cow-girls) of Vrindavana.
- Krishna the child. Stories of his upbringing in Gokula and Vrindavan, stealing butter and butter-milk, breaking pitchers and annoying village belles are a staple of children's tales in India.
- Govinda Krishna, the beloved of the gopis. The original stories of Krishna as a boy included his adolescent play with Gopis of the village of Vrindavana. These were developed to form the basis of the Gita Govinda, and numerous other later works. Devotees of Krishna subscribe to the concept of lila, or divine play as the central principle of the universe. This is counterpoint to another avatar of Vishnu: Rama, "He of the straight and narrow path of *maryada*, or rules and regulations."
- Krishna the philosopher, the author of Bhagavad Gita. Paartha-Sarathi – the charioteer of Arjuna (Paartha) during the great battle where, he instructed Arjuna in dharma and yoga in the Bhagavad Gita.
- Krishna Vaasudeva the prince of Mathura and later King of Dwaraka. Mathura and Dwarka were the first democratic states in the world.
- Krishna the true friend of poor Sudama and many of his other childhood playmates.
- Krishna the great warrior, who liberated Mathura after killing Kansa.
- Krishna the killer of Putana. She was a demoness who was sent to kill him by getting him to suckle her poisoned breasts.
- Krishna Giridhari, as a boy, he raised Govardhana hill to protect villagers from rain and flood sent by Indra.
- Krishna, together with Arjuna, helped Agni consume the Khandava forest.
- Krishna played a major role in the events leading up to the Mahabharata war, the greatest war of history, helping the Pandavas who accept him as their counsel and guide. He protected the dignity of Draupadi when Dushasana tried to strip her in the court.
- According to one belief Krishna married 16,108 Gopis, with Radha being his true consort. Chandravali was the sister of Radha, who first hated Krishna and later fell for him. **The main purpose of the relationship of Krishna**

and the Gopis, for that matter Radha, and the *Rasa Lila* was not to display any sensual relationship. It was to illustrate the merging of the Jivatma [soul of each one of the Gopis] with the Paramatma [the God Himself].

Sister Subhadra

Krishna's sister Subhadra was married to Arjuna. During his term of exile Arjuna came to Dwaraka, the residence of his cousins Balarama, Krishna and Subhadra, who were the children of his maternal uncle Vasudeva. Here, he and his cousin Subhadra fell in love with each other, a relationship supported and approved by Krishna, who had always been particularly attached to Arjuna, and wished nothing but the best for his sister Subhadra. Knowing that the entire family would view with disfavour the prospect of Subhadra becoming the fourth wife of her cousin Arjuna, Sri Krishna induced the couple to elope and depart for Indraprastha. In a twist to the tale, Krishna's advice, it was Subhadra who drove the chariot from Dwaraka to Indraprastha. Krishna used this tact to persuade his family that Subhadra had not been abducted; on the contrary, it was she who had kidnapped Arjuna.

The only son, named Abhimanyu, was born to Arjuna and Subhadra. Parikshita, the posthumous son of Abhimanyu, was destined to be the sole surviving dynast of the entire Kuru clan.

Brother Balram

Balram was the seventh child of Devki and Vasudeva. He was very strong and stood by his younger brother Krishana in all of his battles. Balram was the incarnation of ten headed Sheshnag, on whose back Vishu rests.

When Devki was pregnant, the unborn fetus was transferred from Devki's womb to Rohini's womb, who was Vasudeva's other wife.

The weapon of Balram was a plough.

Balram was married to Revati the daughter of King Raivat. According to a legend, once King Raivat took his daughter, **Revati** to god Brahma's abode. (*Brahmalok*). There, for a moment or so, he and his daughter listened to Brahma's divine recitals and then returned to earth. Meanwhile, eras had passed on the earth but he and his daughter had not aged at all. Later Revati was married to Balram.

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